



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 8, 2011

Sabres and Kings face off in Berlin

Pete Jensen

NHL.com

October 8, 2011

SABRES (1-0-0) at KINGS (1-0-0)

TV: TSN2, MSG-B

Season series: Saturday's game between the Sabres and Kings in Berlin is the lone meeting between the two teams this season. Buffalo and Los Angeles met only once last season as well -- a pair of third-period goals lifted the Sabres to a 4-2 win in Buffalo on Nov. 19, 2010.

Big Story: Less than 24 hours after Buffalo and Los Angeles earned season opening victories in Finland and Sweden, respectively, the teams collide in Berlin for the final contest of the 2011 Compuware NHL Premiere. On Friday, the Sabres showcased their offensive firepower in a 4-1 victory against the Anaheim Ducks in Helsinki, while the Kings used an overtime winner by Jack Johnson to squeak by the New York Rangers 3-2 in Stockholm.

Team Scope:

Sabres: The positive momentum from the Sabres' bold offseason carried over to Friday's season opener, as Thomas Vanek and new acquisition Ville Leino scored to give Buffalo a 2-0 advantage by the 8:30 mark in the first period.

"We changed the tone in the first 10 minutes having a two-goal lead," Vanek told NHL.com. "The puck was bouncing our way a little bit today, but it's something we work on all the time now. We harp on it -- getting pucks to the net and getting bodies there. I think it paid off early on and even later on."

After Anaheim's Nate Guenin countered early in the second period with a goal to cut the Ducks' deficit in half, new captain Jason Pominville responded with a back-breaking goal just over a minute later to turn the tide back in Buffalo's favor. Vanek then added his second goal later in the period, giving goaltender Ryan Miller -- who stopped 29 of 30 shots on the day -- more than enough support to close out a win in Buffalo's first contest of 2011-12.

Kings: While the Sabres offense flourished in their season opener, the Kings failed to convert on power-play opportunities throughout regulation. However, after Rangers blueliner Ryan McDonagh was called for tripping with 2:09 left in overtime, Los Angeles finally cashed in.

Defenseman Jack Johnson scored the game-winning goal during a 4-on-3 advantage with 52 seconds left in overtime to get the Kings off on the right foot.

Despite Los Angeles going 1 for 5 on the man advantage in the game, their clutch conversion in overtime is a step in the right direction after the unit's '10-11 power-play output (16.1 percent) ranked 21st in the league last season.

"You can't get frustrated," said Anze Kopitar, who scored a goal and assisted on Johnson's game-ending tally. "Obviously, [the Rangers] have some good penalty killers and a top-5 goalie in the league, [Henrik Lundqvist], but we stuck with [the power-play], and it came through for us."

After Jonathan Quick turned in a 24-save outing in Friday's win, Kings' coach Terry Murray announced backup Jonathan Bernier will get the nod against Buffalo.

Who's Hot: Vanek notched a three-point effort in Friday's season opener in Helsinki. ... Kopitar, the Kings' point leader in '10-11 who suffered a season-ending ankle injury in late March, registered a hat trick in a preseason win over Colorado and shined in Friday's regular season opener for L.A. with a two-point showing.

Injury Report: Buffalo forward and Germany native Jochen Hecht (head injury) is listed as day-to-day. ... Los Angeles forward Dustin Penner (lower body) did not play Friday. Murray told LAKingsInsider.com that Penner skated for 40 minutes in Thursday's practice and that his situation is improving.

Stat Pack: After failing to register a goal in his first six regular-season games of 2010-11, Vanek scored twice in Friday's season opener in Helsinki. ... Last season, the Kings tied for second in the League with 50 game-opening goals, compiling a 36-12-2 record when scoring first. In Friday's season opener against the Rangers, the trend continued as Kopitar opened the scoring midway through the first period.

Puck Drop: Expect Hecht to do everything possible to get on the ice. He and teammate Christian Ehrhoff are excited at the opportunity to play in the first-ever regular-season NHL game in their home country.

"It's really nice for us to be able to show German fans what we do over here in the NHL," Ehrhoff told NHL.com.

THE AFTERMATH: SABRES 4, DUCKS 1

Vanek scores twice as Sabres top Ducks in Helsinki

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

October 8, 2011

HELSINKI, FINLAND (AP) - Thomas Vanek scored two power-play goals, leading the Buffalo Sabres past the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 in their NHL opener Friday.

Vanek, the top goal-scorer for Buffalo the last five seasons, set the tone with his first goal at 4:02 in the first period. Ville Leino of Finland, playing in his former home stadium, then made it 2-0 on his debut for the Sabres.

Nate Guenin replied for Anaheim in the second period, but Vanek helped restore the Sabres' two-goal lead by setting up Jason Pominville. ...MORE.

