



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

April 1, 2021

Sabres end 18-game skid with 6-1 win over Flyers

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

April 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Embarrassment for Brandon Montour and the Buffalo Sabres turned into relief on Wednesday night.

The Sabres ended their 18-game skid — the NHL's longest in 17 years — with a resounding 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers. Rather than squandering a 3-0 third-period lead, like it did during a 4-3 overtime loss to the Flyers on Monday, Buffalo put it away by scoring the final four goals.

Montour capped the surge by scoring short-handed goals 37 seconds apart, the first into an empty net.

"It was a tough stretch. You never want to lose, especially the streak we had there. Everybody was talking about it," the defenseman said. "Tonight, luckily we all played together and got the win. It was good for everyone.

It was Buffalo's first win since a 4-1 victory at New Jersey on Feb. 23, and ended an 0-15-3 streak. The slump was tied for the league's 14th longest, and worst since the Pittsburgh Penguins had a 0-17-1 stretch during the 2003-04 season.

The Sabres also snapped a 0-9-2 home skid, one short of matching a franchise record set during the 1990-91 season. Buffalo won for just the third time at home, and first since a 4-3 shootout win over the Devils on Jan. 30.

Linus Ullmark stopped 31 shots and was greeted by a long line of Sabres, led by Rasmus Dahlin, after the final horn sounded in an arena without fans. Steven Fogarty scored his first career goal and added an assist.

The win was the first under interim coach Don Granato, who took over after Ralph Krueger was fired March 17 during a calamitous season likely to end with Buffalo extending its playoff drought to an NHL record-matching 10th consecutive year.

"There's no question that it was important to put the streak behind (us) so everybody can move on. But we absolutely had to block it out," Granato said. "They pulled together instead of apart, and that showed that they learned."

Buffalo's Sam Reinhart and Curtis Lazar scored 2:27 apart in the opening period. After Philadelphia's Ivan Provorov scored 3:50 into the second period, Buffalo responded by closing the period with goals from Fogarty and Casey Mittelstadt.

Mittelstadt's goal, a softie which beat Brian Elliott through the legs, chased the Flyers goalie after he allowed four goals on 16 shots.

Coming off consecutive wins for the first time in a month, the Flyers' inconsistencies turned up again in dropping to 6-10-1 in their past 17. The slump has dropped them into fifth in the East Division.

"No matter what, we've got to turn the page," said Sean Couturier, looking ahead to the Flyers' next opponent. "Obviously it's an embarrassing loss but we've got a big game here coming up against the Islanders. We've got to make sure we're ready to get the two points."

Elliott, who stopped 29 shots on Monday and shut out Buffalo twice already this season, dropped to 17-3-2 for his career against the Sabres.

With Carter Hart relegated to practice-only duty to see if the third-year starter can shake off a season-long funk, Alex Lyon finished the game for the Flyers in his first appearance of the season. He made nine saves on 10 shots.

Buffalo was coming off consecutive games in which it blew leads in a failed bid to end the drought. On Saturday in Boston, the Sabres blew two one-goal leads in a 3-2 loss to the Bruins. Then came the meltdown on Monday, in which Couturier tied the game with 1:29 left, and Provorov sealed it 42 seconds into overtime.

This time, the Sabres made their lead stick, even after Provorov's shot from the left point banked in off Montour, or while being outshot 11-0 through the first nine minutes of the second.

Fogarty scored on Buffalo's second shot of the frame after being set up alone in front at the 9:42 mark.

After what happened Monday, Montour acknowledged waiting until the final horn sounded just to be sure.

"You obviously have that in the back of your mind, but that game (Monday) was over. You've got to wash it," Montour said. "But it was good to hear the zero there and it was good to win."

Montour set a record among NHL defensemen in scoring the fastest consecutive short-handed goals. The 37-second span ranks 12th-fastest overall.

FORGETTABLE FIRST

Reinhart opened the scoring at 9:32 when his shot from the right circle banked in off Flyers defenseman Justin Braun. Lazar made it 2-0 when he converted an odd-man rush after Braun's shot from the blue line was blocked by Riley Sheahan.

GOSTISBEHERE STILL HERE

The Flyers placed Shayne Gostisbehere on their taxi squad after the regular defenseman cleared waivers earlier. Coach Alain Vigneault said the team made the move to free up space to allow forwards Oskar Lindblom and Nolan Patrick to get a much-needed rest.

The Flyers used the free spot to call up forwards Connor Bunnaman and Carsen Twarynski from the taxi squad.

BANGED-UP SABRES

Rookie center Dylan Cozens is expected to miss a week after sustaining an upper-body injury Monday. Defenseman Jacob Bryson had two assists in his return after missing one game with an upper-body injury.

UP NEXT

Flyers: At the New York Islanders on Saturday.

Sabres: Open two-game series against the New York Rangers on Thursday.

Erik Brady: Remembering when Sabres were an April Fools' joke for the gags, not their play

By Erik Brady

The Buffalo News

April 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres are their own April Fools' joke these days. But there was a time, many years ago, when April 1 was a red-letter day for our blue and gold.

Paul Wieland was public relations director for the Sabres then. He was the sort of guy who thought of April Fools' Day as a holiday worth celebrating. Still does, actually. Today he's here to offer another high-concept hoax for your springtime amusement:

"The Buffalo Sabres today announced a new program to assign players who are not performing well to work as hand frackers for Pegula Enterprises, benevolent owners of the NHL franchise. ... Hand frackers from the Sabres roster will see their hockey sticks converted to lightweight shovels so they will be able to scoop out the earth" underneath Chestnut Ridge Park. "It is expected that nearly all the current Sabres roster will go on fracking duty."

You can find the complete release, in all its phony-baloney glory, on a Facebook page that Wieland recently created called "Sabres Success." This release – like the ones Wieland sent out in his official capacity decades ago – is expressed in the flat, matter-of-fact tone of an actual public relations missive, which is a large part of what makes it so darn funny.

Just don't think that Wieland takes the Sabres' 18-game losing streak that ended Wednesday night as a laughing matter. He very much does not. It's just that a joke is the best way for him to express his anger these days.

"I'm doing it with humor, I suppose, but I'm really irritated as hell," he says from his home in Great Valley. He is a retired journalism professor at St. Bonaventure University, his alma mater. "I'm one of the last people alive who was there with the Sabres at the beginning. I'm literally one of a dying breed. So I'm trying to have fun with it. Otherwise I'd be really ticked off."

Think of this original Sabres employee as a Buffalo original – in the sense that Thelonious Monk was an American original. Wieland worked not in jazz but as a corporate spokesperson, which is normally not thought of as a jazzy profession. But he made it so with his mission to boost the profile of an expansion team by showcasing it as a franchise full of fun.

Wieland, 82, was a reporter at the Courier-Express and the Buffalo Evening News before he moved into public relations with General Motors. In 1970, the newborn Sabres hired him as their first public relations director, which turned out to be a stroke of corporate genius. Here was a guy who could make saves (as a practice goalie) and make waves (as a practical jokester).

Witness his annual April Fools' news releases. These were sent to local and national media outlets on official Sabres letterhead, but with crucial clues that the news therein was, in fact, fake. First was the notation at the top: "For release April 1." (The usual notation is: "For immediate release.") And second was, well, the sheer bombast of the claims. No one could really believe these.

Could they?

- One year Wieland's release said the Sabres had purchased the USS Little Rock from the Naval and Servicemen's Park for a team yacht, and that general manager Punch Imlach planned to use it as a summer training vessel. Then a New York Times columnist wrote that one reason NHL ticket prices were so high was extravagances such as the Sabres buying a used Navy ship.

- Another year, Wieland announced that President Ronald Reagan had named the Sabres as "America's Hockey Team." The release included a mocked-up Time magazine cover and a counterfeit White House proclamation – dated April 1 – over what appeared to be Reagan's signature. The Associated Press in Washington called to say that Wieland had committed federal offenses: use of ersatz White House stationery and attaching the president's name to a letter he hadn't written. Did he have a comment? Bring it on, Wieland said, figuring this would make the kind of national news he wanted for his franchise of fun. Alas, he never heard from the authorities.

- Perhaps Wieland's finest April Fools' hoax was Sliderex. His release said the Sabres were putting down a new plastic ice surface at Memorial Auditorium, and that Sliderex had been developed in a cow barn in Pictou County, Nova Scotia, by one Ramsay MacDonald. (Wieland borrowed the name from a former British prime minister.) When the Canadian Press called NHL commissioner Clarence Campbell for comment, he said: "Of course the NHL always operates on the edge of technological change, so this is just another step forward in making it a better game."

Campbell wasn't the only fool who got fooled. One Buffalo sportscaster reported it, on March 31, as an exclusive. When Wieland confronted him about breaking the release date, the sportscaster said he had his own sources — which in itself was even funnier than the notion of skating on plastic. We'll not mention his name, though you can find it in Wieland's 2019 book "Taro Lives! Confessions of the Sabres Hoaxer."

The Taro of the title, of course, is Wieland's most famous hoax. This one came not on April Fools' Day but on NHL draft day, in 1974, when the Sabres selected center Taro Tsujimoto of the Tokyo Katanas in the 11th round.

"Taro didn't exist," Wieland wrote in his book. "I made him up, and he'll be in the lead in any obituary about me."

We pray such is a long way off. We need Paul Wieland. April 1 needs him. Heck, the Sabres need him.

He is, after all, an emblem of a bygone era when the world laughed with them, not at them.

Mike Harrington: Sabres finally find their heart at home to end ugly streaks

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Ranch goes with chicken wings, pigs do fly, Brett Hull's goal really doesn't count.

And the Buffalo Sabres can actually win a hockey game.

Seriously. It happened Wednesday night in KeyBank Center. I realize this wasn't momentous enough for thousands of you to someday claim you were there, so you'll have to take this corner's word for it.

The 18-game winless streak – the longest in the NHL in the post-2005 shootout era – is over. The 11-game home winless streak is also history, one shy of equaling the franchise record.

Give the Sabres full marks for their 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers, a victory that essentially was three games in the making after the Sabres frittered away third-period leads against the Flyers here Monday and Saturday in Boston.

Things have been particularly egregious at home, where the Sabres were 2-11-3 and had not won since Jan. 30. They were last in the NHL at 1.63 goals per game at home and a shocking 0.88 per game at 5 on 5. Patently absurd.

Frankly, it's been a good thing for this team there have been no fans around. I can hear the booing. But maybe they've missed the motivation. There's just nothing in the way of atmosphere without the masses.

Even if only a few hundred show up Saturday night when the gates are finally opened for the second game of the series against the New York Rangers, it will be a good thing. There were 2,100 in the house Saturday in Boston and I can vouch that the place was rocking late in the third period when the Dropkick Murphys' "Shipping Up to Boston" reverberated through TD Garden.

How to take some of the mystery out of buying a house sight unseen

"It was great. It felt like kind of old times, felt like more normal, simpler times," winger Kyle Okposo said earlier in the day. "I guess you really don't know what you have till it's gone. That's something that you know, as hockey players, that you kind of take for granted. As entertainers, doing the things that we do in our profession, you take it for granted that you're gonna have that energy, you're gonna have those people in the seats."

"A lot of emotions in that building," added interim coach Don Granato.

The Sabres would have heard a lot of cheers if folks were there Wednesday night. They deserved some for once. When the fans finally come back, you have to hope they'll see more of the hockey that's been on display the last three games.

"I think tonight was the most consistent for sure," said Sam Reinhart. "We were able to weather a storm early in the second (when Philadelphia got the first 11 shots on goal). The penalty kill did a good job. So it was a good process."

"Guys have been positive," added defenseman Brandon Montour. "The guys have tried to pick each other up after every game, and we're doing a great job of that. Tonight just kind of was a full 60 minutes, where everybody was moving, everybody was feeling good."

