



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*September 23, 2011*

## Sabres give Finley a test drive

Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

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Save for the still-under-construction service level of First Niagara Center, Buffalo Sabres training camp is really no different than any other team's at this point of the season.

There are big-money guys getting ready and prospects hoping to make an impression before their inevitable trip to the minor leagues. And most teams tend to bring in one or two guys on a whim to see what they've got.

In Buffalo's case, they have a massive curiosity on their hands. His name is Joe Finley and he's a 6-foot-8, 260-pound defenseman. Yes, 6-foot-8.

Finley is in camp on a tryout. A best-case scenario is he gets sent to their AHL camp, which begins Monday, for a chance to crack the tight lineup in Rochester. But he's a surprisingly good skater for a big man. The Sabres are trying the former No. 1 pick for the Washington Capitals a little at wing as well.

"When you're given an opportunity in a great place like Buffalo, with the organization they have and the personnel, it sounds funny to say but if they tell you to go out and play goalie, you're probably going to go out and try to play goal," Finley said after a recent practice. "You just do what you're told, work hard and things should take care of yourself."

The Minnesota native played four years for the University of North Dakota, where he appeared in three Frozen Fours, and was the Capitals' top choice in 2005, the 27th pick overall. Injuries have been a major issue.

Finley has combined to play just 50 games the last two years between Hershey of the AHL and the South Carolina Stingrays of the East Coast Hockey League. He has two goals, 11 assists and 131 penalty minutes in those games.

He played just 17 games in 2009-10, with his season ending in November due to a ruptured artery in his hand suffered in a collision with an opponent.

"For me it's just a matter of staying healthy and playing games," Finley said. "I've been limited to [the 50 games] the last two years and that's not acceptable. I'm a big guy who's been unfortunate. Go back and tell me how many aneurysms you've seen in a hand? It's few and far between."

"He is huge, yeah," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "He's struggled with injuries the last couple years but for a big man, he's an excellent skater. I don't know a lot about him either, but we've tried him a little bit up front and on the back end. We're just really trying to test drive a used car, so to speak."

Finley developed his skating skills through intense lessons with former U.S. figure skater Diane Ness, who has privately tutored New Jersey star Zach Parise as well as Olympic hockey programs.

"She's out there wearing her figure skates but it doesn't matter if you're 6-8 or 5-8, she's making everyone get low and work hard," Finley said. "I owe a lot of that to her and even more to my mom waking up early at the 6 in the morning to bring me to skating schools."

Finley isn't shy about physical play and fighting; his stats certainly bear that out.

"But that can't be your main focus," he said. "You have to go out and make plays and be good defensively, play good minutes on the penalty kill."

Finley said the Sabres' message was short: "They just said, 'Come in healthy, come in in good shape and show us what you got.'

"I'm not feeling like a rookie at all. This is my third NHL camp. You're going in here with a purpose and that's to show people what you've got. ... It's a do-or-die mentality and that's how you have to carry yourself."

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Ruff said Jochen Hecht will not play in any of the three games this weekend, the home-and-home with Toronto that opens tonight at 7 in Air Canada Centre (Radio 550 AM, MSG) or Sunday's game at Columbus. Hecht has not practiced for a few days after needing stitches in his lip following a collision with defenseman Shaone Morrisonn.

Hecht was sidelined last spring with what was learned to be concussion symptoms.

"A little bit of it is us being precautionary here," said Ruff, who added he expected Hecht to return to the ice next week.

Ryan Miller will play the full game in goal tonight while Jhonas Enroth is expected to get all of the action at home Saturday night.

Former Sabres center Tim Connolly missed practice for the Leafs on Thursday for personal reasons. Toronto coach Ron Wilson said Connolly will play tonight but will not make the trip to Buffalo on Saturday.

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The Sabres announced Thursday their game tonight against the Leafs at 7 will be carried by MSG. MSG will use the Leafs' television broadcast feed via the NHL Network.

## Boyes looks to make strides

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

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BUFFALO — Forget about Brad Boyes' surprising 17-game goal drought, his poor postseason or that his 43-goal campaign seems like a decade ago, not four years.