With Buffalo applying pressure in the Ducks' zone, Anaheim's clearing attempt is held in at the blueline by Christian Ehrhoff. He fires a wrist shot at the net that bounces off Tyler Ennis before being picked up by Brad Boyes behind the net. Boyes finds Andrej Sekera sneaking in down low at the faceoff circle, and he lasers a pass to Ville Leino in the slot. Leino takes the pass in his skate, and quickly kicks it into a shooting position just as he's tripped by Anaheim's Andrew Gordon. While falling to the ice, Leino uncorks a snap shot over Jonas Hiller's left shoulder for what turned out to be the game winning goal.

"I thought Ville played very well tonight," said head coach Lindy Ruff. "He was sound in his own end and scored a big goal for us. He made a heck of a play kicking the puck off his skate and scoring a big goal. But even importantly was that his play in his own end was really solid."

Vanek

Thomas Vanek picked up right where he left off at the end of the 2010-11 regular season, finishing the night with three points (2+1) and a game-high nine shots. Vanek ended last season with consecutive three-point games, giving him nine points (6+3) in his last three regular season contests. Vanek played alongside Luke Adam and Jason Pominville for the first time in a regular season game, after being formed midway through training camp when Derek Roy was injured. Vanek was happy with their chemistry, but knows they have a long way to go.

"It's only game one, but I thought Luke looked good out there. I think we still have some things to work on though, because the Getzlaf line had us rotating a few times tonight."

- The line of Vanek-Pominville-Adam accounted for eight of Buffalo's 12 points.

- Ryan Miller made 29 saves to earn the win in the 400th game of his NHL career. He joins Domink Hasek (491) as the second goaltender in Sabres history to play in 400 games.

- Buffalo was held without a shot in the third period. The last time this happened was March 29, 2003.

I think that was a real momentum killer for them. - Lindy Ruff, on Buffalo's 5-on-3 penalty kill early in the 3rd period.

- Jordan Leopold led the Sabres in TOI with 24:45, including 5:04 while shorthanded.

- Robyn Regehr had a game-high five hits and six blocked shots.

- Paul Gaustad's 10 face-off wins led Buffalo, and tied him with Anaheim's Saku Koivu and Ryan Getzlaf.

- Tonight's game opened the first of Buffalo's league-high 21 sets of back-to-back games this season. Buffalo also topped the NHL last season with 22.

- The Sabres are now 23-14-4 in season openers; 8-8 when they start on the road.

- Lindy Ruff improved his record to 8-5-1 in season openers as Buffalo's head coach.

- The Ducks dropped to 4-14 all-time in season openers.

The Sabres will face Los Angeles on Saturday at 2 p.m. ET at the o2 World Arena in Berlin, Germany. They leave Berlin right after the game, with an expected early Sunday morning arrival in Buffalo. After five days off, the Sabres play their home opener at the First Niagara Center one week from tonight against Carolina. Game time is 7:30 p.m. ET.

Sabres off to flying start

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

HELSINKI, Finland — After just one game of the 2011-12 season, the Buffalo Sabres look as good as advertised.

The summer of excitement and enthusiasm in Sabreland continued into fall when the puck dropped Friday. The Sabres thoroughly earned a 4-1 win over Anaheim in Helsinki's Hartwell Arena, every phase of Buffalo's game shining in the opener.

The Sabres had the Finnish fans rocking almost as much as the '80s heavy metal bands that blared through the arena speakers. The offense clicked, the special teams were solid and the goaltending was impressive.

"Overall, we can be pretty happy with our effort. It's definitely nice to get off to a good start," said captain Jason Pominville, who had a three-point night with a goal and two assists. "Our compete, our battles, everything we talked about was good. Our special teams were good. Millsie [Goalie Ryan Miller] right off the bat made some big saves to keep us in the game, and after that we were able to get the lead and play good with it."

It's likely fans back in Buffalo were already planning the Stanley Cup parade after just 20 minutes. The Sabres took a 2-0 lead into the first intermission, getting goals from Thomas Vanek and Ville Leino along with six timely saves by Miller, who finished with 29 saves.

Vanek opened the season's scoring just 4:02 in. The left winger set up in his usual home at the top of the crease on the power play. Luke Adam fed him from the boards, and Vanek turned to knock the puck past goalie Jonas Hiller.

"We've still got a lot of things to work on, but this game was good," Vanek said.

Leino, a Finland native, doubled the lead midway through the period. Again, the Sabres found success in the slot. Pinching defenseman Andrej Sekera hit Leino with a pass, and the center flipped a shot over Hiller's glove while falling to the ice.

"He made a heck of a play taking the puck off his skate and a quick release to score the goal," coach Lindy Ruff said of Leino.

Anaheim cut into the Sabres' lead less than five minutes into the middle period. Nate Guenin's point shot deflected off Maxime Macenauer and caromed through the pads of Miller.

