



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres rookie defenseman Zadorov apologetic for sleeping in

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 23, 2015

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sabres rookie defenseman Nikita Zadorov believes he's heard this wake-up call after being disciplined by the team for showing up late to a meeting.

The 2013 first-round draft pick said Monday it was "my fault" and he has "100 percent no excuses" for sleeping in after his alarm clock failed to go off a day earlier.

"I'm mad at myself," said Zadorov, who was the last player off the ice following an optional practice. "I spoke with the team and said, 'I'm sorry boys. I don't want to lose your trust.'"

Saying he needed to come up with a "Plan B" to make sure he's never late again, Zadorov smiled and said he's considering buying three alarm clocks.

The 19-year-old was held out from playing in a 2-1 shootout loss against Nashville on Sunday. Zadorov's absence compounded the Sabres' troubles on a defense already missing three regulars due to injuries.

Coach Ted Nolan called Zadorov's transgression "a minor thing," and yet he still won't say if the player will return to the lineup for Buffalo's game at Columbus on Tuesday.

"The defense last game, I thought they played pretty well," Nolan said. "So to make a change just to make a change, I don't think we'll do that. But we'll see. You never know."

This is the second time in a month Zadorov has been disciplined for punctuality issues.

In January, he was held out for two games after being late reporting to the team because his flight to Buffalo was canceled following the All-Star break.

"He's a great kid. He really is," Nolan said of the Russian-born player. "We've still got to take in his age and where he came from. Different country. Different environment. Everything's different. It just takes some time sometimes."

What's not in question has been Zadorov's potential. Though still eligible to play junior hockey, Zadorov got off to such an impressive start this season that he left the Sabres little choice but to keep him in Buffalo.

With three goals and 10 assists in 42 games, Zadorov's 13 points are tied for the team lead among defensemen. He is also averaging just over 19 minutes of ice time.

Nolan said minor-league call-ups Mark Pysyk and Jake McCabe are expected to travel with the Sabres because of the team's already depleted defensive ranks. Tyson Strachan won't travel because of an infection. Josh Gorges was scheduled to have season-ending surgery on a lower body injury on Monday. And Mike Weber is out at least two weeks after having minor surgery to repair an upper body injury.

Sabres-Blue Jackets preview

Associated Press

February 23, 2015

Nikita Zadorov and Marko Dano were drafted 11 picks apart in the first round in 2013, and these rookies figure to play heavily down the stretch with their teams out of contention.

In Zadorov's case, that's if he can show up on time for the [Buffalo Sabres](#).

The defenseman missed the last contest after being late to a meeting and it's not clear if he will return in Tuesday night's road matchup with Dano's [Columbus Blue Jackets](#).

Zadorov, the No. 16 pick by Buffalo in 2013, has been disciplined twice for punctuality issues. The most recent occasion resulted in him missing Sunday's 2-1 shootout loss to Nashville.

"I'm mad at myself," said Zadorov, who was the last player off the ice following an optional practice Monday. "I spoke with the team and said, 'I'm sorry boys. I don't want to lose your trust.'"

Coach Ted Nolan called Zadorov's transgression "a minor thing," and yet he still won't say if the player will return to the lineup Tuesday.

"The defense last game, I thought they played pretty well," Nolan said. "So to make a change just to make a change, I don't think we'll do that. But we'll see. You never know."

Nolan is already without three injured defensemen - Josh Gorges (lower-body injury), Mike Weber (upper-body injury) and Tyson Strachan (infection).

Buffalo (17-38-5) allows league highs of 35.0 shots and 3.32 goals as it tries to slow down a surging Columbus line which features Dano, Buffalo-born Nick Foligno and Artem Anisimov.

Each member of that trio had three points over two weekend road losses, 3-1 to Montreal on Saturday and 4-3 in a shootout to the New York Rangers the next night. Dano, the 27th pick in 2013, has appeared in the last four games after being recalled from the minors last Monday.

"I can't tell you where the chemistry is coming from but we've had different lines step up," coach Todd Richards said. "Dubie's (Brandon Dubinsky) line has been good as far as contributing, earlier than that it was Jo (Ryan Johansen) and (Scott) Hartnell seemed to have something and now we've got another line. That's good."

Columbus (26-28-4) won 3-1 on the road in the season opener Oct. 9 by outshooting Buffalo 40-22. Both goalies who started that game won't play since Sergei Bobrovsky is injured for the Blue Jackets and Jhonas Enroth was traded Feb. 11 by the Sabres.

Michal Neuvirth, who has a 1.72 goals-against average in his last five starts, will be in goal for the Sabres after Sunday's 37-save effort.

"He's been playing great these last five games," Nolan said. "We're going to ride that horse until we see some tiredness comes in."

Curtis McElhinney is 3-1-1 with a 2.16 GAA in his last five starts for the Blue Jackets, with winless rookie Anton Forsberg the other option.

Sunday's defeat capped a 2-2-1 trip for Columbus, which plays its next three at home.

"I think we're anxious to get home," said Dubinsky, who has six points in his last six games. "It's been a long stretch here and we're looking forward to it."

Zadorov is sorry, but may sit some more

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 23, 2015

Nikita Zadorov promises to set more alarm clocks. A louder wakeup call might come from Mark Pysyk taking his ice time.