There were no panic attacks in this one for the Sabres. They were by far the better team for about 50 of the 60 minutes. And sometimes you need some luck, too. The Sabres got some right off the opening faceoff as just 11 seconds into the game, Sean Couturier burned Linus Ullmark with a backhand.

Doink.

Flat off the goalpost and back out. Given the way Monday's game ended, imagine the boomerang effect on both teams if the Flyers had taken a lead in that kind of short order. Instead, the first period proceeded much like the

opening 40 minutes did Monday. The Sabres played with pace and purpose, the Flyers were disheveled and disjointed.

Reinhart's goal that opened the scoring came off great work by Okposo. Rochester Amerks captain Steven Fogarty chipped in his first NHL goal and had a sublime assist to Casey Mittelstadt. Jacob Bryson and Rasmus Ristolainen each rang up two assists and a plus-4 rating. Montour scored two short-handed goals in a 37-second span late in the third period.

Granato's first win as an NHL head coach showcased the way he wants them to play with pace. They're becoming a North-South team again. Reinhart made a point of noting the free-skating style the team has been given the keys to since Ralph Krueger left. It makes a difference.

"I think that right now, the way that he wants us to play is a lot of close support, a lot of easy passes to each other," said Okposo. "And when you do that, you start to get a lot of good puck touches, and then you start to feel good."

Just give the fans a good effort. Score some goals. Make some plays. It's not too much to ask. And it was time to get rid of this streak, which was starting to become a huge story across North America and could have become a huge organizational albatross if it got into the 20s, something no NHL team had endured since 1993.

"There's no question that it is important to put the streak behind so everybody can move on," Granato admitted. "But we absolutely had to block it out. ... We had to control what we can truly control and focus on making this group better and getting better as a team. And I feel we are. We're in a much better place, getting better. And we have to keep that focus."

Of course, this was only one win and just the seventh of the season. Here's hoping the diehards who decide to come in April get a few rewards and are able to make some noise.

The Wraparound: Sabres finally win, snap 18-game skid with 6-goal effort

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Colin Miller shot the puck off the end boards as the Philadelphia Flyers celebrated near their own bench and Linus Ullmark hung his head in disbelief.

An Ivan Provorov shot had just ricocheted off Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour and into the net in the second period Wednesday, silencing the Buffalo bench and threatening another outstanding start under interim coach Don Granato.

The moment spelled doom for the Sabres. No matter the coach, general manager or players across nine seasons without playoff hockey, Buffalo has routinely fallen apart when faced with adversity. Only 48 hours earlier, with the Sabres searching for their first win in over a month, Granato watched from behind the bench as the Flyers roared back from a three-goal deficit before an overtime triumph.

Not Wednesday. The Sabres' resolve came through in the final 30 minutes, as Steven Fogarty, Casey Mittelstadt and Montour provided insurance goals to help Buffalo snap a historic 18-game winless streak with a 6-1 victory over the Flyers inside KeyBank Center.

This was the Sabres' first win in 34 days and allowed them to avoid the 11th-longest winless streak in the history of the National Hockey League. While Buffalo (7-23-5) remains at the bottom of the standings, Granato's first win as interim coach provided a glimmer of hope in another season filled with tumult.

With several contributors injured, most notably center Jack Eichel, the Sabres received a balanced effort from their makeshift forward lines, including Sam Reinhart, who centered a 5-on-5 forward line for the first time since the 2017-18 season.

Reinhart scored the game's opening goal in the first period, and the Sabres carried a 2-0 lead into the intermission after Curtis Lazar's shot from the slot beat Brian Elliott. Montour added two shorthanded goals in the third period, including an empty-netter.

The Flyers (17-14-4) managed only 11 shots in the third period while trailing by three goals, and Ullmark finished with 31 saves.

Close call: Seconds into the game, Flyers winger Sean Couturier backhanded a shot that went off the far post of the Sabres' net. Less than one minute later, Montour set up Jeff Skinner for a chance from the slot, but Skinner's shot went off Elliott's blocker.

Opening salvo: Reinhart broke the scoreless tie at 9:32 into the first period when his shot from the right circle went off the leg of Flyers defenseman Justin Braun and into the net for a 1-0 Sabres lead. The goal was Reinhart's team-leading 13th of the season.

With a primary assist on the goal, Sabres winger Kyle Okposo extended his point streak to five games.

Heads-up play: Sabres forward Riley Sheahan blocked Braun's shot near the Buffalo blue line but could not create enough separation for a clear breakaway.

Rather than forcing a backhanded shot, Sheahan cut to his right after passing the hashmarks and protected the puck long enough to pass to Lazar, whose one-timer from the slot went through Elliott's five-hole for a 2-0 lead at 11:59 into the game.

This was only the eighth time all season the Sabres led at the end of the first period. Across its past three games, Buffalo has outscored its opponents 4-0 in the first period. The Sabres outshot the Flyers 10-7.

Momentum swing: The Flyers used an early power play in the second period to generate momentum and eventually broke through when Provorov's shot from the left point went off Montour and in, cutting the Sabres' lead to 2-1 at 3:50.

Milestone: Fogarty, the 27-year-old captain of the Rochester Americans, scored his first career NHL goal at 9:42 into the second period by receiving a pass from Rasmus Ristolainen while stationed in front of the net, giving the Sabres a 3-1 advantage.

Entering Wednesday, Fogarty had one assist in 21 career NHL regular-season games, 18 of which were with the New York Rangers.

Knockout punch: The Sabres chased Elliott from the game with Mittelstadt scoring from the right-wing circle for a 4-1 lead at 15:39 into the second period. With assists on the goal, Fogarty and rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson clinched their first career two-point games in the NHL.

The goal was Mittelstadt's second of the season and his first since moving back to center. It also ended his 14-game goal drought.

Injury: Lazar did not return to the game after suffering an undisclosed injury in the second period. Lazar finished with 7:43 of ice time.

Roster moves: Prior to the game, the Sabres recalled Fogarty from the taxi squad. Defenseman Matt Irwin was a healthy scratch for Buffalo.

The Rochester Americans also signed goalie Billy Christopolous to a professional tryout. Christopolous, 27, played college hockey at Air Force and most recently played in the ECHL, totaling a .911 save percentage in 11 games for the Indy Fuel this season.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to play the New York Rangers on Thursday in KeyBank Center. Puck drop is 7 p.m.

Observations: Don Granato's changes making big difference for Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Don Granato wasn't the only person on the Buffalo Sabres' bench peering up at the scoreboard as the clocked drained in KeyBank Center.

When the horn finally sounded and the Sabres' players converged on goalie Linus Ullmark for a matter-of-fact celebration, Granato turned to shake hands with his assistant coaches and filed back to the dressing room.

Granato, a 53-year-old hockey lifer, had achieved his first NHL win as a head coach, the latest milestone in a career that's spanned 25 years and various leagues across North America. Yet, for as long as Granato has waited for the feat, one 60-minute game does not illustrate all that he's accomplished in two weeks as the Sabres' interim coach.

Using a delicate blend of structure and freedom, Granato helped a group of directionless players forge an identity and guided the Sabres through a winless streak that spanned 34 days and 18 games. After a crushing defeat to begin the week, his players executed his system in brilliant fashion Wednesday, scoring four unanswered goals to cap a 6-1 win.

The franchise-record winless streak that led to former coach Ralph Krueger's firing is finally over.

"There's no question that is important to put the streak behind so everybody can move on, but we absolutely had to block it out," said Granato. "I had to block it out. On the coaching side, of course I want to win, but again, we had to control what we could control and focus on making this group better and getting better as a team. I feel we are. We're in a much better place and getting better. We have to keep that focus."

The Sabres, still last in the NHL with a 7-23-5 record, did not relent when their lead was cut to 2-1 only 3:50 into the second period by an Ivan Provorov shot. There were no signs of discouragement on the Buffalo bench or on the ice when the Sabres went almost half the second period without a shot on goal.

Unwavering in their desire to execute Granato's system, the Sabres continued to pressure the Flyers into mistakes. Forwards created traffic in front of the net. Defensemen took wise, calculated risks to leave the opposing blue line for a chance to retrieve the puck.

Steven Fogarty, a 27-year-old forward and captain of the Rochester Americans, scored his first career NHL goal by parking himself in front of the net and directing a pass from Rasmus Ristolainen into the Flyers' net. Casey Mittelstadt, elevated into a first-line center role with Jack Eichel and Dylan Cozens out, pushed the lead to 4-1 with a shot that chased Philadelphia goalie Brian Elliott from the game.

Granato did not want to give a speech in the dressing room when the Sabres were leading by three goals at the second intermission, the same situation they were in two nights earlier. Instead, he turned the room over to his players, knowing they were aware what needed to be done in the final 20 minutes.

"Obviously relieved," Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour said with a laugh. "We've spoken enough times. Obviously, we're frustrated with the results we're having, losing streak and whatnot. But guys have been positive."

Upon taking over as interim coach, Granato tweaked the 5-on-5 system used by Krueger and implemented subtle changes to allow the Sabres to use their speed to create chances. Early returns were ugly, as Buffalo allowed 14 goals across Granato's first three games.

Granato did not alter his plan. He restructured the Sabres' practices, demanding more of players and emphasizing pace. Individual and team meetings were longer. Any examples shown on video were then taught using on-ice drills. Granato has even used morning skates as abbreviated practices, pulling out the whiteboard to provide detailed instructions rather than having his players go through the same drills every game.

"It's exciting," said Sam Reinhart, who scored the game's opening goal. "I like the style we've been able to play, we've been able to skate more and play a faster game. Tonight, I think on the defensive end, we were able to build speed and make some plays coming out of our end a little bit more."

This wasn't about only one win. Granato is a realist. The Sabres are 22 points behind the fourth and final playoff spot in the East Division. This is about improving a team that has performed far below expectations. And as much as all involved were relieved to end a winless streak that Montour previously referred to as "embarrassing," Granato is still in the early stages of his plan to implement a system that enhances his team's strengths and masks any weaknesses.

"As a coach, you hope it turns for them. You know it's going to turn. You hope it turns sooner than later and tonight was a good one."

Here are other observations from the game Wednesday:

1. Reinhart may stick at center longer than expected. Granato's decision to use Reinhart at center was made partly out of necessity. Entering the game, Eichel and Cozens remained out with upper-body injuries, and using Reinhart at center gave the Sabres better options in the top six.

Reinhart, though, may remain at center beyond Wednesday. Curtis Lazar did not return to the game after suffering an undisclosed injury in the second period.

"It was fun, I enjoyed it," said Reinhart. "It was good to come underneath the puck a little bit more and get a couple different looks. I thought the defensive part was went well. It's an easy system to read off of, so I enjoyed it."

2. The system change has worked wonders for Kyle Okposo. The 32-year-old was a valuable defensive forward in Year One under former Krueger, providing a consistent effort on the forecheck and forming a shutdown line with Zemgus Girgensons and Johan Larsson.

Okposo, though, struggled to gain traction this season, partly because of injury. He's performing well under Granato, as illustrated again Wednesday when his effort on the forecheck and smart pass led to Reinhart's opening goal. It extended Okposo's point streak to five games and he has seven points in his last nine games.

3. Montour won't be around much longer. The 26-year-old scored two short-handed goals in 37 seconds during the third period, the fastest by a defenseman in NHL history and 12th fastest by any player. The pending unrestricted free agent was ranked by TSN as the top right-handed defenseman on the move ahead of the April 12 deadline.

Sabres plan to give prospects an NHL audition in season's final weeks

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Amid all the phone calls ahead of the April 12 trade deadline, General Manager Kevyn Adams drove across Interstate 90 on Wednesday to take a closer look at possible reinforcements for the Buffalo Sabres.