The Sabres' new captain answered just over a minute later. With Buffalo applying pressure in the Ducks' zone, Pominville pulled a rebound out of the slot, took it to the right faceoff dot and quickly turned to beat Hiller with a shot through traffic.

"We got off to a quick start, got up by a couple goals in the first period," Ruff said. "Obviously, they got one quick one in the second, but we responded with a couple. That was probably the most important part of the game."

Vanek's second power-play goal of the season lifted the Sabres to a 4-1 lead with eight minutes left in the second. Not surprisingly, the goal came from the top of the crease, though this time he received help from Anaheim defenseman Cam Fowler.

After two shots by Christian Ehrhoff, the defenseman eschewed a third and fed Vanek in front. Hiller stopped two whacks, but rather than clearing the rebound, Fowler fired the puck into his own net.

"That's how you're going to score," Pominville said. "You've got to go to the net if you want to score goals. Thomas does a good job in front of the net, gets his nose in the paint and got rewarded with a nice one and probably a little bit of a lucky one. We'll take it."

Miller's best save of a shot-filled second period came short-handed. An Adam turnover deep in the Buffalo zone set up Bobby Ryan alone in front, but Miller got his blocker on the blast to send the Sabres into the final intermission with a comfortable advantage.

"Ryan was very good," Ruff said. "He made some big saves that were probably equally as big as that five-on-three kill. You look back to the end of the second period when that puck got away on our power play and Ryan walked in, that was a big save at a big time of the game for us."

Like the power play, the Sabres' penalty killers got a quick start to the season, too. Paul Gaustad went to the box for interference just 68 seconds in. Anaheim's Saku Koivu followed a minute later, the second of six first-period penalties split by the teams.

The power play finished 2 for 4. The short-handed unit went 5 for 5, including a successful five-on-three kill early in the third.

"We came out hard," Ruff said. "We played our system hard. We moved the puck really well in the first period. The response to their goal in the second period was really important. We got ourselves in a little bit of trouble when we started turning pucks over, but we were pretty sound. We played a good game."

For Sabres, attitude is everything

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

HELSINKI, Finland — Terry Pegula recently made a trip to his favorite college, Penn State, to watch the football team play Alabama. The game featured legendary national powers, universities that rarely meet, so he was ready for excitement. He was ready for an uplifting weekend.

By the time he headed back to Buffalo, the Sabres' owner was completely dismayed. It wasn't just the lopsided loss by Penn State that ruined his visit, it was that everyone he encountered expected it. He must've talked with 50 friends and fellow alums, and not a single one figured the Nittany Lions had a chance. Not one.

"Nobody believes down there anymore," Pegula said. "It's difficult."

The weekend reinforced Pegula's belief that attitude impacts results. Of course the result was negative, he thought. The entire vibe nudged it that way.

He and the Sabres are ready to test his theory in the other direction. The mood in Sabreland is off-the-charts positive. Since he bought the team in February, Pegula has improved the roster, locker room and arena. More than that, he's improved morale. He's brought the winning attitude Penn State used to have up to Buffalo.

"We've got that here now," Pegula said. "We believe we can win. Just because you talk about it doesn't mean you're going to do it. I don't think anybody in here is foolish enough to believe it's going to happen just because you want it to, but it's definitely the way to start."

According to the team, it's the only way.

"There's an energy around the room. We're not going to deny that," center Paul Gaustad said. "We have high expectations, and we want to be champions. It's been a really positive atmosphere around the locker room."

The 2011-12 season begins Friday when the Sabres play the Anaheim Ducks in Helsinki, marking one of the most-anticipated season openers in team history. Fans and players can't wait to see what gift the Sabres present next. It's been like Christmas for the past eight months, and the holiday cheer shows no sign of subsiding.

The Sabres have treated their followers to three new faces: forward Ville Leino and defensemen Robyn Regehr and Christian Ehrhoff. The fans have had season tickets delivered to their homes by players and Pegula. The team will return to newly named First Niagara Center next week to find a completely renovated locker room.

"Just the whole outlook has changed," Ehrhoff said. "They want to take the extra step to be a competitive team and play for the Stanley Cup. That was my goal, to be on a team that's really committed, and ownership has shown that right from the start. I talked to them, and I think right from the start when I got here they made sure they're serious about it. It's probably only the beginning."

Newcomers are good fit

The on-ice arrivals have jacked up the expectations considerably. On paper and throughout the preseason, the trio provided exactly what the Sabres needed.

"We feel like the guys coming in complement what we have already," goaltender Ryan Miller said. "What we're looking to do is try and develop a game that can spread across the league when you talk about matchups. We need to be able to play against 29 other teams and match up, and not just compete but beat different styles of hockey."

Regehr and Ehrhoff bring a veteran presence to a defense corps that lacked experience. Regehr also brings toughness, while Ehrhoff adds offensive skill. Leino is a much-needed center, a proven playoff performer who can complement Derek Roy.