Zadorov, scratched by the Sabres on Sunday after failing to arrive for a morning meeting, returned to the team Monday in a contrite mood. For the second time in a month, he delivered an apology for showing up late.

"It was my mistake 100 percent," Zadorov said in First Niagara Center. "No excuses. I couldn't do that. I spoke with the team, said, 'I'm sorry boys, don't want to lose your trust.'

"It's all about the team. I just want to get back as soon as I can and help my team."

It's not clear whether he'll help Tuesday when the Sabres visit Columbus. He sat for two games when he returned to Buffalo late from the All-Star break, and this could again be a multiple-game infraction.

"The defense last game, I thought they all played pretty well, so to make a change just to make a change, I don't think we'll do that," coach Ted Nolan said.

Nolan and General Manager Tim Murray had sitdowns with Zadorov, stressing the importance of being a punctual professional. They told him to make sure he had a backup plan. How about two alarm clocks?

"Three," Zadorov said. "Young guy, you can't do that. You've got to be careful. You've got to have a Plan B or something like that every time.

"I will work on that. It's my fault."

Nolan, who was angry Sunday, was in a more forgiving mood Monday. He chalked up the incident to Zadorov being a 19-year-old who's still learning to be a pro in a new league and new country.

The Russian didn't want any part of the "kids being kids" excuse.

"I'm not looking that way like I'm a young guy," Zadorov said. "Old guy can make same mistake. It's just me personally. I think it's not excuses. Zero excuses about that."

Zadorov's indiscretion coupled with an illness to Tyson Strachan forced the Sabres to recall Pysyk and Jake McCabe from Rochester. The defensemen, particularly Pysyk, had good games against Nashville. Pysyk skated 16:51 with three shot attempts and two blocked shots.

"That's good if I don't look nervous because I definitely was," said Pysyk, who has played 68 games in the NHL and is hoping to stick around for more. "Just play simple and try to limit my mistakes and not give them any reason to send me back down."

The 23-year-old has played just five games with Buffalo this season after skating in 44 last year. While the time in Rochester has allowed Pysyk to add more responsibilities to his game, including power-play work, Nolan would have liked having the 2010 first-round pick at his disposal.

"Last time he was up he looked ready for prime time," Nolan said. "I really like Mark and I think he's ready. But as a coach you've just got to make sure you're as patient as the players are and wait for players to get here full time."

With Josh Gorges done for the season, Mike Weber out for at least two weeks, Strachan absent and Zadorov serving time, Pysyk has his best chance to seize a roster spot. This season's 50-game run as a go-to guy in Rochester has given him the poise to succeed.

"I think any player with confidence is a lot better player," Pysyk said. "Hopefully, I can keep building that confidence."

McCabe, meanwhile, played 10 minutes in his season debut. The 21-year-old had three hits and a blocked shot.

"You want to get that shot up here and prove to the coaches that you can play at this level," said McCabe, an AHL rookie who has improved after a slow start with the Amerks. "I couldn't string three games together to save my life. This last 15 or so games, I felt I've had that confidence and my consistency has shown."

Nolan made it clear Pysyk is more ready for this level than McCabe, but all it takes is one faulty alarm clock for anyone to get an opportunity.

"Tim and the staff are really looking for the long-term picture and how much time kids need in the minors," Nolan said. "We certainly have our input, but there's a big picture here, and I'm sure that's where Mark figures in."

Sabres notebook: Extra work helping Neuvirth play well

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

February 23, 2015

Michal Neuvirth, set to make his sixth start in 10 days, had the option to rest Monday. Nearly all of his Sabres teammates did. Despite a five-game run that would make any goaltender jealous, the Buffalo netminder was on the ice.

"We had an optional skate, but I felt like I had to work on a couple things," said Neuvirth, who had a one-on-one session with goalie coach Arturs Irbe in First Niagara Center. "I've been happy with my game, but I've got to keep working hard. I've been working hard, and it's been paying off."

Neuvirth has indeed found benefits in an increased workload. In five games since taking over as the No. 1 goalie, he's stopped 175 of 184 shots for a .951 save percentage. He'll attempt to continue the hot streak Tuesday in Columbus.

"It's good to get in there and get in a routine to play every other day," Neuvirth said. "It's a big opportunity. I've done it before in Washington, but it was a long time ago. This time I've got an opportunity here and I'm going to bring my best effort every night."

After trading former No. 1 goalie Jhonas Enroth on Feb. 11, Sabres General Manager said he wanted to see what Neuvirth could do. He'll get plenty of chances since coach Ted Nolan has no plans to rest the goalie.

"We're going to ride that horse until we see some tiredness come in," Nolan said. "When you know that you don't have someone backing you up or bailing you out, you are the guy. Arturs Irbe, I think he's done a tremendous job of preparing him and getting him ready."

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With a 6-for-7 showing Sunday against Nashville, the Sabres' penalty killers climbed out of the basement and past the New York Islanders for 29th place. Buffalo went 10 for 11 during the last two games to move to 74.8 percent for the season.

"Guys are working really hard for me, and our penalty kill has been outstanding lately," Neuvirth said. "We're giving everything we have each night, and I'm proud of that. We're playing with more heart, trying to block every shot and playing for each other and playing as one unit. That's the biggest difference."

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Defenseman Tyson Strachan, who came down with an infection during the weekend, did not make the trip to Columbus. There's no timetable for his return.