Boyes, the Sabres' \$4 million trade deadline acquisition, helped save the team's 2010-11 season, coach Lindy Ruff said.

"I don't think we make the playoffs if we don't have Brad Boyes," Ruff, whose team won 14 of its last 21 games with Boyes, said Wednesday morning inside the First Niagara Center.

Boyes' February arrival from St. Louis was significant, a harbinger new owner Terry Pegula would keep his word and spend for a winner. The 29-year-old paid immediate dividends, scoring in his first two games and five times in the first 10 contests.

Then Boyes went dry. He tallied his last regular-season goal March 19. When injuries forced Ruff to switch Boyes from wing to center, he stopped scoring. Boyes finally scored again 38 days later, a meaningless goal late in the Sabres' 5-2 Game 7 playoff loss in Philadelphia.

His lone playoff point came too late.

But Ruff felt he had to sacrifice Boyes' scoring to get another center. The Sabres, already down No. 1 pivot Derek Roy, had become woefully thin down the middle after a concussion shelved Jochen Hecht.

"You may have not liked his production, but he was our centerman down the stretch the last 10, 12 games, and he was a big part of why we got (to the postseason)," Ruff said about Boyes. "And if we didn't have him, we would've been pretty thin in the middle of the ice. ... We asked him to play a position he hadn't played in a couple of years. I thought he did a good job for us."

But that meager offensive output gnawed at Boyes, a center until partway through his rookie season in 2005-06. The Sabres lost two one-goal games to the Flyers.

"I'm looking at myself as someone that could've or should've made that difference," said Boyes, who's been back playing wing during training camp. "... I looked at myself to be somebody that could change a game, chip in when we really need it. It wasn't there. That's what was the worst part ... being a guy that could've pushed us over that line and didn't."

Ruff added: "He had some great opportunities. Part of it was he missed some great opportunities. Even in the playoffs, he hit a post. He probably missed two or three other ones. You go home at night and shake your head and think, 'Those are ones I got to put away.'"

By Game 5 in April, Ruff had clearly grown frustrated with Boyes, and he suddenly stopped defending him, saying, "Once you're in the offensive zone, you're not a winger or a centerman. You're a player."

That's why Ruff's defense Wednesday sounded a bit surprising. Boyes understands the spring criticism.

“There’s still opportunities, there’s still chances,” Boyes said Tuesday about playing center. “It’s just a matter of kind of bearing down a little more, things aren’t going well then finding ways, getting to those areas. That was probably one thing I look back now, to really get in those dirty areas in the crease.”

Using Boyes at wing again will allow him to play down low near the circles and net, where he’s adept at pulling the trigger.

“The strength of Brad is he’s got a real quick release,” Ruff said. “He’s got good hands in tight. He’s got as good a shot as we have on our team, and if he can get inside and get those opportunities, he’s the type of guy that lives off that. I don’t consider him a rush-type player that creates a lot of offense off the rush.”

Believe it or not, Boyes compiled 76 goals in 164 games with the Blues over a two-year stretch from 2007-09. He’s scored 31 times in 165 contests since then, including 14 in 2009-10 and 17 last season.

Ruff has acknowledged Boyes may never reach the 40-goal mark again. But before his late-winter slump, it seemed like Boyes had found some middle ground, perhaps as a 20-goal, 60-point type player. He had 55 points last year.

If he can produce like that, he should keep his spot with the Sabres during his contract season. Remember, the Sabres are more than \$3.5 million over the \$64.3 million salary cap.

“We’ve got so much depth, for sure, everyone’s going to have to earn their ice time and position,” Boyes said. “You can’t really take nights off because you got a guy sitting beside you or in the room that could be going and takes that spot.”

## **Kotalik fights for spot with Sabres**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

September 23, 2011

TORONTO — Go ahead. Crunch the numbers, start crossing off names. Try to pare more than \$3.5 million from the Buffalo Sabres roster. Inevitably, if you attempt to get the free-spending team underneath the salary cap, your pen will keep coming back to one name first.

Winger Ales Kotalik and his \$3 million salary.

To most Kotalik's return to Buffalo, while a nice story, will be fleeting. They say in a couple of weeks the Czech, a top Sabres goal scorer from 2001-09, will become a cap casualty, banished to Rochester.