"We've got all the elements we need to be able to go out and compete, and compete at a top level," defenseman Jordan Leopold said. "All the cards are there for us. It's just a matter of us putting the pieces together in the right place. We're excited. Yeah, we're confident, but not overly confident."

The newcomers have arrived during a time of massive change, so each mixes into the scenery. Ehrhoff will make \$10 million this season, but it's not discussed much because the Sabres also committed \$38.5 million to defenseman Tyler Myers. Leino received a huge raise, but so did the ceiling in the dressing room.

Every change is one small part of a grand plan.

"They don't have to be world beaters, but they have to be good players for us," coach Lindy Ruff said. "I don't think any guy needs to be painted in the picture that they have to be the savior. We don't need a savior. We just need the level of our team to be a notch up to give yourself a chance to compete and contend."

Contending for the Cup is what nearly everyone expects.

"People here now, myself included, you talk about championships," General Manager Darcy Regier said. "You want that. You want to do it. You hope you get off to a good start, but ultimately you've got to have the conversation, you've got to talk about it, you've got to put it right up front and center, and you've got to go after it."

A whirlwind start

The Sabres are quick to warn a championship won't be easy. The Sabres thought they improved their roster last season, too, but they started terribly and needed a second-half surge to make the playoffs.

Chemistry takes time to develop, injuries happen. The teams that deal with adversity best end up as winners, and the Sabres feel that's where their refreshing attitude will help.

"When everything's going right, everyone's happy," Roy said. "When something starts going bad that's when you see who the leaders are and who your real teammates are and who's out there to play hard. There's going to be some tough times this season, we know that, and we've got to stick together as a team and play hard."

The Sabres start the season in whirlwind yet intriguing fashion. They begin with the Ducks in Helsinki, then they fly to Berlin, Germany, to play the Los Angeles Kings on Saturday. Of note: The last three Stanley Cup champions have started the season in Europe.

The Sabres hope their worldwide good vibe makes them the fourth straight.

"That's the bottom line. You've got to win," left wing Thomas Vanek said. "It doesn't matter how much you spend, how nice of a locker room you have, how nice of a carpet you have. If you don't win, you don't win."

"Guys are more excited about the changes and stuff, but I've said it before as far as hockey goes, I still think the mentality is the same. Our goal from Day One since I was here [in 2005] is to win the Stanley Cup. That doesn't change just because we're getting a new locker room and we've got a new great opportunity. But obviously, it's different. The atmosphere is different."

Defensive on the offensive

Makeover on back end could key Sabres' season

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

HELSINKI, Finland — Change has come swiftly and consistently throughout the Buffalo Sabres' organization, but Lindy Ruff hasn't bought into the sweeping remakes entirely. Sure, the coach has tweaked his system and special teams plans a bit. The backbone of his game plan, however, remains the same.

Defensemen have to be aggressive.

The Sabres have thrived in recent years when they abandon conservatism. They like defensemen joining the rush, creating a four-man attack that puts opponents on their heels. Despite a hefty roster makeover on the back end, the green light remains on any time a blueliner has the puck.

"To have that green light, it's nice," Tyler Myers said. "All the D-men have it. Obviously, you want to play defense first, but if we're on a rush bringing that fourth man in, that defenseman, it's part of our game."

The Sabres' attack should intensify even more this year. Christian Ehrhoff, Marc-Andre Gagnani and Robyn Regehr have replaced Craig Rivet, Shaone Morrisonn and Steve Montador, increasing the speed along the blue line, especially in the case of Ehrhoff.

The former Vancouver defenseman is in the smooth-skating, puck-moving mold Ruff adores, and Ehrhoff proved during the preseason he has a shot from the point that is second to none.

"We want to use Ehrhoff to his strengths," Ruff said. "A big part of our success was having our D involved."

The back end should be improved this season, but the team will need more to get past the first round of the playoffs, something it hasn't done since 2007.

"We need everybody to be a little bit better," Ruff said, "Push each other to be a little better through the year."

Offense

The Sabres' depth up front is as good as it's been since the back-to-back Eastern Conference finals teams of the mid-2000s. The top three lines have proven scorers, while the checking line has the requisite toughness.

Perennial goal-scoring leader Thomas Vanek is back on a line with right wing Jason Pominville, who has scored at least 20 times for five straight seasons. Center Derek Roy is healthy after missing the second half of last season, and he's eager to prove his point-per-game start is going to be the norm.

Right wing Drew Stafford came into camp as a physical specimen, and the hope is his improved fitness level will keep him healthy. He played just 62 games last season but finally lived up to his first-round hype with 31 goals, second only to Vanek's 32.