"I don't think it's a lengthy one, but I don't think it's a tomorrow type of thing, either," Nolan said.

The coach said Josh Gorges had successful surgery on his lower-body injury.

"It's all cleaned up," Nolan said. "Now he's just got to wait for Mother Nature to take its course and get all healed and ready in September."

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The Blue Jackets completed a five-game road trip Sunday with a 4-3 shootout loss to the New York Rangers. Columbus, which is just 12-14-2 in Nationwide Arena, went 2-2-1 during its journey.

"We did some good things on this trip, played some good hockey," coach Todd Richards told reporters after the game in New York. "Now we have to do that same thing at home. We can't think because we're at home it's going to be easy. We have to come out with the same effort, the same battle and intensity."

Pegula Sports may shift offices to The Creamery

By James Fink

Buffalo Business First

February 23, 2015

The financially struggling One Seneca Tower may soon lose another office tenant — this one with one of the highest profiles in the region.

Several sources have confirmed that Pegula Sports & Entertainment may soon be leaving the largely vacant, 38-story building and moving to Ellicott Development Co.'s The Creamery on Scott St. Pegula Sports & Entertainment oversees many of the sports and entertainment business holdings, including the Buffalo Bills and Buffalo Sabres, controlled by Terry and Kim Pegula.

Last summer, Pegula Sports & Entertainment signed a one-year lease to occupy just under 20,000-square-feet in the tower. Because of the complex legal actions centering on the building and an expected court-ordered foreclosure sale that may take place later this spring, State Supreme Court Justice Timothy Walker has only allowed new tenants in the tower to sign one-year leases. That order is nearing its expiration date.

If Pegula Sports & Entertainment does move to the redeveloped Creamery, it will still keep the company in the shadow of First Niagara Center and the HarborCenter.

William Paladino, Ellicott Development president and CEO, confirmed he is negotiating with Pegula Sports & Entertainment about leasing at least one floor, roughly 15,000-square-feet, in the Creamery.

"We don't have any signed agreements with them," Paladino said.

Representatives from Pegula Sports declined to comment.

Ellicott Development has invested more than \$14 million, turning the vacant, circa 1920 former Fairmont Creamery building into one of downtown Buffalo's hottest addresses. Commercial tenants include Liazon and VPS. The building is home to 30 apartments and a first-floor restaurant is expected to open later this year.

Should Pegula Sports & Entertainment leave One Seneca Tower, it may put to an end speculation that the Pegulas could bid on the 851,000-square-foot building — the tallest tower in downtown Buffalo. One Seneca Tower virtually neighbors the Canalside District, which is home to both First Niagara Center and the HarborCenter.

The building is less than 5 percent occupied.

The court-ordered sale is expected to attract potential bidders from both local and out-of-town development interests.

"I believe the market will take care of itself," Buffalo Mayor Byron Brown said.

Sabres' patience with Nikita Zadorov could be wearing thin

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 23, 2015

BUFFALO – Each time Nikita Zadorov violates a team rule, it's important to remember the Sabres defenseman wasn't drafted by Tim Murray. The gruff general manager isn't tied to the Russian.

Sure, Zadorov, the 16th pick in 2013, is an elite prospect. At just 19 years old, he's already a big contributor to the Sabres. Zadorov recently compiled seven points in seven games. The Sabres scored only 16 times in that stretch. He could be a franchise cornerstone very soon.

But Murray's patience might be wearing thin after Zadorov was benched for missing a team meeting after oversleeping Sunday morning. On a team-produced radio program on WGR, Murray said Monday, "The issue is he's not always punctual."

Maturity has been an issue throughout Zadorov's rookie season.

Just late last month, Zadorov's flight from the Dominican Republic following the NHL All-Star break was overbooked, briefly leaving him stranded. The Sabres formally suspended him then.

"It doesn't matter if I was drafted by other guy," Zadorov said Monday inside the First Niagara Center. "I'm on his team. It's his team right now. Yeah, I'm worried because I didn't do the right things."

After skating in the Sabres' optional practice, Zadorov, who likely won't play tonight in Columbus, owned up for a mistake he refused to attribute to his age.

"I felt pretty bad in myself because I made that mistake again, just try to be better teammate, and I will work on that," Zadorov said.

Zadorov stood up before his teammates and apologized for the second time in less than a month.

"I just feel sorry this happened. ... I couldn't do that," Zadorov said. "It was my mistake, 100 percent, no excuses, couldn't do that. I spoke with the team, I said, 'I'm sorry, boys. I don't want to lose your trust.' It's all about the team. I just want to get back as soon as I can and help the team."

Murray was clearly upset with Zadorov. Their chat Monday morning was "ten minutes of me talking, and not very politely," Murray said.

"He's a good prospect, but he's not getting the keys to the kingdom here," he said. "He's just one player, and he has to be a better teammate."

Murray recently said the Sabres have no untouchables but named Zadorov as a player he plans to keep.

What did Murray tell Zadorov on Monday?

"He said ... 'You can't do that, you're a young guy, you got to be careful. You got to have a plan B or something like that every time,'" Zadorov said. "Same thing with the flight. I will work on that. It's my fault."

Sabres coach Ted Nolan downplayed Zadorov's infraction, calling it a "minor thing that young people do."

"I'm quite sure a lot of young 19-year-olds in university probably slept in and missed an exam once in a while," he said.