Don't tell that to Kotalik, though. The 32-year-old feels home again. He said it's like he never left. Three months ago, he thought his NHL career was over. Now, he's living the ultimate dream again.

When the Sabres open the regular season against Anaheim on Oct. 7 in Finland, Kotalik fully expects to be playing his 543rd NHL contest.

"For me, there is no other option than to be on this team," Kotalik said Thursday following a training camp session inside the First Niagara Center.

Kotalik sat the Sabres' first two preseason games, so he should play tonight against the Maple Leafs at the Air Canada Centre. Through almost a week of camp, Kotalik has resembled the guy who averaged 20 goals and 41 points in his five full seasons in Buffalo, coach Lindy Ruff.

"Al looks like the old Al we saw before he left," Ruff said.

But Kotalik's a different man today. He's carrying a heavy heart, having lost three friends from home — Jan Marek, Karel Rachunek and Josef Vasicek — in the Russian plane crash that killed every member of the KHL team Lokomotiv Yaroslavl earlier this month.

In the Czech Republic, "time stopped the week it happened. Nobody was able to do anything else or think about anything else," Kotalik said.

"It puts life in a little different view, different perspective," he said. "Sometimes those things you call tragedies are not really tragedies. You got to enjoy the time you're here. I guess we never know what could happen."

The Sabres don't have many open jobs. Kotalik's competing for possibly one final forward spot, but he's welcoming the stiff challenge before him.

"I want to have fun and enjoy things," Kotalik said. "I'm just happy being around the people I like and I know. Everything else will take care of itself."

Kotalik has always been an interesting player to watch. He still possesses one of the league's hardest, most fluid shots, something he's been utilizing to score in practices and scrimmages.

In recent seasons, however, that lethal shot hasn't helped Kotalik, whose career fell apart when the Sabres dealt him to Edmonton at the 2009 trade deadline. He has only 22 goals since he departed.

"It's never been the same since I left the Sabres," Kotalik said.

Kotalik played 19 games with the Oilers, and then signed a three-year, \$9 million contract with the Rangers. Kotalik lasted only 45 contests in New York, accumulating a wretched minus-18 rating.

He appeared finished shortly after the Rangers dealt him to Calgary. He injured his knee late in camp last season, missed about two months and was eventually sent to the AHL in the winter.

The deadline had passed for Kotalik to go play in Europe, so he made the most of his first trip to the minors since 2002 and eventually got back to the Flames. Still, he thought he'd be playing this season in the Czech Republic.

"I thought that the Flames were going to buy me out, I would be a free agent and I would decide about my future," Kotalik said.

Then, in June, when the Sabres were negotiating to acquire defenseman Robyn Regehr, Kotalik's agent told him he might be involved the trade. Kotalik was stunned.

"The trade back here came out of nowhere," Kotalik said. "I was really excited when I heard the news. Right now, for me, I came in here to prove that I can still be a good player."

The Sabres' familiarity with Kotalik will certainly help him. General manager Darcy Regier drafted him 164th overall in 1998. Ruff was his only Sabres coach.

"They gave me a chance to become an NHL player," Kotalik said. "I will never forget that. They built me. They thought I would be helpful to the team."

Kotalik could be. He's a shootout ace (22 goals, 11 game-deciding, third all-time) and a power-play stud (46 goals, 113 points).

His history makes him an intriguing roster candidate.

"Now it's up to me to prove it to everybody who had doubts about me over the years," Kotalik said. "It wasn't easy. It was a tough two years for me. I'm taking it like an opportunity to show I can still be a good player in this league."

## **Sabres Hecht resting head injury**

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

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Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jochen Hecht hasn't been practicing this week with a head problem.

You may remember last season when Hecht was out with a concussion, he tried to come back but left the Leafs game in Toronto as symptoms continued.

I wondered if Hecht is suffering symptoms again and Lindy Ruff said, "He ran into Morrisonn and wound up cutting his lip and got stitches so a little bit of it is just being precautionary here. He'll start skating within the next few days. He won't be able to play during the weekend, but he'll probably be practicing in full by next week."

Maxime Legault and Paul Szczechura are rehabbing injuries and haven't skated.