Left wings Tyler Ennis and Nathan Gerbe added experience to their skill sets, enhancing their reputations as playmakers and snipers, respectively. Ennis now has company in the puckhandling department with the arrival of Ville Leino. The former Detroit and Philadelphia winger returns to his natural position of center, and he showed during the exhibitions he can create plays with his puck possession.

Paul Gaustad, Cody McCormick and Patrick Kaleta have the task of making life difficult for the other teams and relish the role.

Defense

Myers' flash will be complemented by Regehr's substance. The 11-year veteran inspires fear whenever the puck heads to the corner, and his defense-first mind-set should mesh well with Myers' high-paced approach.

"He's so solid defensively that with the way I like to jump up into the play, he's a guy that can back me up," Myers said.

Ehrhoff will start alongside Jordan Leopold, who had a career year of 13 goals and 35 points during his first season in Buffalo. Both players have an all-around game, but the only concern is ensuring that the vaunted four-man attack doesn't become a five-man jail break.

Mike Weber provides grit and a crease-clearing presence, while Andrej Sekera and Gagnani have offensive skill. Playing time will be limited for one.

"There's seven players that can all play and are obviously utilized in different situations," Ruff said.

"We've got some guys on the physical side. We've got some guys that are on the offensive side of it. But I know one thing for sure: You're going to use all seven. It never fails where a D goes down.

"It's not easy to have the number we have, but I think to have seven is a good thing."

Goaltenders

Ryan Miller feels he's back to the form that earned him the Vezina Trophy and Olympic stardom two seasons ago. He struggled at times last year, which can be attributed to injuries (knee, hip, head) and a faulty approach.

He admittedly hid from hockey too much following the 2009-10 season, and his offseason routine didn't set him up for a repeat performance. His summer was mapped out better this year, so he's eager to return to elite status.

Miller may finally get more rest, something that has been promised but never delivered, now that Jhonas Enroth is the full-time backup. The rookie went 9-2-2 as an injury replacement last season, including a 6-0-1 run during the final month.

One of Miller's goals early is getting acclimated to his new defense corps. It's the second straight season of significant change, and communication problems hindered performances early last year.

"We got ourselves in a situation where we felt like we wanted to play just like we did the year before, but we didn't have the same personnel, so it took a little while to get everybody on board," Miller said. "I think once we got everyone going, I think we were one of the better teams system-wise, so the job this year is to do it earlier."

Sabres hope to continue odd trend

European openers breed Cup winners

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

When you analyze the Buffalo Sabres' schedule and the road to the 2012 Stanley Cup Playoffs, you have to start right at the beginning here in October.

The season starts farther away from home than at any time in the franchise's history, more than 4,100 miles away in Helsinki, Finland, against the Anaheim Ducks.

Oddly enough, the last three Stanley Cup champions all opened their campaigns overseas in the NHL Premiere Series. It's a good omen the Sabres, Ducks, New York Rangers and Los Angeles Kings all hope holds again this season.

"I'm buying into that stat," Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff said. "I like that one. If that works, let's go over every year."

Among the previous Cup winners, the 2010-11 Boston Bruins went 1-1 against the Phoenix Coyotes in the Czech Republic, the 2009-10 Chicago Blackhawks were 1-0-1 against the Florida Panthers in Helsinki and the 2008-09 Pittsburgh Penguins were 1-1 against Ottawa in Stockholm, Sweden.

The Sabres' last overseas trip was a training camp journey to Austria with the Tampa Bay Lightning prior to the 1998-99 season. And how did that season end? In Game Six of the Stanley Cup final against Dallas, the famous No Goal game.

"I've thought of that too. It's been mentioned," Ruff said. "There are some factors we hope will become key and that's especially any time you can get your group together without distractions for seven or eight days on the road.

"It's not unlike the trip we had last year (a 4-2-1 March run over a 12-day span). The team came together, played well on that trip and we came home and played well. Those times are important for your team."

Before hunkering down in Finland to prep for the opener, the Sabres saw the German countryside, had an on-ice meet-and-greet with fans who traveled across the ocean to see them and had an emotional visit to a military hospital.

"There's a lot to be said about the bonding thing," NBC NHL analyst Pierre McGuire said this week on a season-preview conference call. "You can bring your guys together pretty quickly on those trips."

"It is very important when you have new players," added network analyst and former NHL player Eddie Olczyk. "... If you can get them knowing each other and your system, they come together a lot quicker.

"When you do hit that rough spot at some point which all teams go through sometimes, they're just camouflaged a little bit more because of how well you may be playing or where you are in the standings."

At least the Sabres should be well-rested after the trip. They don't have to go West after Europe like the Carolina Hurricanes did last year or the Rangers do this year because they can't play right away in the under-renovation Madison Square Garden. Neither team played their home opener until Oct. 27.

The Sabres open in First Niagara Center against the Hurricanes on Oct. 14, but the October schedule is still rough.