Still, Zadorov, who said he'll start setting three alarms, might have to wait to return. Nolan sat him two games last month.

"He's a great kid," Nolan said. "It's just sometimes it takes a little bit of time. We still got to take into account his age and where he came from and different country, different environment – everything's different."

With Zadorov and Tyson Strachan (infection) out Sunday, the Sabres recalled defense prospects Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk. Both will likely play again tonight against the Blue Jackets.

"The defense last game, I thought they all played pretty well," Nolan said. "To make a change just to make a change, I don't think we'll do that."

In just his fifth NHL game this season, Pysyk played impressively throughout Sunday's 2-1 shootout loss to the Nashville Predators.

Pysyk looked ready for regular duty when the Sabres sent him to Rochester to perfect his game halfway through last season. The 23-year-old's absence this year has raised some eyebrows, especially with veteran defensemen Andre Benoit and Andrej Meszaros struggling.

"Last time he was up he was ready for primetime," Nolan said about Pysyk. "I thought he played a real strong, solid game (Sunday). McCabe's coming, too. As far as who's ahead of who, Pysyk right now seems like he's really ready."

Nolan clearly wanted Pysyk to stay when the Sabres recalled him in December, although he stopped short of saying so.

"Personally, I like Mark, and I think he's ready," he said. "As a coach, you just got to make sure you're as patient as the players are."

Nolan said about the youngsters: "We'll wait. I think the waiting here is going to be very worthwhile."

The additional time in the AHL allowed Pysyk to play in every situation and briefly serve as the Americans' captain.

"You're building confidence," Pysyk said.

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Forget about former Sabres goalie Ryan Miller enjoying a special homecoming to Buffalo with the Vancouver Canucks on Thursday.

Miller injured his right knee Sunday when teammate Jannik Hansen crashed into him in Vancouver's 4-0 win against the New York Islanders. The former Vezina Trophy winner will miss four to six weeks, according to Sportsnet.

"It's too bad," Nolan said. "I'm quite sure he was really looking forward to coming back here and playing. But good for us maybe."

Backup Eddie Lack will sub for Miller, who likely won't be in Buffalo.

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Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges underwent season-ending surgery for his lower-body injury Monday, Nolan said.

Meanwhile, Strachan didn't travel to Columbus.

"I don't think it's a lengthy one, but I don't think it's a tomorrow type of thing, either," Nolan said.

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The Sabres are in a stretch of eight games in 14 days, so Nolan made Monday's practice optional.

"Resting and recovering is very important, as much as practice is sometimes," Nolan said.

Sabres' Zadorov takes full responsibility

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 23, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Nikita Zadorov was one of the few that skated Monday at the arena. The team met and had an optional.

Zadorov didn't play on Sunday because he showed up late for a meeting. Both Tim Murray and Ted Nolan spoke to the 19-year old defenseman and Nolan wouldn't commit to if Zadorov will play Tuesday in Columbus, "We'll see, the defense last game all played pretty well, so to make a change just to make a change, I don't think we'll do that, but we'll see, you never know."

Zadorov skated over an hour after talking to the team. He said he had a message for his teammates, "I'm sorry boys, I don't want to lose your trust, it's all about the team and I just want to get back as soon as I can and help my team." Zadorov added, "It's pretty bad, I'm mad at myself because I made a mistake again, so I have to try to be a better teammate and I will work on that."

Tim Murray of course wasn't happy. Zadorov said he told him, "He said the same thing as Teddy, you can't do that, you're a young guy you've got to be careful, you've got to have a Plan B every time, so I will work on that, it's my fault."

With two instances happening in a short period of time, Zadorov could be on thin ice. He said, "Doesn't matter who drafted me, I'm on his team and yes, I'm worried because I didn't do the right things."

When it's all said and done and you look at the big picture, Nolan isn't too worried about Zadorov, "He's a great kid, just sometimes it takes a little time, we have to take into account his age and where he came from, a different country, a different environment, so it just takes some time sometimes."

Tim Murray was on WGR Sports Radio 550 with Andrew and Kevin. He said, "It was a coach's decisions, I had a talk with Nikita this morning where I did all the talking, he didn't talk and hopefully the problem is rectified. It was 10 minutes of me talking and not very politely, I told him he's a good prospect, but he's not getting the keys to the kingdom here and he has to be a better teammate."

Tyson Strachan won't go on the trip and it appears that Mark Pysyk and Jake McCabe will make the trip, "As of right now, I believe we are, we only have one over the limit and we have no other players, so it would be nice to bring at least one extra."

It's obvious that Tim Murray thinks Pysyk will grow more in the American Hockey League, but Ted Nolan said, "This is his third year pro and I mean last time he was up he looked like he's ready for primetime, I thought he played a real, strong solid game last night." I followed up on that and it was obvious he and Murray differ on this topic, "What we do is coach and Tim and the staff are really looking for the long term picture and how much time kids need in the minors and we certainly have our input, but there's a big picture here and that's where Mark figures in." Nolan added, "Personally I really like Mark and I think he's ready, but as a coach you just have to make sure you're as patient as the players are and wait for players to get here fulltime."

Murray also spoke on Pysyk. He said, "Mark showed his ability to get up the ice which is all I've ever asked of him. We know you can play a safe game, we know you're smart and play a safe game, we want you to do more, we want you to push yourself to do more and I think he got up the ice three or four times last night, but I liked his game, I liked his feet, I liked his ability to move the puck."