During a livestream at the morning skate in KeyBank Center, Adams told Sabres television analysts Brian Duff and Martin Biron that he planned to step away from the NHL team in order to watch the Rochester Americans' game Wednesday night in Blue Cross Arena against the Cleveland Monsters.

In addition to evaluating top prospects, Adams wanted to have extensive conversations with players. A trip to Rochester was not possible during the first three months of the Sabres' season because there was little time with the truncated schedule.

This fact-finding mission will be used to determine which prospects can help the Sabres following the deadline. Interim coach Don Granato confirmed to the media following the morning skate that the organization plans to give Amerks players an NHL opportunity in the final weeks of the season.

"We know that we want to do that," said Granato. "And that's part of the plan moving forward. The timeline has not been set. But the motor is moving for me, certainly. And I'm excited for that. I think it's a valuable time for players to gain some experience, internalize that experience. It's what we're about right now."

Winger Taylor Hall and defenseman Brandon Montour are among the pending unrestricted free agents likely to be traded before the deadline. Each will be among the most highly coveted players at his respective position, providing Adams with an opportunity to acquire draft picks and/or prospects rather than receiving nothing in return when they likely sign elsewhere in July.

Those trades, though, will leave significant holes in the Sabres' lineup. Rather than plugging in players from the taxi squad, Adams can use this as an opportunity to evaluate and develop prospects who are currently in Rochester.

Center Arttu Ruotsalainen, winger Jack Quinn, defenseman Mattias Samuelsson, goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and defenseman Oskari Laaksonen could be candidates for an NHL audition. The Sabres might also want to see if winger Brett Murray, a power forward with skill, can add a physical element to their bottom six.

Evaluation and development will be primary focuses for the Sabres over the final five weeks. Casey Mittelstadt is receiving an opportunity to play center. Granato plans to give Tage Thompson a consistent spot in the lineup. Henri Jokiharju, a 21-year-old defenseman, is again a fixture after he was scratched 10 times by former coach Ralph Krueger this season.

The Amerks' game Wednesday night was only their second since three positive Covid-19 cases on the team resulted in a two-week pause. Rochester had additional games postponed because the Utica Comets endured a similar outbreak.

"Obviously, we're in a position where we need our young players to be learning and growing and getting better, but we just have to figure out a way to balance all that," said Adams. "The veterans know when you're in a situation like we are there may be guys on the move, and we'll see where it goes the next couple weeks."

The Sabres will face a difficult decision with Quinn, a 19-year-old selected eighth overall in the NHL draft in October. Entering Wednesday, Quinn had one goal and three assists for four points in eight games since joining the Amerks. He isn't physically ready for professional hockey, but a spot in Rochester made the most sense because his junior team, the Ottawa 67's, are awaiting word on when or if the Ontario Hockey League will launch its season. The Sabres can leave Quinn with the Amerks or see how he responds to facing bigger, stronger competition in the NHL.

Luukkonen, 22, isn't ready for a full-time job with the Sabres, but introducing the former second-round draft pick to the NHL would make more sense than giving starts to pending unrestricted free agent Carter Hutton or Dustin Tokarski, who is currently the backup behind Linus Ullmark.

Entering Wednesday, Luukkonen had appeared in 55 professional games between Finland and North America, including 19 with the Amerks. NHL teams typically want goaltending prospects to play 100 pro games before a permanent promotion.

Cozens update

The Sabres are hopeful rookie forward Dylan Cozens will only miss one week with an upper-body injury, Granato said.

Cozens, 20, missed a second consecutive game Wednesday after he exited in the first period Monday because of a hit from Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Philippe Myers. Cozens, one of the few bright spots in the Sabres' dismal season, has yet to resume skating with the Sabres.

"He was really angry," Granato said of Cozens. "He was upset at himself and the fact that he was injured. You guys sense the competitive nature of Dylan Cozens. It is there. He's an intense, intense hockey player. And he was mad that he has to sit out games.

"So, he's a player who's going to push it and be back as soon as he possibly can. We're hopeful that it's next week at some point. And he's just going to keep pushing ahead."

Cozens has totaled four goals with two assists for six points in 25 games during his rookie season. He began the year at right wing in a move to lessen the growing pains during his introduction in the NHL. However, Jack Eichel's upper-body injury caused Krueger to move Cozens to a top-line center role last month. This is the second time in less than three weeks that the former seventh overall draft pick suffered an injury.

Cozens missed four games after he crashed into the boards because of a blindside hit from Pittsburgh Penguins winger Zach Aston-Reese in KeyBank Center on March 11.

Sabres game day: As winless streak continues, home futility mark now in play

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (6-23-5) vs. Philadelphia Flyers (17-13-4)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 7:30 p.m.

TV: NBCSN

Radio: WGR 550

Yes, the eyes of the nation get to see the Sabres in yet-another attempt to snap the most onerous winless streak in franchise history after 18 games (0-15-3). And those that tune in also get a chance to watch Buffalo try to avoid equaling another dubious franchise mark.

The Sabres are 0-9-2 in their last 11 home games and one more loss would tie the franchise mark of going winless in 12 at home, set at Memorial Auditorium during the 1990-91 season. The Sabres went 0-6-1-5 (remember ties?) during a stretch that ran from Jan. 27-March 10, 1991 and was finally broken by a 6-1 win over the Hartford Whalers on St. Patrick's Day just over 30 years ago.

The NHL record for home winless streaks is 17, set by Ottawa in 1995-96 and equaled by the expansion Atlanta Thrashers of 1999-2000. The last team to get to 12 was Vancouver in 2016-17.

The Sabres are an NHL-worst 2-11-3 at home this season and the numbers are astonishing.

They have scored just 26 goals in those 16 games, a shocking average of 1.63 per game that includes five shutouts and three other games where they only scored one goal. They have scored only 14 goals at 5-on-5 – fewer than one per game!

They are last in the league home goals for and against (3.69), as well as shots per game (26.3). Their only victories were a 3-2 triumph over the New York Rangers on Jan. 26 and their 4-3 shootout win over New Jersey on Jan. 30.

Two months later, they don't have another win.

"You don't have that same energy in the building when you're buzzing, when a guy is going in on a breakaway and it's just dead quiet," winger Kyle Okposo said after today's optional morning skate. "That's something that you don't really get used to as a player. You feed off that energy, feed off that buzz. We feed off people here in KeyBank Center in the seats. We just have to do a better job in all games, home and away, of getting results. We're continuing to work towards that."

Interim coach Don Granato takes solace in the way his club has played in the first two periods of the last two games. The Sabres looked strong through 40 minutes Saturday in Boston and again here Monday against the Flyers and blew a lead both times.

"We all want to see wins. Nobody wants to see wins more than the players because they're taking the heat and obviously me as a coach," Granato said. "The wins are going to be the byproduct of doing things the right way and we have to continue to work toward doing the things the right way and the process of it was gaining confidence in what are the right things we do as a team collectively. We're identifying better with that and the stronger that becomes, wins follow."

Winless streak update: If the Sabres lose tonight to push the winless streak to 19, it would be the longest in the NHL since Winnipeg went 19 straight in 1993-94 and would tie the Sabres for the ninth-longest in NHL history.

If you're looking ahead, there's only 10 teams who have reached 20 and nobody has gotten there since 1992-93, when the second-year San Jose Sharks went 20 games without a win and expansion Ottawa went 21. The record is 30, set by Winnipeg in 1981.

March madness: A loss in some form tonight would leave the Sabres at either 0-13-3 or 0-14-2 for March and make them just the second team ever to play at least 16 games in a month and not win a single one. The other was Detroit, which went 0-15-1 in March, 1977.

The Sabres' only pointless month of more than 10 games was January, 2015 in the height of the tank when they went 0-12-0.

Lineup news: To start a back-to-back and a stretch of three games in four nights, the Sabres peeled back and had an optional morning skate today. The Flyers did not skate at all. Thus, we don't have a lot of pregame lineup news.

With Dylan Cozens out of the lineup after being injured Monday, here's how the Sabres lined up Tuesday in practice:

Linus Ullmark (5-5-3, 2.60/.916) is expected to start in goal for the Sabres. Brian Elliott (9-4-1, 2.84/.893) is likely to head back to the net for Philadelphia. He improved to 4-0, 1.40/.951 against the Sabres this year with Monday's 4-3 overtime win. His eye-popping career numbers against Buffalo are 17-2-2, 1.74/.941 for his career.

Cozens doing well: The Sabres got some good news on Cozens, as GM Kevyn Adams said on a livestream on the team's website that the rookie center could be back in a few days. Granato confirmed that with reporters.

"A lot of relief a lot of excitement," Granato said. "I saw him the next morning ... He was really angry he was upset at himself at the fact that he was injured. You guys sense the competitive nature of Dylan Cozens. It is there. He's an intense intense hockey player and he was mad that he has to sit out games."

Sabres forward Dylan Cozens likely out one week with upper-body injury

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 31, 2021

Dylan Cozens, one of the few bright spots in the Buffalo Sabres' dismal season, will likely be out of the lineup for one week, according to General Manager Kevyn Adams.

Adams told Sabres television analysts Brian Duff and Martin Biron during a livestream Wednesday morning that the organization is being cautious with Cozens, who suffered an upper-body injury in the first period Monday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"He's dealing with an upper-body, probably around a week," said Adams. "Hopefully it's more day to day than week to week. He's a tough kid, but we certainly don't want to put him on the ice if he's not 100%."

Cozens, 20, has totaled four goals with two assists for six points in 24 games during his rookie season. He began the year at right wing in a move to lessen the growing pains during his introduction in the NHL.

However, Jack Eichel's upper-body injury caused former coach Ralph Krueger to move Cozens to a top-line center role last month. This is the second time in less than three weeks that the former seventh overall draft pick suffered an injury.

Cozens missed four games after he crashed into the boards because of a blindside hit from Pittsburgh Penguins winger Zach Aston-Reese in KeyBank Center on March 11. Cozens scored a goal in his return to the lineup on March 22 and continued to thrive in a prominent role until he left the game Monday following a hit from Flyers defenseman Philippe Myers.

OPINION: Sabres win for first time in 19 games

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 1, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – This is not an April Fools joke. The Buffalo Sabres' 18-game winless streak is over.

Buffalo threatened to win on Saturday against the Bruins in Boston, and then again on Monday against the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center, but they blew leads in both games and lost.

Wednesday was different.

When adversity struck, the team handled it well, got through it and got back to the way Don Granato wants them to play. This time, there was no blowing a three-goal third period lead. There was, instead, only two record-breaking shorthanded goals to clinch a 6-1 win.

Buffalo led 4-1 after two periods and Granato stayed away from the players and the locker room.

"We felt it was best to hand it to them," the interim head coach said following the win. "'It's your third period. It's not ours, and you know what to do.' And we felt they did know what to do."

The adversity struck early in the second period.

While leading 2-0, Tage Thompson took a high sticking penalty just 54 seconds into the middle frame. Philadelphia didn't score, but they took over the game and by 3:50, Ivan Provorov had put one in off of Brandon Montour to make it 2-1.

Things got worse, as the Flyers had outshot Buffalo, 9-0. Luckily for the Sabres, Philadelphia couldn't get another by Linus Ullmark.

Instead of falling apart, the team got back to the way Granato wants them to play with pace and speed, and it paid off.

Rasmus Ristolainen took the puck deep into the corner and found Steven Fogarty in front, who, at age 27, scored his first NHL goal in his 22nd NHL game. Fogarty had one NHL point in his whole career, and 5:57 after his goal, he made a slick pass to Casey Mittelstadt, who beat Elliott between the legs for his second point of the period.

That gave the Sabres the same three-goal lead that they blew when they lost in overtime to the Flyers on Monday.