The five days off after Europe are followed by the home opener and a road game the next night at Pittsburgh. Then come road games at Montreal, Florida and Tampa Bay, meaning six of the first seven games are out of town.

Here's a look at some of the key elements to the schedule:

- * The start: Few teams miss the playoffs after starting 6-0-2, like the Sabres did in 2008-09. Last year, in fact, the Sabres were the only Eastern team not in the top eight on Dec. 1 — 57 games from the end of the season — that managed to sneak into the postseason. So it's important for the Sabres to get going quickly and match their high expectations.

- * Long roads: With Atlanta replaced in the Eastern Conference for one year by Winnipeg, the Sabres have two extended trips that include jaunts to Manitoba. One is in January (Long Island, Detroit, Chicago, Winnipeg, St. Louis) and one is in March (Anaheim, San Jose, Vancouver, Winnipeg).

The January trip is part of a seven-game run around the all-star break that leaves Buffalo with no home games from Jan. 13 to Feb. 1.

- * Home cookin': The Sabres can quickly hunker down in Buffalo the last week in October. From Oct. 25 to Dec. 16, the team has 18 of its 24 games at home. Same with February, with nine of 13 at home.

- * Paying the piper: Look out in January (nine of 12 on the road), and for a tough finish (seven of the last 11 away).

- * A bottom line: The Sabres have finished with at least 90 points in all six seasons since the lockout and have averaged 45.5 wins. They'll be above average this year. Call it 47-27-8 for 102 points.

Said NBC's McGuire: "You can't say enough about what Mr. Pegula has done in Buffalo. ... They were so close for so long, then they had to lose key components. They don't have to do that anymore. I love where this thing is going. Buffalo is going to cause a lot of heartache for a lot of teams."

Humble beginnings frame Pegula's path

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

Tears were inevitable. Terry Pegula knew as much long before taking the podium Feb. 22 and introducing himself to Buffalo as the Sabres' new owner.

He prepared the best he could under the circumstances. He knew his children would be sitting in the front row, a few feet away. He knew Gilbert Perreault, his favorite player, would be somewhere in the HSBC Arena atrium. He knew their presence would intensify emotions that already were running high that day.

But it goes deeper, much deeper.

Eloise and Myron "Rip" Pegula couldn't spare a nickel 50 years ago, when their son was growing up in Carbondale, Pa. (pop. 8,100). Eloise took jobs in the garment industry to help put food on the table. As the story goes, Rip once jumped from a second-story schoolhouse window, started working in the coal mines and never looked back.

They were good, honest, selfless people, hard workers who were raised during the Depression. They had a shortage of money but gave Terry and his sister a surplus of values. Heaven knows how many sacrifices they made so Terry could attend private Scranton Prep High and build a life better than their own.

Pegula's story sounds like the one each generation passes to the next, but his wasn't born from fiction. He really did hitchhike 15 miles back and forth to school. He really did work at age 14, driving a truck in the mines when he was too young to have a license. He really did mind his manners, keep up his studies and put himself through college.

His \$12,000 salary from his first job after graduating from Penn State in 1973 was twice what his father ever made in a year, a fact that for years made him feel guilty. A decade later, he borrowed \$7,500 to start East Resources Inc. The company made him a billionaire after his parents died.

Pegula couldn't stop thinking about those moments before he was introduced, and he was overwhelmed by the time he took the microphone.

"It's what went through my mind above all this stuff, looking at my kids and 'Where's Perreault?'" Pegula said. "My parents. Neither one was around to see anything I had done later in my life. I grew up, um, we didn't have much. My parents, trust me, when I got out on my own and started my business, they never asked me for anything. They weren't selfish at all. They gave and gave and gave. My mother was always trying to get me to be better. It was never about her."

Well, that certainly explains a few things now about him.

The Sabres have become his sixth child, his baby, and he wants them to be better. Pegula has spent an estimated \$220 million on them, when you include the franchise fee and subsequent upgrades, in the past eight months. His commitment to winning a championship has changed the collective attitude of a proud hockey town that's starving for one.

Buffalo has always wanted to win, but not since the Knox family founded the franchise have so many players wanted to win for their owner. He has done everything expected and more, but he still doesn't understand all the hoopla. The attention makes him uneasy. He certainly didn't buy the team to turn a profit any time soon.

What's the big deal?

The story, he says, shouldn't be about him.

Ironically, Terry, that's why it is.

People are drawn to him because he arrived with a ton of dough and not an ounce of pretense, a quality passed down from his parents that people find fascinating. He's a sports owner who makes winning his top priority. It's a rare combination that's particularly welcomed in Buffalo, where the bottom line for years trumped all else.