In his career Pysyk had played 68 NHL games and 138 AHL games.

Nolan said Josh Gorges had his surgery this morning and indicated that it is a knee injury.

My stress level is rising

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

February 23, 2015

I did something last week that I never thought I'd do. But its par for the course since I also never thought I'd spend a season hoping the Sabres lose as many games as possible.

Last week I bought the NHL Center Ice package.....to watch the Edmonton Oilers. Now, if Gretzky and company were in their prime, that would have made perfect sense but who in their right mind would pay(it was only 50 bucks for the rest of the season including playoffs) to watch Oilers games. Someone who has a strong rooting interest in Edmonton not beating out the Sabres for 30th place, thats who!

Watching NHL Network and waiting for the Oilers score to come up on the screen on nights when they were playing was far too annoying and very stressful. So was staring at the gamecast on ESPN.com. I couldn't take it anymore so now I can watch the Oilers and root for them as if they were my favorite team.

It was not a good weekend to watch the Oilers who were drilled at home by Minnesota on Friday and were just a few minutes away from gaining a point against Anaheim on Saturday before Ben Scrivens killed them. He couldn't locate the puck after stopping a point shot and the Ducks jumped on the loose puck and put it in the net for what turned out to be the game winning goal.

In the meantime, the Sabres decided to get four points out of a possible eight last week, making the race for 30th tighter and upping my stress level considerably.

There was an eight point gap between the Sabres and Oilers going into last Thursday's Sabres game in Philadelphia. Its now down to five points.

Its time for General Manager Tim Murray to step up and do the right thing. Trade goalie Michal Neuvirth. He could mess this whole thing up. In the five starts Neuvirth has made since Jhonas Enroth was traded away, the Czech native has stopped 95% of the shots he's faced. Buffalo has been outshot(shots on goal only) by 63 over the five games but they have four points(all coming via the shootout) because of Neuvirth. He can't maintain a .951 save percentage but the Sabres can't take any chances.

Remember that 10-3 stretch earlier this season? It came in large part because Enroth was standing on his head with a .940 save percentage. When will Neuvirth cool down? How many points will he steal before then? Will those points be the difference when all is said and done?

The trade deadline is Monday March 2nd and the Sabres have three more games before the deadline so there's no time to waste. A goalie tandem of Andres Lindback and Matt Hackett would suit me just fine for the rest of the season.

As far as the remaining schedules for the Sabres and Oilers, Buffalo has 22 games left with 13 on the road and 9 at home. Tha'ts good because the Sabres have won just six road games this season(6-20-2) as opposed to their home record of 11-18-2. The game in Columbus Tuesday night kicks off a stretch that will see the Sabres play 11 of the next 16 away from First Niagara Center.

Edmonton has 21 games left with 11 at home and 10 on the road. 14 of the Oilers final 21 games will come against Western Conference opposition. Time to pray to the hockey gods folks because the Oilers are an unsightly 4-23-9 against teams inside their conference.

Which is why the stretch of the schedule from March 8th through the 21st is critical in the race for 30th.

Edmonton will play seven consecutive games against Eastern Conference clubs. The Oilers are 13-11-1 versus the East.

Edmonton will need to rack up some points there because the last 10 games of the season are strictly against Western teams.

Not to add to your stress level but Arizona is creeping back into the race too. The Coyotes were 12 points ahead of the Sabres last week but now the gap is just eight. The Coyotes have lost five in a row and seven of eight. In those eight games, Arizona has managed to score a grand total of eight goals. In addition, the Coyotes are expected to sell some of their better parts before the trade deadline.

Don't forget, the Sabres and Coyotes will face each other twice in the last week of March.

Progress in Rochester earned McCabe call to Buffalo

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

February 23, 2015

Jake McCabe was one of the only players sitting at his locker Friday night after a 5 to 2 loss to the Texas Stars. He watched as the small cast of media wandered into the Rochester Amerks' dressing room, then turned to take off his gear when they requested Cameron Burt - a former RIT star who had just played his first game.

McCabe was ready to answer for a bad turnover behind the net that resulted in an important goal for the Stars.

The play was one that experienced defensemen make thousands of times. They tap the puck back to their partner, the breakout begins. McCabe hesitated slightly, thinking about carrying the puck himself. It took a bounce, then it was too late and his opponent - a savvy AHL veteran - took advantage.

The Sabres' 2nd round pick in 2012 played nearly 30 minutes against the Stars. He's on the top power play unit, kills penalties and is asked nightly to face opponents' top forwards. He and puck-moving D-man Chad Ruhwedel have been a pair for months. Early on, the 24-year-old Ruhwedel carried his partner through ups and downs, but over the past month, McCabe has kicked his play up a notch.

Two days after his tough outing, the former second round pick was called up to the Sabres, ironically to take the spot of suspended defenseman Nikita Zadorov, completely his opposite in so many ways.

"I think in the last 15 games or so I've had a lot of confidence," McCabe said. "It's kind of weird how points work, they come in bunches and you can have slumps for 20 games, but me and Chad have a good thing going right now, he helps me talk a lot and helps me out on the back end."

The AHL rookie trajectory that McCabe is traveling on is common among quality prospects. Making the adjustment from NCAA to the AHL is like being a 7th grader going to play varsity. He never has and never will see a bigger jump in quality of competition - and there will be plenty of bumps.