"They pulled together instead of apart, and it couldn't have been a better scenario, because you were playing the same team with the same lead a day later," Granato said.

Buffalo was playing a good third period when Thompson took another penalty. Alain Vigneault pulled his goalie to make it a 6-on-4 power play, but Montour got the puck directly in front of Ullmark and fired it the length of the ice into the net to make it 5-1. Just 37 seconds later, Montour converted his own rebound on Alex Lyon for another shorty. It was the fastest two shorthanded goals by a defenseman in NHL history.

One other player who stepped up for this improving team under Granato was Jacob Bryson, who missed one game with an upper-body injury. The rookie had two assists and handled 22:31 of ice-time to lead the team. Bryson was plus-4 on the evening.

After going 0-15-3, the Sabres have now picked up three out of a possible four points in the last two games. They're still in last place in the NHL with 19 points. That's nine points behind the Anaheim Ducks and Detroit Red Wings. Buffalo's points percentage of .271 is also worst by far. The Wings and Ducks are both at .378.

As I wrote earlier this week, I definitely see improvement in this team with Granato as coach. He recognizes what will work with this team, while Ralph Krueger didn't have a clue and insisted they play a style they weren't suited for.

Curtis Lazar scored a goal in the first period, but then left the game and never returned. Rasmus Asplund returned to practice on Wednesday and could maybe play if Lazar can't go on Thursday against the New York Rangers. Lazar only played 7:43 before exiting.

OPINION: Three observations: Sabres finally break through against Flyers

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

March 31, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have won their first game since Feb. 23.

Over the last 18 games, the Sabres simply could not find a way to win in regulation, overtime or in a shootout. In Game 19, Buffalo found a way and never took their foot off the gas in a 6-1 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers.

Let's take a look at three observations from Wednesday night's win:

1.) Sabres get first regulation win in March since 2018

Yes, you read that right. It has been exactly three years since the Sabres have had a regulation win in March.

March 31, 2021 is slightly different than March 31, 2018, as the season will continue into April and still into the first couple weeks of May, as well. Back in 2018, Phil Housley was the head coach and Chad Johnson was in goal. Things are different now.

The Sabres also only played half of March in 2020, so maybe it's not fair to hold this entirely against them, but not having a win in regulation in the month of March for three full calendar years is pretty jarring.

2.) Sabres don't let up the pressure

The Sabres, once again, were off to a hot start, heading into the first intermission holding a 2-0 lead.

In the second period, the Flyers increased their pressure a little bit, halving the Sabres' lead on a shot ripped from the point by defenseman Ivan Provorov. That shot hit Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour and went straight in on Linus Ullmark, but it was the only goal the Sabres goaltender allowed all night.

After that Flyers goal, the Sabres re-took their two-goal lead with Steven Fogarty's first NHL goal. Fogarty also assisted on Casey Mittelstadt's goal 5:57 later to give the Sabres a three-goal lead at 4-1, chasing Flyers starting netminder Brian Elliott.

For the second-straight night, Buffalo took a three-goal lead into the third period. This time, they held on, and even added to it late with a couple shorthanded goals from Brandon Montour to extend their lead to 6-1.

Montour scored an empty-net goal first before following up 37 seconds later with another goal with Flyers goalie Alex Lyon in the net.

3.) Ullmark giving the Sabres stability in net

The Sabres sure must be glad Ullmark is back between the pipes.

Ullmark returned this past Saturday for the Sabres in a game against the Boston Bruins, and he hasn't relinquished the net since. In the three games since his return, Ullmark is 1-1-1 with a .923 save percentage.

At this point of the season, the Sabres have nothing left to play for. While they're not mathematically eliminated from the playoffs, there really is no path from them to get enough points to make the postseason, even if they won all of their games moving forward.

Still, Ullmark's presence must give them confidence. They've played much closer games with him in net, and it seems that they're comfortable with letting their goaltender bail them out with big saves when they need him to.

The veteran netminder is in the final year of his contract with the Sabres and will become an unrestricted free agent upon the expiration of his contract. It will be interesting to see if the Sabres make an effort to retain Ullmark, or if he wants to sign a contract with Buffalo following this season.

While the Sabres have prospects Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen in Rochester and Erik Portillo at Michigan University, they don't have anyone who is NHL caliber at the position after this year.

The Sabres will be right back at it Thursday evening at KeyBank Center, this time to face the visiting New York Rangers.

We'll bring you the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show hosted by Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6 p.m. ET. They'll talk to Paul Hamilton, as well as bring you interviews from the locker room and interim head coach Don Granato, leading you up to puck drop, scheduled for just after 7 p.m. ET. You can hear all the play-by-play action on the radio flagship station of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Sabres buck winless trend in big way against Flyers

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

March 31, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres put together a complete 60-minute effort on Wednesday night and were rewarded in a major way. Again hosting the Flyers, the blue and gold took down Philadelphia by a score of 6-1 at KeyBank Center.

The winless streak came to a firm halt at 18 games, as Buffalo dominated from start-to-finish.

For the third consecutive game, the Sabres struck first blood against their opponent.

At the halfway point of the opening period, a Sam Reinhart shot looked to be flying wide of the Flyers' net. However, it found its way in behind goalie Brian Elliott after bounding off defenseman Justin Braun. Reinhart's 13th goal of the season gave Buffalo the 1-0 edge.

It was quickly 2-0 Sabres just two-and-a-half minutes later, courtesy of veteran forward Curtis Lazar. After blocking a shot, Riley Sheahan got loose for a partial breakaway. He was chased down and shied away before getting a shot off, but the savvy veteran was able to dish the puck off to Lazar in the slot for the tally.

Philadelphia got on the scoreboard 3:50 into the middle frame, when defenseman Ivan Provorov's shot deflected off Buffalo defenseman Brandon Montour and into the net. It was Provorov's sixth goal of the season on the Flyers' eighth shot of the second period.

The run of shots reached 11-0 Philadelphia in the stanza before a Colin Miller point shot reached Elliott with about nine minutes gone.

Buffalo's second shot of the period resulted in a goal, coming off the stick of Steven Fogarty. It was the forward's first goal in the National Hockey League after registering his first NHL point on Monday with an assist. Helping on the goal were Rasmus Ristolainen and Jacob Bryson.

Fogarty doubled down on his memorable night, this time with a nifty pass for an assist on Casey Mittelstadt's second goal of the 2020-21 campaign. The Sabres' advantage grew to 4-1 on this scoring play, and Brian Elliott's night in goal for the Flyers was over.

The third period belonged to Buffalo and Montour.

The 20 minutes on the clock were all that separated the blue and gold from putting to bed their 18-game winless streak, and they did just that by adding to their three-goal lead. In fact, the advantage grew to five by the time the buzzer sounded, as Montour chipped in a pair of short-handed goals while killing a Tage Thompson minor penalty to make it a 6-1 contest. That score stood as the eventual final.

The win was also the first in the career of interim head coach Don Granato, who moved to 1-5-1 since taking over for Ralph Krueger.

Buffalo's victory moved their record to 7-23-5 through 35 games in the 2020-21 season.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 9:32 - Sam Reinhart (13) (Kyle Okposo, Rasmus Ristolainen); 11:59 - Curtis Lazar (5) (Riley Sheahan)

PHI: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 9:42 - Steven Fogarty (1) (Rasmus Ristolainen, Jacob Bryson); 15:39 - Casey Mittelstadt (2) (Steven Fogarty, Jacob Bryson)
PHI: 3:50 - Ivan Provorov (6) (Sean Couturier, Jakub Voracek)

Third Period:

BUF: 14:53 - Brandon Montour (3) SH-ENG (Unassisted); 15:30 - Brandon Montour (4) SHG (Kyle Okposo)
PHI: NONE

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE
PHI: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 0:54 - Tage Thompson (High-sticking - 2 min.); 16:51 - Henri Jokiharju (Delay of game, puck over glass - 2 min.)
PHI: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: 13:38 - Tage Thompson (Tripping - 2 min.)
PHI: NONE

STATS OF THE GAME

Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) Steven Fogarty - BUF
- 2.) Brandon Montour - BUF
- 3.) Jacob Bryson - BUF

What's Next:

It's right back on the saddle for the blue and gold Thursday night, as their homestand continues against the New York Rangers. Puck drops at KeyBank Center is set for 7 p.m. ET with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6 p.m. ET on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Dylan Cozens should miss about a week

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 31, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres held an optional morning skate on Wednesday ahead of their evening matchup with the Philadelphia Flyers.

The Sabres had a feed going during the skate where general manager Kevyn Adams was a guest. Adams said that Dylan Cozens is about a week away after suffering an injury on Monday night. He added that Cozens is more day-to-day than week-to-week.

Buffalo comes into the game trying to break an 18-game winless streak. Don Granato said the focus isn't just to win one game to break a streak, it's to be a better team.

"The win is going to be the byproduct of doing things the right way," he said following the morning skate. "We're not giving these guys extra reps so we can hope to win the next game and then we're right back to where we were. If we turn to the streak and focus and turn to just chasing one win, just for the sake of one win and sacrifice becoming better, I don't believe in that."

One of things that has gotten back on track is the penalty killing. In the last two games, they're 7-for-7, and are 12-for-12 in three of four games. That has gotten the team back to 16th in the NHL.

The Sabres are 0-9-2 in their last 11 home games.

Linus Ullmark likely will get the call in goal on Wednesday. He's given up seven goals in his two starts coming back from injury. Overall, Ullmark is 5-5-3 with a 2.60 goals-against average and a .916 save percentage.

In six games against the Flyers, Taylor Hall has six points.

Philadelphia is in fifth place in the East Division, three points back of the Boston Bruins. What puts the Flyers in more of a jam is they're already 5-1-0 against the Sabres, meaning they've picked up 10 points against the Sabres with four possible points remaining. The Bruins are 2-0-0 against the Sabres and likely have 12 more points coming against them.

In five games this season against Buffalo, Brian Elliott is 4-0-0 with a 1.40 goals-against average and a .951 save percentage. In his career against the Sabres, Elliott is 17-2-2 with a 1.74 goals-against average and a .941 save percentage.

This season, Sean Couturier has three goals and four assists for seven points in four games against Buffalo.

After four-straight losses, the Flyers have won two in a row. Couturier has four goals and three assists for seven points in his last four games.

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for pregame coverage starting at 6:30 p.m. ET when they'll be joined by Granato, Kyle Okposo and Casey Mittelstadt.

Wednesday's game will be televised on NBCSN, so the only place to catch Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the call of the play-by-play is on WGR.

Sabres finally end winless streak, beat Flyers: ‘Everybody stepped up’

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO – Instead of addressing the Sabres during Wednesday’s second intermission, interim coach Don Granato left his players alone.

No words of encouragement. Not even a tactical point or two.

The game was playing out eerily similar to Monday’s. Granato, whose Sabres also held a three-goal that night over the Philadelphia Flyers, wanted his players to take over.

“I wouldn’t have handed it off to them if I wasn’t confident that they could do it and handle it,” Granato said after the Sabres beat the Flyers 6-1, ending their 18-game winless skid.

This time, instead of buckling like they did in Monday’s 4-3 overtime loss, the Sabres calmly closed out their first win under Granato, scoring two more goals to seal the game.

“Everybody stepped up,” Granato said on a Zoom call. “There was no variance of guys on the bench, one guy more vocal than the next guy. I believe they were in it together and consistent mannerisms through the whole group into the third period.”

Wednesday’s win was the Sabres’ first since Feb. 23 and just their seventh all season.

They’re clearly improving Granato. They’ve led after 40 minutes in each of their last three games.

“Guys (are) just playing free,” said Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour, who scored two short-handed goals late. “This whole stretch here, they score a goal, I think everyone sees it, we kind of tense up, kind of have that factor of, ‘Here we go again.’ I think we’re just washing that.