"I'm very uncomfortable with this God-like image that people are starting to throw at me. Trust me, I'm very uncomfortable," he said. "It's time to drop the puck and play hockey. I'm really going to try to backpedal from the front of this thing. Let the players get all this adulation and the coaches or whatever the media is saying about the Sabres. Let me be an owner. Let me hide."

That's the beauty of Terry Pegula.

He either genuinely doesn't know or refuses to acknowledge that he's the reason for the excitement and optimism regarding his team. He's just your average, everyday, run-of-the-mill, humble multibillionaire who purchased his favorite team for all the right reasons without forgetting his roots. Some see him as a savior.

Simply, he's a good guy, a cool dude.

For all the money he's spent buying the Sabres, sprucing up the arena, signing players, handing out raises and purchasing the Rochester Americans, people have a greater appreciation for the little things Pegula & Co., have done that don't cost a dime. He insists that it comes from his wife, Kim, and others in the organization.

Take, for example, Kim Pegula and team president Ted Black. Upon hearing their employees were swamped on Slug Appreciation Day, they left their offices and began bagging merchandise and running cash registers. How many owners' wives and team presidents volunteer in the team store?

"I need to set the record straight," he said. "It's all Ted Black and my wife. I like to stay on the hockey side. They're coming up with all of this stuff with the fan experience and all the non-hockey things. People should know that."

Kim Pegula was the one who thought the Sabres needed a new dressing room. It started out as a \$6 million project and is now nearing \$10 million. Black is behind the upgrades throughout First Niagara Center and improving relations throughout the community. He's another class act. Both are smart, warm and unassuming, much like Pegula.

Last season, Terry Pegula and Black greeted fans in the atrium before games and thanked them for coming. They blew off the owner's suite and watched several games from the 300 level. Several weeks ago, they canceled a limousine and drove around town delivering season tickets. And they drank beer with a fan who greeted them Buffalo-style when answering the door.

It's easy to pull for them because they get it.

Soon enough, people will realize Pegula and a hockey town smitten with him have the same essential values. He introduced himself to Buffalo while wearing a suit and tie, but he's really not a suit-and-tie guy. Really, he's just one of the guys.

Pegula still has his mother's canceled checks for \$412, which covered tuition at Scranton Prep. Now, he's paying it forward.

Eloise and Rip would be proud.

"My father used to tell me — I don't know if he said this once to me or five times a day — that if I ever had my own business, I better treat people right," Pegula said. "He was one of the guys out there [laboring], and maybe he wasn't treated right. He might have only said it one time, I don't know, but it stuck."

Four reasons for optimism/pessimism during 2011-12 season

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

Reasons for optimism

1. Attitude of gratitude: There's an old adage that if you feel good, you play good. The Sabres feel really good. There's a belief at the foot of Washington Street that things are going their way and will continue to do so. Confidence can carry teams a long way. Folks in Pegulaville believe.
2. No more holes? The Sabres needed playoff experience, so they added center Ville Leino. They needed a brute on the back end, so they added defenseman Robyn Regehr. The power play needed a boost, so they added Christian Ehrhoff. Add it all up, and they hope it brings what else they need: the Stanley Cup.
3. Big rebound by Miller: Ryan Miller walked in on the first day of training camp and said last year wasn't good enough. The goaltender failed to follow up on his "best goalie on the planet" season. He dedicated this summer to revitalizing his game and enhancing his personal life. He's ready to be elite again.
4. Going to great depths: Injuries happen. It's how teams deal with them that defines a winner. The Sabres have the depth to handle a few setbacks. They're carrying an extra defenseman, and they have three more in the minors ready to step in. The forward ranks are stocked, too, so the organization is in a good place.

Reasons for pessimism

1. Unfamiliar surroundings: The Sabres roster moves certainly bolstered the talent level, but games aren't won on talent alone. The Sabres need to become a team, and it could take awhile. One-third of the defense corps is new, and communication in the team's own zone might be off.
2. Inexperience behind the bench: Lindy Ruff has changed his coaching staff, trading the longtime experience of associate coach Brian McCutcheon for first-time assistants Kevyn Adams and Teppo Numminen. The fresh ideas should benefit the system, but there is a learning curve for every job.
3. It's hard to repeat: Jordan Leopold and Drew Stafford are coming off career years. Tyler Ennis and Nathan Gerbe performed admirably during their first full seasons. Although the Sabres expect everyone to continue to improve, it just doesn't happen. Some players' games will take a step back.
4. The best got better: The Sabres are Eastern Conference contenders, but they're not alone. Washington added proven puck-stopper Tomas Vokoun. Philadelphia one-upped that move with the addition of goalie Ilya Bryzgalov. The Cup champion Bruins have their core. There's no easy route to a championship.

140 characters at a time

Some Sabres taking to Twitter as another way to connect to their fans

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

Folks who have a voracious appetite for Sabres news have all the traditional news sources bookmarked. Now the players are giving you somewhere else to go.