At Wisconsin, McCabe was big. In the AHL, he's average sized. At Wisconsin, he was an exceptional skater, in the AHL he's a millisecond quicker than the norm. In the NCAA, the 21-year-old could stop an opponent dead in his tracks at the blue line. Here, the forwards are like downhill skiers, shifting and changing directions so quickly they can't be checked.

"It's all a new process for me, being my first year I am just trying to learn every day and get better as I go," he said. "The people around me have helped me become a better player. It's been a good year so far."

Third-year pro Mark Pysyk and current ex-Amerks and current LA King Brayden McNabb were tasked with facing a similar adjustment period their first pro year, as did Rasmus Ristolainen - though Ristolainen is a different breed of prospect and made tweaks much quicker. Pysyk and McNabb were inconsistent, but turned their game in the right direction during the dog days of January and February.

As evidenced by the turnover on Friday night, McCabe isn't finished with his path, but the mistakes are coming fewer and farther between. College players are much closer to a finished product than 18-year-old junior prospects, but the ceiling has not yet been reached. Defensemen especially take longer to be ready for The Show because of the complexity of the position and the pressure involved.

Defensive mistakes by wingers can often be covered up, but if you'd like to put yourself in the shoes of a defenseman, think of it as doing your office job in front of 18,000 people and trying not to make a single typo. Operating a cash register in front of a packed arena and never missing a penny.

Sunday evening, McCabe will have that feeling again. He played for the Sabres for seven games last season,

registering one assist. It was easier then - and on Sunday - than it will be in the future. He's the new guy now. Next year he won't be.

"I was definitely a little nervous when I first got the call," McCabe said. "But you only get your first NHL game once and I'm glad I got that over with (last season). I could actually feel my legs tonight."

With the rise in analytics in hockey, one of the "truths" NHL teams have come to accept is that defensemen with the ability to move the puck and create offense are more valuable than your old rough-em-up, good-in-his-own-zone defender. The Hal Gil types are no longer a staple of bluelines. That's good news for the Sabres, whose projected defense doesn't have a single stuck-in-the-mud blueliner.

For McCabe, though, it means he must transfer his college game over to the pros before he can be effective. The days of "playing a simple game" are probably gone. Make an impact or get out. The former Badger has upped his offensive game in Rochester as the season has gone along, with points in nine of his last 10 games. On the year he has four goals and 21 assists.

The power play point may not be his future position, but he has offered a quality shot from above the circle. His 5v5 production is more important considering most have projected a 2nd-3rd pair NHL future.

This is where we circle back to character. The funny thing about character is that it's talked about more in the context of whether a player is a leader or takes responsibility for mistakes as McCabe did on Friday. Character is used by media to tell us whether someone is good at speaking postgame - which McCabe is coming off as mature and bright in the Vine-length conversations.

But those things aren't the keys to whether he will be an NHL regular though. They're great traits, and no doubt WGR beat reporter Paul Hamilton will be at McCabe's locker a lot if he is a Sabre, but the biggest factor is whether he can keep learning. And whether he can handle the pressure. Waiting at the locker after a bad night gets harder when your mistakes are seen and quotes are read by thousands.

Against the Predators on Sunday evening, the young defenseman got off to a tough start. He allowed a quick skater to get behind him at the blue line, which turned into a Grade A scoring chance. Two shifts later, attempting to make a simple play off the wall, he iced the puck. At times during the rest of the game, there were times he could not decide whether to pinch or drop back. Ice time was limited by penalties, but McCabe played a solid third period.

"It's in the back of your mind, you want to prove to the coaches that you can play at this level," he said.

He will have chances soon. The rest of this year will tell us whether he can be in their plans for 2015 or if he needs more time.

Pysyk impresses in NHL return; Zadorov has 'no excuses'

By Zac Hirschbeck

Sabres.com

February 23, 2015

Following Buffalo's 2-1 shootout defeat to Nashville on Sunday, the club returned to the First Niagara Center on Monday morning for a team meeting and an optional skate.

As the team attempted to regroup ahead of their afternoon flight to Columbus, many of the club's younger players hit the ice with the hopes of shaking out some of the previous night's aches and pains. One of those players was defenseman Mark Pysyk.

Pysyk, who was recalled along with fellow defenseman Jake McCabe prior to Sunday's tilt with the Predators, impressed in his first game back with the big club.

"I thought he played a real strong, solid game last night," Sabres head coach Ted Nolan said. "He seems like he's really ready to be up here."

Although he was admittedly a little nervous upon his return to Buffalo, Pysyk was also pleased with his own performance.

"It's good if I don't look nervous because I definitely was," Pysyk said. "I tried to play simple and not do too much. I thought things went well. We should've had the two points, but they got a lucky bounce there at the end."

In the coming weeks, Pysyk could have an opportunity to carve out a role on the backend. Injuries to Josh Gorges (season-ending lower body injury), Mike Weber (out two weeks with an upper body injury) and Tyson Strachan (day-to-day) leaves spots to be filled in the Sabres defensive group. Pysyk hopes that he shows enough during his time with the Sabres to earn an extended look at the NHL level.

"I just want to play simple and limit my mistakes," Pysyk said. "I don't want to give them any reasons to send me back down."