Ruff is done splitting goaltending duties. Ryan Miller plays Friday in Toronto while Jhonas Enroth gets the full game Saturday here against the Leafs.



## Ehrhoff, Leino Fitting In with Sabres

Ben Hayes

WGRZ

September 23, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. - One week into training camp, Sabres' free agent additions Christian Ehrhoff and Ville Leino are working to fit in with their new team.

In his first preseason game with the Sabres, Ehrhoff scored a goal and added an assist in a win against Montreal. "That's what I try to do. I got a few opportunities and took advantage of it," said Ehrhoff.

Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff was impressed with what his new defenseman brings to the lineup. "He's got a great shot, he's got a great wrist shot and a slap shot. It was only a little look, but I think it's a look at what he can add to our team."

Ehrhoff is known as an offensive defenseman. Last season with Vancouver he finished with 14 goals and a career high 50 points. He expects to produce similar numbers here in Buffalo. "It's pretty similar to the system I was playing with Vancouver, so it's a pretty easy adjustment for me and definitely the style of play fits my style too."

Up front Ville Leino is still adjusting with the Sabres moving him from forward to center. "Everything is a little different and as far as being a centerman, it's a little different. But it's coming and we're having fun," said Leino.

Leino had an assist in the win against Montreal and Ruff is happy with his adjustment to his new position. "I think he's been strong on the puck, he's been concentrating on his play in his own end," said Ruff. "I think he's done a real good job at it."

Leino scored a career high 19 goals last season with the Flyers and despite changing positions, he's confident with how his game fits in with the Sabres system. "It should fit me like a glove."

The Sabres continue the preseason on Friday night in Toronto. They return home to face the Leafs again on Saturday and then play on Sunday in Columbus.

Ruff said that Ryan Miller will play the entire game in goal against Toronto on Friday and that Jhonas Enroth will play the full game on Saturday.

# THE AFTERMATH: SABRES 3, CANADIENS 1

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

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## THREE STARS OF THE NIGHT

Ehrhoff

Desharnais

Beaulieu

MONTREAL (AP) - Christian Ehrhoff had a goal and an assist to lead the Buffalo Sabres to a 3-1 preseason victory over the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday night.

Jason Pominville opened the scoring 15:31 in when he finished off a centering pass from Ehrhoff, who made his Sabres debut. Ehrhoff restored Buffalo's one-goal lead 6:07 into the third when he snapped a shot past Robert Mayer to make it 2-1.

"He's got a really good shot," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "I thought probably again tonight there were some opportunities we passed up, we passed some plays around, but you don't usually have to tell him to shoot. He's a shooter and he can sling it with a wrist shot and he can hit it pretty hard with a slap shot." ...more.

Newcomer Christian Ehrhoff made his presence felt late in the first period of his first game with Buffalo. Derek Roy won the faceoff cleanly in the offensive zone, and dropped the puck back to Ehrhoff at the right point. Ehrhoff the lugged the puck down low, and wired a backhand pass to Jason Pominville at the edge of the crease for a one-timer past Peter Budaj at 15:36 to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead.

Ehrhoff

Christian Ehrhoff: The man with the new 10-year contract had two points in his Sabres debut, including the game-winning goal in the third period. Ehrhoff showed a penchant for jumping into the rush and created several good scoring chances. "When I see an opening, that's my game," said Ehrhoff. "I like to jump in and help the guys up front a little bit, and a couple of times in the first it worked out."

I had an opportunity to line a guy up along the boards in front of their bench. I've only played out east occasionally being with a Western Conference team, so I took the opportunity to introduce myself to the guys on the opposing bench. - Robyn Regehr

- Buffalo didn't arrive at the Bell Centre until almost 6:30 p.m. due to a delay clearing Canada Customs, along with rush-hour traffic in downtown Montreal.

- Robyn Regehr also skated in his first game with Buffalo tonight, and said that it was fun to get out there and play his usual physical style against some unfamiliar foes – including a punishing collision along the boards with Montreal's Aaron Palushaj in the first period. "I had an opportunity to line a guy up along the boards in front of their bench. I've only played out east occasionally being with a Western Conference team, so I took the opportunity to introduce myself to the guys on the opposing bench."