“Everybody’s playing free, everybody’s trying to do the right thing. We’re on the same rope and we’re trying to get out of it. Donnie’s been positive.”

Despite blowing a 3-0 lead Monday, it felt like the Sabres were building and could win Wednesday’s game.

The Sabres jumped out to an early lead inside KeyBank Center, getting goals from centers Sam Reinhart at 9:42 and Curtis Lazar at 11:59.

After Ivan Provorov narrowed it to 2-1 3:50 into the second period, the Sabres did not flinch. They shook off a poor offensive stretch – they went nearly half the period without recording a shot – and buried the Flyers.

Winger Steven Fogarty scored his first NHL goal 9:42 before center Casey Mittelstadt’s goal at 15:39 chased Flyers goalie Brian Elliott.

“It was a huge part of the game and the fun part of that was our players really wanted to get back to our game,” Granato said of the Sabres’ response. “In the midst of those shots was a penalty kill and we got hemmed in our zone. And we weren’t five-on-five. I felt the bench was saying, ‘Oh, let’s just get through this and get back to our game, playing our game.’ ...

“And then we got back to our game, the pace we want to play at, and then Fogarty scores and the energy was just through the roof at that point.”

Fogarty, who was recalled from the taxi squad earlier Wednesday, also recorded an assist. He began the night with one career NHL point.

“It was awesome,” Fogarty said of scoring in a win. “I mean, it’s something you always dream of, but to be able to get it in a winning effort makes it that much more special. The other night I thought the team did a really good

job and had it in their grasp, and I think tonight, the same kind of mindset. We saw we pretty much dominated all three periods and I think we've seen signs of that over the last three games."

Montour scored an empty-netter at 14:53 before beating goalie Alex Lyon 37 seconds later to secure only the Sabres' third home win all season. The short-handed goals are the fastest scored consecutively by a defenseman since 1981-82.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark made 31 saves. Winger Kyle Okposo extended his point streak to five games, recording two assists.

Reinhart, a winger nearly his entire NHL career, played center Wednesday, pivoting Okposo and Victor Olofsson.

"It was fun, I enjoyed it," said Reinhart, who was drafted as a center. "It was good to come underneath the puck a little bit more and get a couple different looks. I thought the defensive part was went well. It's an easy system to read off of."

The Sabres, who were already down centers Jack Eichel and Dylan Cozens, lost Lazar to an undisclosed injury after the second period.

They host the New York Rangers tonight.

Sabres notes: Don Granato overworks players; Buffalo plans to add prospects

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO – Instead of letting the Sabres rest and recover in the midst of their grueling schedule, interim coach Don Granato said he has “overworked” his players.

“We’re trying to push them harder to develop harder,” Granato said on a Zoom call prior to Wednesday’s 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center. “We know we have to get better. The focus has to be on that. And we have to trust that wins will follow and be a by-product of that.”

So Granato has tried to use what little practice time the Sabres have available – they played a whopping 16 games in March – to his team’s advantage.

“We moved the thought of, ‘OK, let’s just rest and maximize maybe our work-to-rest ratio on the rest side so we can maybe get the next win,’” Granato said.

Granato, who replaced Ralph Krueger on March 17, has embraced a long-term approach. He did not want the Sabres to end what had ballooned to an 18-game winless skid and quickly revert to their old ways.

He said focusing on the marathon streak “drains you.”

“We had to turn our focus to improving even if it costs us in the short term with a little bit longer practices, a lot harder practices, maybe a couple more minutes in meetings or videos or one-on-ones,” Granato said.

He added: “We want to try to get to a point where we can feel we can win any night out, and win with consistency.”

So, for example, prior to Monday’s 4-3 overtime loss to the Flyers, the Sabres’ morning skate was really a full practice.

Sessions under Granato feature plenty of teaching. He, of course, has different ideas than Krueger. His new system has forced the Sabres to play faster.

“We’ve had some pretty in-depth meetings and some really good conversation about the things that we want to do and how we want to play,” Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. “It’s about getting everybody on the same page that way, because you don’t have (a lot) of practice time in a year like this.”

Granato said he and his staff have introduced things to the team “incrementally.”

“We didn’t want to give them too much,” he said. “To tie it in, we made sure that whatever we spoke of in a meeting or video and showed them, we actually ran drills in practice where they could get the reps to it and get some confidence that way. And that’s still a process. We can only move in increments within that process.”

The Sabres have slowly started performing better for long stretches of games. Having taken leads into the third period in each of other their last two outings, they appear close to winning for the first time since Feb. 23.

In Monday’s game, they led 3-0 before imploding late.

“We’re trying to push them harder to develop harder,” Granato said. “We know we have to get better. The focus has to be on that. And we have to trust that wins will follow and be a by-product of that.”

–

Granato said the Sabres plan to recall some of their prospects from the Rochester Americans before the season ends May 8.

"The timeline has not been set," he said. "But the motor is moving for me, certainly. And I'm excited for that. I think it's a valuable time for players to gain some experience, internalize that experience. It's what we're about right now."

Goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, forward Arttu Ruotsalainen and defenseman Mattias Samuelsson would probably be the top candidates to play their first NHL games.

Amerks defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and forwards Brett Murray and Andrew Oglevie have also spent time on the Sabres' taxi squad this season.

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With rookie center Dylan Cozens sidelined by an upper-body injury, the Sabres recalled Steven Fogarty from the taxi squad prior to the game and played him at right wing on the fourth line beside center Cody Eakin and Tobias Rieder.

Fogarty scored the first goal of his 22-game NHL career 9:42 into the second period. He also assisted on center Casey Mittelstadt's goal later in the period.

The Notre Dame product had recorded one NHL point entering the night.

—

Sabres rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson played Wednesday after an upper-body injury sidelined him Monday.

Sabres' Dylan Cozens should return from upper-body injury soon

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 31, 2021

When interim Buffalo Sabres coach Don Granato saw center Dylan Cozens on Tuesday morning, he said the rookie "was really angry."

An upper-body injury had just sidelined Cozens, 20, four games. Now he is dealing with another upper-body injury after Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Philippe Myers checked him into the left boards 11:43 into the first period on Monday.

"He was upset at himself and the fact that he was injured," Granato said on a Zoom call prior to tonight's game against the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center.

Luckily, Granato said Cozens could return as soon as next week from what appears to be a left arm injury.

"A lot of relief, a lot of excitement," Granato said of knowing Cozens will likely only miss minimal time.

The Sabres sorely need Cozens, who has quickly morphed into one of their best players.

"You guys sense the competitive nature of Dylan Cozens," Granato said. "It is there. He's an intense, intense hockey player. And he was mad that he has to sit out games. So he's a player who's going to push it and be back as soon as he possibly can. We're hopeful that it's next week at some point. And he's just going to keep pushing ahead."

Cozens has compiled four goals and six points in 25 games this season. The Sabres drafted the Yukon native seventh overall in 2019.

Sabres snap 18-game winless streak with 6-1 win against Flyers

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. [WKBW] — The longest winless streak in Buffalo Sabres franchise history has come to an end. On Wednesday the Sabres topped the Philadelphia Flyers 6-1 for their first win in more than a month.

5 Observations from Wednesday's win:

Finally

The worst skid in the history of the Buffalo Sabres is now a thing of the past. After 18 games without a win, the Sabres picked up their first win since February 23 on Wednesday night. This is also the first regulation win for the Sabres in the month of March since March 31, 2018. The question now becomes: can the Sabres start a win streak tomorrow night against the New York Rangers?

Well, let's not get carried away.

This was also the first-career win for interim head coach Don Granato. It may be there first win wit Granato behind the bench but this team has certainly played better wit him as the man in charge.

Mittelstadt making strides

During the first intermission, we did a Q&A on Twitter like we often do to pass the time. Brian asked "is Mittelstadt actually good at hockey?" and that question had me thinking.

So here's the deal — Casey Mittelstadt still has a long way to go. There's a reason the Sabres had him on the taxi squad to start the season and not on the opening night roster. That said, as of late, he's playing better. He still doesn't look like the guy they were hoping for when he was drafted with the 8th overall pick in the 2017 NHL Draft. But he looks like a young player with upside who can provide secondary scoring for a more competitive team.

Mittelstadt hasn't proven to be a full-time NHL player but he's well on his way.

Bryson Shines

Every once in a while Jacob Bryson makes a play that just leaves your jaw on the floor. He had a few of those on Wednesday night on what I would say was one of the best games of his NHL career.

That's not saying a ton considering he's only played in 17 games. But still, Bryson is making plays with confidence. If he can continue to play with poise and limit the mistakes in his own end, he certainly looks like a player we could be watching for a long time. In a year full of disappointments, Bryson has been one of the few players who have exceeded expectations.

Fogarty Flourishes

Good for Steven Fogarty. Before the game started, plenty of Sabres fans probably had never even heard his name.

On Wednesday that changed, as the first-year Sabre scored his first NHL goal and added an assist. That assist, by the way, was a pretty one as he sent a perfect pass to the aforementioned Mittelstadt. This was just Fogarty's fourth game with the Sabres and 22 NHL games. Safe to say it's his best NHL performance up to this point and will be quite the memorable night for the 27-year-old.

Lights Out Linus

How ridiculous is this stat? This season, Linus Ullmark is 6-5-3! For a team that has lost 23 times in regulation, it's wild to see how well Ullmark has played. Just look at it this way — Ullmark has been in net for all but one of the

Sabres' wins this season. You'd have to imagine Ullmark's agent will be showing these numbers to everyone he can when negotiating a contract this summer.

The streak is over: Sabres snap 18-game winless skid

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – It took 36 days and 1,080 game minutes, but the Buffalo Sabres finally ended their 18-game winless streak, and they did it in style. A 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers brought the drought to a close.

It was pure elation as Rasmus Dahlin threw his hands up once the clock struck zero and the game came to an end. Goaltender Linus Ullmark appeared to enjoy the high fives with his teammates just a little bit more once this one was over.

The Sabres jumped out to a 2-0 lead thanks to goals from Sam Reinhart and Curtis Lazar. Both came just 2:27 apart.

Philly responded in the second period with a goal from Ivan Provorov, cutting the Sabres lead in half. Buffalo came right back and scored two more to extend the lead to 4-1. Steven Fogarty got his first career NHL goal and was followed up with a goal from Casey Mittelstadt roughly six minutes later.

Then Buffalo piled it on in the third. Two goals from Brandon Montour in less than a minute made it 6-1 and essentially put the game away, giving the Sabres the victory.

The Sabres play Saturday at 7 p.m. when they welcome the New York Rangers to the KeyBank Center.

The final 20: How the 3rd period has hurt the Sabres recently

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – If there's one positive the Sabres can take from their last two losses, it's that they had the lead going into the third period. Their biggest problem is finishing the games. They've fallen apart in the third in each of those losses, extending their winless streak to 18.

Saturday against the Boston Bruins, the Sabres held a 2-1 lead after two periods, but gave up two goals in the 3rd to lose 3-2.

Monday, they outplayed the Philadelphia Flyers for the first 40 minutes, scoring three goals and allowing zero. That 3-0 lead turned into a 3-3 tie in the third period as the Flyers were able to net a trio of goals to send it to overtime, where they scored first to get the 4-3 win.

Perhaps their biggest problem now is knowing how to play with the lead. They haven't experienced it much this season, especially in the last month. Rasmus Dahlin said the team had a "panic attack" on Monday as things started to unravel. Kyle Okposo spoke on the team's need for confidence in the third with the lead.

"We haven't been in a position where we've had leads and holding leads and that's something that you have to learn how to do as a team as well," Okposo said. "We haven't really been able to do that over the past month, month and a half so that's just a skill you have to learn how to incorporate into the way you play and that's maturing as a team."