The former first-round pick in 2010 (23rd overall) has one goal in 5 games with the Sabres so far this year. In 50 games with Rochester, Pysyk has three goals and 13 assists.

After missing Sunday's game for violating a team rule (late to a team meeting), Nikita Zadorov expressed his regret regarding the events that led to his absence.

"I feel sorry that it happened. It was 100 percent my mistake, no excuses, I can't do that," Zadorov said. "I spoke with the team and said 'I'm sorry boys, and I don't want to lose your trust.' It's all about the team, and I just want to get back as soon as I can and help my team."

During an appearance on Hockey Hotline this morning, Sabres general manager Tim Murray also spoke of his hopes that the rookie can learn from the situation and move on.

"I had a talk with Nikita this morning. Well, I did all the talking and he didn't talk," Murray said. "Hopefully the problem is rectified and we can move forward."

As it stands now, Zadorov might have to wait before returning to the lineup. Although he's expected to travel with the team, Nolan said he was happy with how his defenders played against Nashville.

"The defense last game I thought played pretty well, so we won't be making a change just to make a change."

While the Sabres have recorded only one win during their last five games, it hasn't been because of subpar goaltending.

Over the last five games, Sabres goaltender Michal Neuvirth has made 175 saves on 184 shots (.951 save%), which includes 37 saves on 38 shots against Nashville. Despite that personal success, the 26-year-old is quick to attribute his good form to those around him.

"The guys are working really hard for me and our penalty kill has been outstanding lately," Neuvirth said. "We are giving everything we have each night and I'm proud of that."

Neuvirth will look to extend his hot streak against Columbus on Tuesday, and as of now, his coach will turn to him more often than not.

"He's been playing great these last five games," Nolan said. "We're going to ride that horse until we see some tiredness come in."

Sabres prospects report

By Kris Baker

Sabres.com

February 23, 2015

Sam Reinhart (2014, first round) scored a pair of goals Friday including the game-winner as the Kootenay ICE remained in control of the top wildcard spot for the WHL's Eastern Conference playoffs with a 4-1 victory over Edmonton.

Reinhart's first marker, a power-play tally from the edge of the blue paint at 7:10 of the third period, was his 300th career point in the WHL, making him the first Kootenay player to ever reach the milestone.

Reinhart began the week with an assist on the game-winning goal in Tuesday's 5-2 triumph at Lethbridge. On Saturday, the Kootenay captain collected a pair of helpers to extend his point streak to four games as the ICE blanked Spokane 5-0.

Entering the final week of February, Reinhart has contributed 15 goals and 34 assists while collecting at least one point in 30 of 35 games.

NCAA

Cal Petersen made a career-high 44 saves Saturday as Notre Dame held on for a 3-2 victory at No. 2 Boston University. The performance was the continuation of an excellent effort the night before, when the freshman goaltender stopped 34 of shots in a 2-2 tie with the Terriers. Petersen, who entered the weekend with back-to-back Hockey East Defensive Player of the Week honors, has lost just one of his last five starts for the Fighting Irish to improve his season record to 9-12-3 with a 2.46 GAA and .918 save%.

Freshman center **Connor Hurley** logged a plus-one rating in Notre Dame's tie with Boston University on Friday, and recorded a team-high four shots on goal in Saturday's victory over the Terriers. Hurley has three goals and 12 points in his first 33 collegiate contests, but he's connected for just one assist in his last 13 games.

J.T. Compher (2013, second round) picked up an assist to end a career-long five-game point drought Friday as Michigan Ohio State. Compher recorded two shots and a roughing minor in the game's final minute as Wolverines closed the week with a 5-2 win over the Buckeyes. Compher has four goals and 14 points this season with six games remaining on the Big Ten schedule.

Hudson Fasching posted one assist Saturday as No. 15 Minnesota dropped a 4-3 overtime decision at Penn State. With 39.6 seconds left in regulation, the budding power forward sent a quick pass down low to Sam Warming for the game-tying tally. On Friday, Fasching registered two shots on goal in a 2-1 win over the Nittany Lions. Fasching is tied for ninth in team scoring with 16 points (8+8) in 29 games played.

Christian Isackson (2010, seventh round) scored his third goal of the season and eighth of his four-year career in Minnesota's Friday triumph at Penn State. The senior forward played in his 100th NCAA contest on Saturday, finishing with a minus-one rating in a limited fourth line role.

Anthony Florentino (2013, fifth round) manned one half of the third defensive pair over the weekend as Providence won 3-2 and lost 2-1, both in overtime, to Massachusetts. The second-year man was kept out of the scoring in the conference set, extending his dry spell to six games without a point. He has two goals, nine assists and a plus-11 rating in 31 games.

Fifth-year defender **Mark Adams** came away empty as Providence split the pair of overtime decisions with Massachusetts. The stay-at-home senior has one goal and three points in 25 appearances for the Friars.

Maxwell Willman (2014, fifth round) snapped a 20-game point drought Friday with one assist as Brown downed Princeton 4-1. Willman was unable to make it points in two straight games on Saturday in the Bears 2-2 tie with Quinnipiac. The second-line winger has one goal, two assists, and 33 shots on goal in 26 games.

Sean Malone (2013, sixth round) produced a team-high four shots on goal Friday as Harvard was bested by St. Lawrence 5-1. The sophomore centerman was kept off the scoresheet for a third consecutive game on Saturday as the Crimson rebounded with a 3-2 victory at Clarkson. In 10 appearances this season, Malone has captured four goals, nine points and 30 shots on goal.