- Ryan Miller started in goal for Buffalo and stopped all 11 shots he faced in 32:46 of action, his first of the preseason. His best saves both came in the second period: he stoned Max Pacioretty on a two-on-one, and later robbed Andreas Engqvist point blank in the slot. Miller was replaced by Enroth immediately after that save. Enroth turned away 12 of 13 shots in 27:07, and also made several big saves.

- Jason Pominville played his first game since severing a tendon in his right ankle in Game 5 of the Eastern Conference Quarterfinals in Philadelphia, and said after the game that he felt no ill effects of the injury. He scored Buffalo's first goal, and took a team-high 5 shots on the night.

- At today's morning skate, Thomas Vanek talked about his name coming up in speculation for the team's vacant captaincy: "I don't think about it at all. Would I welcome it? Sure. But am I looking for it? Am I lobbying for it? No."

- The Sabres are now 136-146-48 all-time in the preseason, and 23-10-2 since the start of 2005-06.

- This was the 21st all-time preseason between the Sabres and Canadiens. Buffalo upped their record to 7-11-3; 4-6-2 in Montreal.

Buffalo begins a stretch of three games in three days when they open up a home-and-home series in Toronto on Friday. Game time from the Air Canada Centre is 7 p.m. The same two teams meet at the First Niagara Center on Saturday at 7 p.m. The game will be preceded by the "Blue & Gold Carpet Walk" beginning at 5 p.m.

# Maple Leafs identity evolving

Sports Network

LATimes.com

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Toronto, ON — When Brian Burke came to Toronto three years ago he made it clear that his version of the Maple Leafs wouldn't be pushed around. The guy who made a career out of constructing big, bruising hockey teams was going to muscle up an organization that had gone soft.

After using a similar recipe with success in places like Vancouver and Anaheim, the plan was a simple one. The first two lines would be scoring lines and the third and fourth lines would be the intimidation crew.

Now, three years into his tenure it seems that in some ways that mantra has changed.

As the NHL moves away from a time where big hits, fights, and the neutral zone trap defined the league into a new era where skill and speed are what precipitate success, the Maple Leafs have been following suit. Burke and his management team have adopted a new philosophy, one that will feature skilled players sprinkled much deeper into the lineup than in years past.

For Monday's first pre-season tilt against the Ottawa Senators, head coach Ron Wilson debuted a new lineup combination exhibiting that new philosophy. Playing alongside the physically bruising Colby Armstrong were two skilled playmakers in Tyler Bozak and Nazem Kadri. And if early results are any indication of things to come, it could be a third-line that stays together until opening night.

Combining for four points in Monday's 4-2 win, the trio were obviously the best line on the ice and they could be just what the doctor ordered for a team that finished near the bottom of the league in secondary scoring. They may not be the 'truculent', 'nose to the grindstone' type line that Burke would have envisioned when he first arrived here, but they could be a revelation.

A guy like Armstrong, who also has the ability to put the puck in the net, could be the main beneficiary of the new setup. He was brought to Toronto as a prototypical "Burke" kind of guy -- a scorer, mucker, grinder and big hitter all in one package -- and on a line with players like Bozak and Kadri he has the potential to reach the 20-goal mark once again. The relationship has the potential to be a symbiotic one as well, with Armstrong opening up the ice for his smaller, quicker linemates.

With more freedom on the ice Bozak didn't waste any time showing off the results of his strenuous summer training regimen on Monday, scoring a pair and adding an assist. While Nazem Kadri looked faster and more explosive than he did at any point last season.

However, for Kadri to be successful for an entire campaign, he needs to realize that the fancy moves that worked in Junior won't always work in the NHL. Once he figures that out and gains a few more pounds he should be fine, because his skill with the puck is undeniable.

As we get closer to the start of the regular season the success of the third line might not be the first, second or even third storyline that fans will follow. How newcomer Tim Connolly fits with Phil Kessel and Joffrey Lupul on the top line or whether James Reimer can find success in his sophomore year will surely dominate the headlines, but the team's new depth should not be overlooked. More scoring from the role players will be crucial if the Leafs are going to have any chance at playing post-season games in April.