So what's causing things to fall apart? Interim head coach Don Granato believes the problem is puck management in the final 20 minutes.

"We have to realize how to possess the puck collectively," Granato said. "So it's more than just one player with the puck, it's the other four supporting that player and that's a mindset that we are progressing toward, we are getting much better with, and that caught us in both those games, but those periods and the elevation of the opposition [led to the losses.]"

In the last two games the Sabres have outscored opponents 5-1 in the first two periods, but they've been outscored 5-0 in the third.

SABRES WIN: Buffalo ends 18-game winless streak with dominant victory over Philadelphia

By Alex Brasky
Batavia Daily News
March 31, 2021

BUFFALO — For the first time in 37 days, the Sabres won a hockey game.

Buffalo defeated the Philadelphia Flyers, 6-1, on Wednesday night which snapped an 18-game winless streak that dated back to February 25.

"Relief," said Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour regarding his emotions after the win. "Tonight was a full 60 minutes where everybody was moving and everybody was feeling good and good thing we got a good result tonight."

The win was the first for interim head coach Don Granato, who took over for former Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger on March 17.

"I was so happy for the guys. To me, that was the biggest enjoyment," said Granato. "You want your players to be rewarded."

The Sabres were winless in Granato's first six games behind the bench, but the drought ended on Wednesday, two days after the Sabres suffered a heartbreaking, 4-3 overtime loss to the Flyers. In that game, Buffalo held a 3-0 lead only to watch Philly come storming back in the third period to steal the win.

"It couldn't have been a better scenario because you played the same team, with the same lead two days later," said Granato. "We showed that we grew from it."

The Sabres got the scoring started 9:32 into the first period as Sam Reinhart scored on assists from Kyle Okposo and Rasmus Ristolainen. Reinhart's goal, his 13th of the season, came on a shot from the left circle that deflected off a Flyer and into the net. Reinhart was moved to first line center for Wednesday's win. It was the first time since the '17-'18 season that Reinhart had played center.

"It was fun. I enjoyed it," said Reinhart regarding his move to the center position. "It was good to come underneath the puck a little more and get a couple different looks."

Buffalo added to its lead before the period was through, with Curtis Lazar scoring his fifth of the season on a drop pass from Riley Sheahan with 8:01 remaining until the first intermission.

To open the second, Philadelphia got on the board with a tally from Ivan Provorov, his sixth of the year, on a slap shot from the right wing that found its way through traffic and past Buffalo netminder Linus Ullmark just 3:50 into the frame.

With the score 2-1 in the Sabres' favor, Steven Fogarty regained a two-goal advantage as he scored his first of the season 9:42 into the second on an assist from Ristolainen. Casey Mittelstadt added a tally, his second of the year, with 4:21 remaining in the second on a beautiful pass from Fogarty to increase Buffalo's lead to 4-1, where it would stay heading into the third.

"We've struggled - they score goals and the ball kind keeps rolling," said Montour about his team's inability to close games. "But I think the last couple of games - scratch the third period the other night - we've stuck together and tried to stay positive."

"A lot of guys on the bench are being more vocal and trying to help out. You go through stretches where guys get pissed off and upset pretty easy but guys are sticking with it and trying to stay positive. And we just went right back at them (tonight)."

Montour added his third and fourth goals of the season to seal the deal in the final period. Ullmark made 31 saves for the Sabres in the win.

"I hope you see progress. That's what we hope as a coaching staff," said Granato. "We're in no position to worry about wins. We just have to get better."

With that said, Wednesday's victory was significant for his team, said the Sabres head coach.

"As a coach, you hope it turns for them," said Granato. "There is no question it's important to put the streak behind so everybody can move on."

Buffalo is now 7-23-5 and remains in the cellar of the Eastern Division.

"It was nice to get the win because the players have been so committed," said Granato. "The leaders have been leaders. Everybody's worked."

Philadelphia falls to 17-14-4 and has lost five of its last seven games.

The Sabres look ahead to two matchups with the New York Rangers (16-15-4) on Thursday and Saturday.

Sabres defeat Flyers, end record skid at 18

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

March 31, 2021

BUFFALO -- The Buffalo Sabres got their first win in 19 games, defeating the Philadelphia Flyers 6-1 at KeyBank Center on Wednesday.

The Sabres, who allowed four straight goals in a 4-3 overtime loss to the Flyers here Monday, were 0-15-3 since Feb. 23 and had extended the NHL shootout-era record of 18 games without a win. The shootout was implemented in the 2005-06 season, eliminating ties.

Sabres coach Don Granato got his first NHL win. Buffalo was 0-5-1 since he replaced Ralph Krueger on March 17. Granato missed one game in NHL COVID-19 protocol, a 4-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday.

"There's no question that it is important to put the streak behind so everybody can move on, but we absolutely had to block it out," Granato said. "I had to block it out. On the coaching side, of course I want to win, but again, we had to control what we could control and focus on making this group better and getting better as a team. I feel we are. We're in a much better place and getting better. We have to keep that focus."

Buffalo's last win was 4-1 at the New Jersey Devils on Feb. 23.

"Donnie's been positive," Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour said. "Obviously, it's tough for any team to have a coaching change and a system change and whatnot throughout a season. But he's been a great communicator."

Steven Fogarty scored his first NHL goal and had an assist, and Montour scored two shorthanded goals for the Sabres (7-23-5). Linus Ullmark made 31 saves.

"Obviously relieved," Montour said. "We've spoken enough times. Obviously, we're frustrated with the results we're having, losing streak and whatnot. But guys have been positive. All the guys tried to pick each other up after every game. We're doing a great job of that. So tonight was kind of a full 60 minutes where everybody was kind of moving, everybody was feeling good. Good thing we got the good result tonight."

Ivan Provorov scored, and Brian Elliott allowed four goals on 16 shots for the Flyers (17-14-4) before being replaced by Alex Lyon, who made nine saves on 10 shots in his NHL season debut.

"A lot of it, in my estimation, started in the offensive zone," Philadelphia coach Alain Vigneault said. "We were a little off on our execution, and that gave them a couple of rush opportunities. They did have control in our zone. Just a simple stick on puck would enable us to kill a lot of plays, to stop a lot of opportunities to get pucks at the net. We weren't good enough there, and they made us pay for it."

Sam Reinhart put the Sabres ahead 1-0 from the right face-off circle at 9:32 of the first period. Curtis Lazar made it 2-0 on a one-timer from the low slot at 11:59.

Provorov's point shot went in off Montour to make it 2-1 at 3:50 of the second period.

Fogarty scored from in front to make it 3-1 at 9:42.

"It was awesome," said Fogarty, who played his 22nd NHL game. "I mean, it's something you always dream of, but to be able to get it in a winning effort makes it that much more special. ... We saw we pretty much dominated all three periods, and I think we've seen signs of that over the last three games."

Casey Mittelstadt pushed the lead to 4-1 from the right circle at 15:39. Elliott was pulled after the goal.

Montour scored into an empty net at 14:53 of the third period to make it 5-1. He scored again on the same penalty, with Lyon back in the net, at 15:30 for the 6-1 final. Scoring consecutive shorthanded goals in 37 seconds is the NHL record for a defenseman.

"I think we each have our own responsibilities in this struggle," Flyers forward Sean Couturier said. "Everyone just needs to find a way to bring their A-game and contribute to the team success right now. Every night we seem to have some guys on and off. It's tough to win in this league if you have too many guys off on some nights."

NOTES: Montour's two consecutive shorthanded goals are the 12th-fastest by any player since 1933-34 (the first season goals by type were officially tracked). ... Sabres forward Kyle Okposo and defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Jacob Bryson each had two assists. ... Lazar left the game with an undisclosed injury with 54 seconds remaining in the second period. There was no update. ... It was Buffalo's first win against an opponent other than New Jersey since a 3-2 win against the New York Rangers on Jan. 26. ... The Flyers assigned defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere to the taxi squad. Forwards Oskar Lindblom and Nolan Patrick were scratched; Vigneault said they looked tired and needed a break. ... The Winnipeg Jets hold the NHL record for the longest stretch without a win, 30 games (0-23 with seven ties) from Oct. 19-Dec. 20, 1980.

Sabres may have 'guys on the move' prior to NHL Trade Deadline, GM says

By Amalie Benjamin

NHL.com

March 31, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres could have several players available ahead of the 2021 NHL Trade Deadline on April 12.

"Obviously, we're in a position where we need our young players to be learning and growing and getting better, but we just have to figure out a way to balance all that," Buffalo general manager Kevyn Adams said Wednesday. "The veterans know that when you're in the situation that we are, there may be guys on the move and we'll see where it goes in the next couple of weeks."

The Sabres won for the first time in 19 games, since Feb. 23, on Wednesday, defeating the Philadelphia Flyers 6-1. The 18 straight losses (0-15-3) set the NHL shootout-era record for the longest stretch without a win (the shootout was implemented in the 2005-06 season, eliminating ties).

The Sabres (7-23-5) have several players who can become an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season, including forwards Taylor Hall, Tobias Rieder and Riley Sheahan; defensemen Brandon Montour and Matt Irwin; and goalies Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark.

Buffalo traded center Eric Staal to the Montreal Canadiens on Friday for a third-round and a fifth-round pick in the 2021 NHL Draft.

Adams said he was headed to Rochester, New York, to watch Buffalo's American Hockey League affiliate play Cleveland on Wednesday. Part of the reason for his visit was to evaluate and have conversations with prospects who could be on their way to the NHL.

Among them are center Arttu Ruotsalainen and forward Jack Quinn, defenseman Mattias Samuelsson and goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen.

Quinn was the No. 8 pick in the 2020 NHL Draft and had scored four points (one goal, three assists) in eight games. Ruotsalainen had scored eight points (three goals, five assists) in 10 games; Samuelsson had scored seven points (one goal, six assists) in 11 games; and Luukkonen was 5-2-1 with a 3.19 goals-against average and .904 save percentage.

The rest of the season could provide a chance for those players, and potentially others, to play in the NHL in a low-pressure setting with Buffalo building for the future.

"We know that we want to do that and that's part of the plan moving forward," Sabres coach Don Granato said. "The timeline has not been set but the motor is moving, for me certainly, and I'm excited for that. I think it's valuable time for players to gain some experience, internalize that experience. That's what we're about right now."

Buffalo Sabres snap 18-game winless streak with victory over Philadelphia Flyers

By Greg Wyshynski

ESPN

March 31, 2021

The nightmare is over for the Buffalo Sabres, who snapped their 18-game winless streak with a 6-1 victory at home over the Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday night.

Sam Reinhart and Curtis Lazar scored in the first period to give Buffalo a 2-0 lead. Steven Fogarty and Casey Mittelstadt added goals in the second period to make it 4-1 entering the third period.

On Monday, the visiting Flyers overcame a 3-0 deficit to beat Buffalo in the shootout. But it was a different story on Wednesday, as Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour scored two short-handed goals on the same third-period penalty kill, 37 seconds apart, to clinch the win.

"Tonight was a full 60 minutes where everyone was moving and feeling good," Montour said. "It was a tough stretch. You never want to lose. The streak we had, everyone was talking about it. Everyone had something to say. But the guys have been positive through the tough time we've been dealing with here."

Buffalo interim coach Don Granato, who earned his first NHL victory (1-5-1), decided not to say anything to the players between the second and third periods Wednesday evening, instead allowing the Sabres to motivate themselves.

"I handed it off to the guys. We felt it was best to hand it to them: 'It's your third period. Not ours. You know what to do.' And we felt they did know what they do," Granato said. "They absolutely got the job done under heavy pressure. They pulled together, instead of apart."

Linus Ullmark made 31 saves in goal for Buffalo.