Jason Kasdorf stood tall with 29 saves Friday as RPI battled to a 2-2 tie at Cornell. The Engineers held a 2-1 lead in the final minute of regulation before the Big Red struck with an extra attacker with 32 seconds left on the clock. Kasdorf, who returned Saturday with 25 saves in a 4-2 loss at Colgate, has amassed a 9-16-1 record, 3.05 GAA and .896 save% while starting the last 15 games for RPI.

Brad Navin (2011, seventh round) posted two shots on goal Friday as Wisconsin earned consecutive victories for the first time all season with a 2-1 win over Michigan State. Navin was kept off the scoresheet for the sixth straight game on Saturday as the Badgers fell to the Spartans 3-0. The senior winger has five points (1+4) and 50 shots on goal in 28 games. He has recorded just one point, an assist, in his last 13 outings.

Judd Petersen (2012, seventh round) did not factor Friday as St. Cloud State edged Nebraska-Omaha 4-3. The freshman winger did not dress on Saturday as the Huskies earned the sweep with a 2-0 shutout of the Mavericks.

OHL

Justin Bailey (2013, second round) scored with a quick-rising wrist shot off a face-off win Monday as Sault Ste. Marie rolled past Sarnia 6-0. Bailey kept at it Wednesday with two more goals plus an assist to earn the game's first star in an 8-3 hammering of Sudbury. The big winger would come up empty as the Greyhounds capped the week with wins over North Bay and Kitchener, leaving him with 34 goals and 67 points through 55 games. The Greyhounds have won seven straight games and 18 of 20 since acquiring Bailey from Kitchener.

Nicholas Baptiste (2013, third round) scored a goal in each the week's three games as Erie skated their way to two victories and one defeat. Baptiste, who posted singles in a 4-0 win at Mississauga on Monday and a 4-3 loss at Guelph on Friday, finished the week with a power play goal plus two assists on Saturday as Erie pounded Peterborough 8-2. The three-point night boosted Baptiste to 23 goals and 46 points through 42 games.

Eric Cornel (2014, second round) notched one assist in all four games played last week as Peterborough won twice to remain in the Eastern Conference playoff hunt. Cornel's highlight of the week came on Saturday when he won a corner battle and earned an assist from his knees as part of a solid overall effort in the Petes' lopsided loss to Erie. Cornel has points in five straight games to elevate him to a total of 47 (13+34) for the season.

Sault Ste. Marie forward **Jean Dupuy** notched a pair of assists in Monday's shellacking of Sarnia, and then scored in back-to-back games on Wednesday and Friday as the Greyhounds earned home wins over Sudbury and North Bay. Dupuy, who saw his three-game point streak end in Saturday's triumph over Kitchener, has 13 goals and 33 points in 45 games.

WHL

Brycen Martin (2014, third round) set a new career high Saturday with his seventh goal of the year as Saskatoon was thumped by Brandon 7-3. On Wednesday, Martin saw his 11-game point streak come to an end in a 5-4 loss to Red Deer. The top-pair defender has posted 21 points (5+16) in 19 games since his trade to the Blades.

QMJHL

Vaclav Karabacek (2014, second round) collected one goal and one assist Tuesday as Baie-Comeau was outgunned 6-4 by Quebec. The Czech winger was held pointless in a 4-0 shutout of Sherbrooke on Saturday. Karabacek has 37 points (16+21) in 51 games this season, including five goals and seven assists in 20 tilts since joining the Drakkar.

USHL

Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) was shut out of Friday and Saturday losses to Chicago and Youngstown, but returned Sunday with two assists as Green Bay suffered another defeat to Youngstown, 8-5. Brown remains the team leader with 13 goals and 32 points. He has marked just once in his last 16 games for the Gamblers, who have lost six in row.

Sweden

Linus Ullmark (2012, sixth round) stopped 30 of 31 shots Wednesday to earn his 11th win of the year as MODO claimed a 4-1 victory over Leksands IF. Ullmark was challenged in next two starts, with the bulky goaltender allowing three goals on nine shots before getting the early hook in Friday's 6-1 loss to Linkoping HC, and then surrendering another four on 19 shots Saturday in a 4-2 defeat to Lulea HF. Ullmark has appeared in 32 games this season, along the way compiling a 3.14 GAA and a .905 save%.

Gustav Possler returned to the MODO lineup Saturday following a two-game absence, finishing with one shot on goal and a minus-one rating in the loss to Lulea HF. Through 42 tilts, the 20-year-old winger is tied for second in team scoring with 20 points (9+11). He has gone without a goal in his last 10 games.

In Wednesday action, **Jonas Johansson** (2014, third round) made 28 saves Wednesday as Almtuna IS was defeated by IF Bjorkloven 4-0. Johansson again earned the nod on Friday, stopping 20 of 22 shots to backstop a 3-2 win over IK Oskarshamn. Johansson is 3-3 with a 2.72 GAA and .893 save% since his loan to the Allsvenskan club.

Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) was unable to connect on a team-high four shots on goal as Timra IK pitched a 2-0 shutout of Sodertalje SK on Wednesday. Olofsson, who was again blanked in Friday's 3-0 loss to Asploven HC, has scored two goals on 11 shots in four Allsvenskan appearances.