The Sabres had gone 0-15-3 since Feb. 25. They own the record for the longest winless streak of the shootout era (since 2005-06) and tied the 2003-04 Pittsburgh Penguins for the most consecutive losses -- including overtime and shootout defeats -- in the 21st century. The Sabres were the 18th team in NHL history to go winless over an 18-game span.

"I don't get too high or low on wins. You have to enjoy it for a few minutes and move on to the next one," Granato said, "but I was extremely happy for our guys."

Buffalo is 7-23-5 (.271 points percentage) on the season, last in the NHL.

The Sabres' Losing Streak Ends at 18

By Andrew Knoll

The New York Times

April 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres started the year seeking to ignite their offense with new acquisitions, but instead they found ignominy with a historic losing streak.

The Sabres lost 18 games in a row before slamming the brakes on their skid with a resounding 6-1 victory over the Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday.

Those 18 losses matched those accumulated by the 2003-4 Pittsburgh Penguins, who previously had the undesirable distinction of having lost more games consecutively than any other team.

Goalie Linus Ullmark had 31 saves, and defenseman Brandon Montour blew the contest open with an empty-net goal and then a superb individual effort that gave him two short-handed scores in the span of 37 seconds as the Sabres tightened their grip on the game late.

"You never want to lose," said Montour, who praised his team's positive through the streak. "Especially the streak we had there, everybody was talking about it, there was always something to say."

Injuries have played a role: Buffalo was without the scoring forward Jack Eichel, who last played on March 7, toward the middle of the slump.

Without Eichel, their captain, the Sabres sought leadership by committee, and many players were vocal on Wednesday, Don Granato, the interim coach, said. The team had squandered a three-goal lead against Philadelphia in the third period on Monday, so Granato allowed his players to speak during the second intermission rather than making strategic adjustments or offering his own thoughts.

"We thought it was best just to hand it to them," Granato said. "It's your third period, not ours, and you know what to do."

What they did was end a slide that had lasted more than a month. Here are some of the highlights:

The skid almost ended Monday. Buffalo found a way to lose.

The losing streak (0-15-3), which began on Feb. 25 with an overtime loss to the Devils, was equal parts woe and "whoa," as the Sabres were abjectly bad at times and imaginatively so at others.

The Sabres nearly broke their free fall on Monday, when they took a 3-0 lead at home against the Flyers. But the Flyers evened the score in the third period before defenseman Ivan Provorov capped Philadelphia's comeback with a goal 42 seconds into overtime.

"We haven't been in this situation — we got panicked," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said in a video news conference. "The puck bounces their way, and — I don't know."

Montour was even more blunt in his assessment, saying that any team in the N.H.L. should have won a game it had led by 3-0, much less a team as desperate for a victory as Buffalo.

Whether or not that was the nadir of the streak may be a matter of debate.

They struggled at both ends of the ice.

The Sabres closed February by being shut out in back-to-back games against Philadelphia, another of the worst defensive teams this season.

Between March 4 and March 11, the Sabres allowed five goals in each of five consecutive games, which was as close as they had come to defensive consistency.

They followed that up with two more shutout losses, falling to the Pittsburgh Penguins and the Washington Capitals by an aggregate score of 9-0. They were shut out five times over all and were outscored, 75-30, as they plummeted to the bottom of the league standings.

It was futility. But was it a record?

The disparities between eras make the official record-keeping and bar-stool arguments a bit messy.

Starting with the implementation of the shootout in the 2005-6 season, the N.H.L. eliminated ties. The 2003-4 Penguins, who also lost 18 in a row (0-17-1), played in the final season before shootouts, but the league had a system, as it does today, that awarded teams a point in the standings for reaching overtime even if they lost.

Technically, the N.H.L. considers overtime losses and shootout losses to be equivalent to ties for historical purposes, as any of the three results would yield a point in the standings. Furthermore, for much of the league's history, any game that would have gone to overtime or a shootout under current rules would have instead ended in a tie, as there was no regular-season overtime period between 1942 and 1983.

In N.H.L. records, the longest losing streaks, at 17 regulation games, belong to the 1974-75 Washington Capitals and the 1992-93 San Jose Sharks. The Sabres' longest string of regulation losses was nine, and the 18 straight defeats are considered a "winless streak."

The longest winless streak in league history belongs to the Winnipeg Jets franchise, today's Arizona Coyotes. They were the class of the World Hockey Association, as the only franchise to win three Avco Cups, but their early days in the N.H.L. were dreadful. In 1980-81, their second N.H.L. campaign, they went winless for 30 games, losing 23 and tying seven times.

But there seems to be little question that the Sabres' slump will bring further infamy to a franchise that hasn't made the playoffs since 2011, hasn't won a postseason series since 2007, hasn't made the finals since 1999 and has never won the Stanley Cup over its 50-season history.

A coaching change did not stop the streak.

The Sabres made an outside-the-box coaching hire before last season by selecting Ralph Krueger, who had coached the Edmonton Oilers in 2012-13 but had spent the previous five years as the chairman of an English Premier League soccer club. The team fired him on March 17, when the skid had reached a dozen losses, and made Don Granato the interim coach. Krueger had taken over a team that started strong in 2018-19 and then did so again under him in 2019-20, only to fall off as those campaigns progressed.

Before this season, they had hoped to make the most of an offense that already featured top picks turned stars like center Jack Eichel and Dahlin. They added Taylor Hall, the most sought-after forward in free agency and the 2018 most valuable player, on a one-year contract. They also traded for the veteran center Eric Staal, who led the Carolina Hurricanes to a Stanley Cup victory and scored 100 points in 2006 and experienced a resurgence with the Minnesota Wild.

The day Krueger was fired, General Manager Kevyn Adams all but heaved Hall onto the trade block. Staal was traded nine days later, with 50 percent of his remaining salary retained, in exchange for two middle-round draft picks.

Several players have performed below expectations.

No Sabre who has played in at least 15 games this season has a positive plus-minus rating, and as of Wednesday evening, the four worst ratings in the N.H.L. belonged to Buffalo players, including Dahlin's league-worst negative 33. Staal and Hall combined for 28 points, while the production of Dahlin and another offensive-minded defenseman, Rasmus Ristolainen, has also flagged considerably.

The former all-star wingers Jeff Skinner and Kyle Okposo have combined for a meager 13 points this season, despite counting for \$15 million and around 18 percent of the salary cap. Okposo has been hindered by health issues, but Skinner's even more underwhelming performance has come two seasons after he scored 40 goals for the Sabres.

As a team, Buffalo is tied with the Anaheim Ducks and the Devils for the second-fewest goals scored and is near the bottom in goals allowed.

Sabres winless streak ends with blowout win over Flyers

By Adam Gretz

NBC Sports

March 31, 2021

It is over. It is finally over.

After going 18 consecutive games (0-15-3) without winning, the Buffalo Sabres are finally — finally! — back in the win column thanks to a 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Wednesday night.

It not only ended what has been a miserable month of March, but it also helped to erase the sour taste that had to exist from Monday's game where the Sabres allowed a three-goal third period lead to slip away to extend their winless streak.

It also helped the Sabres avoid becoming just the second team in NHL history to ever play 16 games in one month without winning any of them.

This is Buffalo's first win since a 4-1 win over the New Jersey Devils on February 23, and its first win against a team other than New Jersey since January 26 (New York Rangers).

The other notable element of this win is that it is the first win for interim coach Don Granato.

Buffalo jumped out to an early lead thanks to a pair of first period goals from Sam Reinhart and Curtis Lazar.

After weathering a big storm and push from the Flyers early in the second period, the Sabres were able to respond with two more goals to build a three-goal lead going into the third period. Steven Fogarty played a big role in that second period effort by scoring his first career goal and then setting up a Casey Mittelstadt goal.

While the win ends a lot of frustration for the Sabres and their fans, it has to create an entirely new level of frustration for the Flyers.

They entered the day on the outside of the playoff picture in the East Division and are not in a position where they can be giving away points. It is the second game in a row they found themselves down by three goals to Buffalo, and instead of mounting a furious rally in the third period they just crumbled down the stretch. The Flyers have been trending in the wrong direction for a while now and are just 5-9-1 in their past 15 games. Only two of those five wins during that stretch has come in regulation, while they have also lost four games by at least five goals. Their problems run a lot deeper than Carter Hart's struggles at the moment.

Things do not get any easier for them as their next five games are against the New York Islanders and Boston Bruins.

NHL On NBCSN: Analyzing Sabres' 18-game winless streak by the numbers

By Adam Gretz

NBC Sports

March 31, 2021

NBCSN's coverage of the 2020-21 NHL season continues with the Wednesday Night Hockey matchup between the Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers. Sabres-Flyers stream coverage begins at 7 p.m. ET on NBCSN. You can watch the game online and on the NBC Sports app by clicking [here](#).

The 2020-21 NHL season has been a perfect storm of disappointment for the Buffalo Sabres.

An already flawed team, thrown into a new division with an unbalanced schedule, where the overwhelming majority of their games would be against Stanley Cup contenders and teams that finished among the top-10 in the league standings a year ago. Add in an injury to the best player on the roster (Jack Eichel) and a couple of disappointing/unlucky performances from two of the big-money players on the roster (Taylor Hall and Jeff Skinner) and you have a historically bad season.

The Sabres not only enter Wednesday's game against the Philadelphia Flyers with what is by far the worst record in the league, they are also riding an 18-game winless streak that goes all the way back to February.

It is every bit as wild as it sounds. It continued on Monday night when the Sabres looked to be on their way to their first win since Feb. 23 when they had a 3-0 lead over the Flyers entering the third period. Then four consecutive goals by the Flyers later, and here we are at 18 games.

What does an 18-game winless streak look like, and what sort of impact does it have on a season?

Let us take a look.

Some numbers on this streak

- During these 18 games the Sabres have been outscored 74-30. That is a minus-44 goal differential, and what is by far the worst goal share in the league during that stretch. During the past 18 games the Sabres have scored only 28% of the goals that have been scored during their games. The next worst mark in the NHL during that stretch belongs to the Anaheim Ducks, who have a 40% share of the goals during their games.
- The Sabres last win came on Feb. 23, a 4-1 win against the New Jersey Devils. The Sabres' past three wins have all come against the Devils. They have not beaten a team that is not the Devils since a 3-2 win against the New York Rangers all the way back on Jan. 26. That is over two months ago. The next time they play the Devils is April 6. They only have two games remaining against the Devils.
- Buffalo's current points percentage of .250 is on track to be the worst the NHL has seen since the Atlanta Thrashers inaugural season when they had a .238 points percentage.
- If the Sabres lose to Philadelphia on Wednesday to close the month of March, that will mean they went an entire calendar month (16 games) without winning a single game. Only one team in NHL history has ever played at least 16 games in a month and failed to win any of them: The 1977-78 Detroit Red Wings had a month (also March) where they lost 15 games and tied one game.
- During their streak the Sabres rank 31st in goals per game and goals against per game, and in the bottom-three of shots per game, shots against per game, save percentage, and on the power play. Their penalty kill has been middle of the pack.
- There are seven players on the roster who are a minus-13 or worse during the streak, including defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who is a minus-20. Rasmus Dahlin is the next lowest at minus-18 during the streak.
- Jeff Skinner (three) and Sam Reinhart (six) are the only players on the team with more than two goals over the past 18 games. Nobody has more than eight points. Eight points in 18 games would come out to a 36-point pace over 82 games.

- The Sabres have spent 573 minutes out of 1,087 minutes during the streak trailing on the scoreboard. That is more than 52% of the time during that stretch. They have held a lead for only 192 minutes. That is only 17% of the time.

'It was that time, and they took over' | Takeaways from Wednesday's win

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 1, 2021

The situation felt eerily familiar as the Sabres left the ice for the second intermission at KeyBank Center on Wednesday. For the second time in three nights, they walked into the dressing room with a three-goal lead after 40 minutes. The first occasion ended in an overtime loss.

Don Granato could have used the intermission to remind players of the mistakes that led to what transpired Monday. He could have avoided the subject entirely and used the 15 minutes to reinforce the positives from the first two periods.

Instead, he did neither. Granato, in year 28 of a career that has spanned 13 stops at virtually every level, earned his first victory as an NHL head coach by simply getting out of the way.

"We felt it was best to just hand it to [the players]," Granato said. "... I wouldn't have handed it off to them if I wasn't confident that they could do it and handle it.

"As a coach, you only feel like you need to give them ... what they need. At some point, they have to take over. You can't play the game for them, obviously. And that's always been my approach. A lot of coaching is getting out of the way. It was time for me to get out of the way, I really felt that. These guys have been great. It was that time, and they took over."

The Sabres maintained their stingy defensive effort over the last 20 minutes and finished with an offensive burst of their own in a 6-1 victory, snapping the 18-game winless streak that had burdened them since late February. Brandon Montour, who spoke emotionally following the defeat on Monday, iced the victory with a pair of shorthanded goals scored 37 seconds apart.

Storylines abounded along the way. Steven Fogarty, in year five as a pro and on the eve of facing his former team, earned his first NHL goal and followed it up with an assist just minutes later. Sam Reinhart started at center for the first time since early in his career and contributed on three goals, including one of his own to open the scoring in the first period.

We'll get to all of it. But our takeaways start with the interim head coach of the Sabres and the incremental improvement that led to a well-earned milestone.

1. How Granato earned win No. 1

Granato challenged his players to look like a different team within seven days when he spoke to them last Monday. He made a calculated choice to increase practice time at the expense of rest and preached playing with pace, defending aggressively, and seeing more time on offense as a result.

The signs of a team coming together showed during the first two periods in Boston on Saturday and against the Flyers on Monday. They showed for most of the full 60 minutes on Wednesday.

"It's exciting," Reinhart said. "I like the style we've been able to play, we've been able to skate more and play a faster game. Tonight, I think on the defensive end, we were able to build speed and make some plays coming out of our end a little bit more."

The Sabres held the Flyers without a high-danger shot attempt at 5-on-5, according to NaturalStatTrick.com. Improved breakouts and puck support through the neutral zone led to controlled zone exits and entries, such as on the rush that led to a Casey Mittelstadt goal during the second period.

Fogarty forced a turnover at the Buffalo blue line and maintained control under pressure along the boards through the neutral zone. When he sent a pass off the leg of a nearby Taylor Hall, Reinhart was there in support to scoop up the puck and enter with speed. The line controlled play in the zone until Fogarty eventually found a seam to an oncoming Mittelstadt.

"We're in no position to worry about wins," Granato said. "We just have to get better and we have to keep getting better. The focus has to stay on that and if you do that I know for sure, we all know for sure, you'll turn this thing and wins will come."

"It was nice to get the win because players have been so committed and so helpful for me. The leaders have been leaders. Everybody's worked. I've mentioned plenty of times the demand we put on them. We increased the demand on them and they responded."

2. A dream come true for Fogarty

Though not quite as long as Granato's, Fogarty's milestone marked the culmination of a long pro journey that spanned four full seasons in the New York Rangers organization. He spent the bulk of that tenure as a productive player for AHL Hartford, appearing in just 21 games for New York.

Fogarty signed a one-year deal with Buffalo during the fall and began the season in Rochester, where he was named captain. He had played three games with the Sabres before earning a recall from the taxi squad on Wednesday following an injury to rookie Dylan Cozens.

Ironically, the sequence leading to his goal began without a stick in his hands. Flyers defenseman Samuel Morin saw to that with a slash in front of the Philadelphia net during the second period. When Fogarty picked the stick back up, he found himself alone with an incoming pass from Rasmus Ristolainen.

Fogarty buried it, then made the play to set up Mittelstadt's goal less than six minutes later.

"It was awesome," he said. "I mean, it's something you always dream of, but to be able to get it in a winning effort makes it that much more special."

The Sabres host the Rangers on Thursday.

3. Reinhart returns to center

Reinhart entered the league as a center but settled into a role on the wing over the course of his career. He moved back to the middle on a line with Victor Olofsson and Kyle Okposo to begin the game Wednesday following the departure of Eric Staal via trade and the injury to Cozens.

"It was fun, I enjoyed it," he said afterward. "It was good come underneath the puck a little bit more and get a couple different looks. I thought the defensive part was went well. It's an easy system to read off of, so I enjoyed it."

Reinhart buried a shot off of defenseman Justin Braun for his team-leading 13th goal to open the scoring during the first period. He was on the ice for two scores during the second, winning a key battle along the boards on the sequence that led to Fogarty's goal and gaining entry with possession on the shift that ended with Mittelstadt's marker.

4. Montour makes history

It was Montour who scored the team's third goal on Monday, the high point of a night that ended in disaster. He spoke passionately in the wake of that loss, referring to the winless stretch as "embarrassing."

This time, Montour's goal left little room for doubt. Seconds after the Flyers pulled their goaltender for a 6-on-4 advantage, the defenseman sent a shot the length of the ice into the empty net. On the very next shift, he took a shot on the rush and buried his own rebound.

The shorthanded goals came 37 seconds apart, the fastest by a defenseman in NHL history. He became the second Sabres defenseman to score two shorthanded goals in the same game, joining Alexei Zhitnik.

Montour addressed his comments from Monday afterward.

"I showed my frustration," he said. "It was right after the game, I came in to talk to you guys. But I think everybody felt the same way. Obviously, I didn't need to say anything. Guys have been great. Guys have been positive through this tough time we're dealing with here.

"Tonight, luckily we all played together and got the win."

5. More notes!

Let's empty out the notebook from this one before moving on to New York.

- Curtis Lazar skated just five shifts during the second period and did not return for the third. He had scored his fifth goal of the season earlier in the contest, matching his total from last season.
- Kyle Okposo tallied two assists to extend his personal point streak to five games. He has two goals and four assists in that span.
- Jacob Bryson recorded a pair of assists for his first multi-point game in the NHL. He skated a team-high 22:31 and finished with a plus-four rating.

At The Final Horn: Flyers 1 - Sabres 6

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 31, 2021

For the first time since February 23, the Buffalo Sabres celebrated a victory.

Their 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers on Monday at KeyBank Center snapped a franchise-record 18-game winless streak (0-15-3).

For the second game in a row against the Flyers, Buffalo entered the third period with a three-goal lead, but the Flyers rallied on Monday to win in overtime. This time around, the Sabres hung on.

Sam Reinhart scored his team-leading 13th goal of the season. Steven Fogarty notched the first goal of his NHL career and added an assist. Curtis Lazar and Casey Mittelstadt also tallied. Brandon Montour scored twice on the same penalty kill to ice the game in the third period.

Montour is just the second defenseman in Sabres history to score two shorthanded goals in the same game. The other was Alexi Zhitnik on March 19, 1998 against Florida.

Linus Ullmark made 31 saves. Sabres interim coach Don Granato also earned his first win behind the bench.

Ivan Provorov scored Philadelphia's lone goal.

Brian Elliott started in goal for the Flyers and allowed four goals on 16 shots. He was replaced in net by Alex Lyon with 4:21 left in the second after Buffalo went ahead 4-1. Lyon finished the game with nine saves in 24:08 of action.

What happened

Buffalo struck first thanks to a lucky bounce 9:32 into the game. Kyle Okposo dished the puck to Reinhart in the slot. Reinhart kicked the puck up to his stick and threw one on net. The puck then deflected off the knee of Flyers defenseman Justin Braun and in past Elliott.

The Sabres went up 2-0 for the second game in a row against the Flyers 8:01 left in the first. Riley Sheahan blocked a shot at his own blue line and attracted a crowd as he skated in on the rush. He slowed and turned his body to protect the puck as he reached the crease and found Lazar coming in as the trailer. Lazar put it in for his fifth goal of the season.

The Flyers got within one 3:50 into the second period when Provorov's shot from the point went off Montour and in.

Fogarty helped regain the two-goal lead to make it 3-1 with his marker at the 9:42 mark of the second thanks to some strong play in front of the net.

Coming off the bench, Mittelstadt put one five hole to chase Elliott from the crease with 4:21 remaining in the second.

Montour added two goals late in the third period. He scored an empty netter with 5:07 left and then scored again on 37 seconds later on Lyon to give Buffalo that 6-1 edge.

Roll the highlight film

Here's Fogarty's first NHL goal:

He now has a point in each of his last two games played (1+2) - the first points of his 22-game NHL career.

Worth mentioning

Rookie defenseman Jacob Bryson returned to the lineup after missing Monday's game with an upper-body injury. He skated 22:31 Wednesday with a pair of assists (his first multi-point game) while paired with Rasmus Ristolainen.

Okposo has five points (2+4) in his last five games after recording the primary assists on Reinhart's goal and Montour's second shorty.

Forward Curtis Lazar did not play in the third period. He missed a significant chunk of the second period while in the Sabres dressing room. His final shift ended with 54 seconds left in the second.

Coming up

The Sabres are back in action tomorrow night when they host the New York Rangers at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550. Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 6:30.

Sabres recall Fogarty from taxi squad

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 31, 2021

The Sabres have recalled forward Steven Fogarty from the taxi squad, the team announced Wednesday.

Fogarty is projected to join the lineup in place of rookie forward Dylan Cozens, who is expected to be out until next week with an upper-body injury. Fogarty has tallied one assist in three games played with Buffalo this season.

The Sabres host the Philadelphia Flyers at 7:30 p.m. on NBCSN.

Morning Skate | Cozens could return to Sabres' lineup next week

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 31, 2021

Dylan Cozens could return to the lineup for the Sabres at some point next week, interim head coach Don Granato announced Wednesday.

Cozens sustained an upper-body injury upon being checked into the boards by Philadelphia Flyers defenseman Philippe Myers on Monday. Granato expressed relief regarding the prognosis for the rookie, who previously missed four games with a separate upper-body injury earlier this month.

"A lot of relief, a lot of excitement," Granato said. "I saw him the next morning. ... He was really angry. He was upset at himself and the fact that he was injured.

"You guys sense the competitive nature of Dylan Cozens. It is there. He's an intense, intense hockey player. And he was mad that he has to sit out games. So, he's a player who's going to push it and be back as soon as he possibly can. We're hopeful that it's next week at some point."

The Sabres will move forward in the meantime, beginning with a rematch with the Flyers at KeyBank Center on Wednesday. Buffalo will look to bounce back from an overtime loss on Monday in which Philadelphia erased a 3-0, third-period lead.

It was the second straight game the Sabres surrendered a third-period lead, having previously led 2-1 before falling in Boston on Saturday. Granato said the past two days have been spent dissecting what went well during the first 40 minutes of both games in comparison to what went wrong late.

"Most of those 40 minutes we felt like things were within our control," he said. "So, even when we maybe gave up a chance, it was a chance from the outside and we had numbers of players ready to recover pucks and transition them back even.

"... You reiterate and you show the growth and the reason to be confident there and then you show the third periods. Why did the third period fall out of our control? What was within our control that we didn't seize control of. And mainly that's possessing the puck."

The lineup

The Sabres held an optional morning skate with no line rushes, but here is how the team lined up for practice on Tuesday:

4 Taylor Hall - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 72 Tage Thompson
68 Victor Olofsson - 15 Riley Sheahan - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 27 Curtis Lazar - 21 Kyle Okposo
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 17 Steven Fogarty

78 Jacob Bryson - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
62 Brandon Montour - 33 Colin Miller
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 10 Henri Jokiharju

Tune in

The game will be nationally televised on NBCSN at 7:30 p.m. The radio broadcast can be heard on WGR 550.