Check out what Derek Roy, who goes by @Roy9ner on the social networking site Twitter, had to say when he arrived Sunday in Germany: "First practice in Manheim under our belts after a long night #goodsweat then got on the Autobahn but rode a bus #slowerthanmolasses"

Roy joined Twitter during the offseason and has quickly become a fan favorite on the site, with nearly 22,000 people following his tweets.

"I think it's great to be able to interact with the fans like that," Roy said during training camp. "They want to know so much about hockey and what's going on behind the scenes, how you get prepared, tips for kids.

"I try to answer questions here and there but you get so many you can't answer them all. But I get some positive feedback and it's been fun."

For those needing a quick get-up-to-speed lesson on Twitter, the site allows users to post tweets, which are limited to 140 characters, that anyone can read (called "following"). Businesses (like @TheBuffaloNews and @TBNSports for instance), government agencies and celebrities have all jumped into Twitter, and so have common folk.

Pop star Lady Gaga (@ladygaga) has more than 14 million followers, the most on Twitter. The most-followed sports related account belongs to Shaquille O'Neal (@shaq) with more than 4.3 million.

Drew Stafford and former Sabre Chris Butler have been on Twitter in the past, but no Sabres were on last season. Team president Ted Black, among others, has said there was no rule banning them and that the players had made a collective decision simply not to tweet.

But Twitter has become so mainstream, especially with the under-30 crowd, that it was inevitable some players would take the plunge. Center Luke Adam (@lukejadam) was one of the first, during offseason workouts in Buffalo with Marcus Foligno and Zack Kassian.

"It's just something that kind of happened when we were hanging out," Adam said. "I got Marcus on there, but we still haven't got Zack. He's not much for words at times so I don't know what we'd get out of him.

"It's been a good way to connect with the fans. And you learn a lot of news following people's feeds and links."

@Roy9ner is first stop

Roy has become the Sabres' Twitter king, showing a wacky sense of humor and an ability to talk about a wide variety of topics. It starts with his bio at the top of his page: "Went from working at a strawberry patch to living my dream in the NHL for the Buffalo Sabres Always pursue your dreams!!!"

What's the deal? It dates to his junior hockey days.

"When I went home [to Ottawa] in the summer, there was a strawberry patch around the corner from my house," Roy said. "So I'd bike over there. We didn't have a lot of money. You had to make your own, and I worked in the patch.

"I'd bike every morning at about 6 a.m., do my work and go train afterward. It was a fun experience when you were 18. They didn't pay much, whatever minimum wage, not more than about six bucks [an hour]. But it was a sweet, little old lady you worked for and it made for an interesting summer."

Roy's account specializes in comical use of hashtags, the words following the "#" sign that are used to search tweets. Some recent Roy hashtags included #sikswag (when he got some new equipment), #keeprollingboys (when offering congratulations to the Bills), and #dropthebeat (on his pregame music choices).

"He's classic, so funny," Adam said. "His Twitter is 'Roysie' in a nutshell. It's not overboard. That's him. That's who he is."

"I like waking up and seeing some of the things he puts up," added winger Nathan Gerbe (@NathanGerbe42). "It's all good. He does it for all the same reasons of getting the fans involved. It's a pretty good thing if you use it the right way."

Roy often puts pictures on his account and also linked his Twitter to a pair of YouTube videos he did with Gong Show Gear, a hockey apparel company that did a sort of "Cribs" episode with Roy's sprawling summer home in Muskoka, Ont.

The videos spotlighted Roy's workout gym and kitchen, his cars, boat dock and the master bedroom he had built for his parents in the house.

"I got a lot of feedback on Twitter about being a family guy because of the bedrooms, so that's good," said a smiling Roy. "I thank everybody for that."

The Sabres' current Twitter list includes Roy, Gerbe (roughly 7,300 followers), Adam (5,100) and Marc-Andre Gragnani (who has 4,600 at @Grags17). In addition to Foligno (@marcusfoligno), several Sabres prospects have Twitter accounts.

Adam is a proud Newfoundlander and has that point at the top of his profile. But a lot of his tweets center on the playoff fortunes of the Detroit Tigers and the surprising 4-0 start of the Detroit Lions.

The explanation?

"My dad is from Windsor, Ont. [across the international bridge and tunnel from Detroit], so I spent my entire summers there," Adam said. "So I'm kind of brainwashed with Detroit everything."

Gerbe used his Twitter feed last month to get suggestions on what kind of dog he should buy.

"I got hundreds of suggestions, hundreds," he said. "We'll see. I'm not worried about it until a little later in life but it was something I thought would be fun to get the fans involved with and to see what they think I should be walking around with.

"I wanted to go on Twitter to give the fans updates, to show them I'm excited to be part of their community in Buffalo."

Twitter trouble

Stafford was a fan favorite on Twitter a couple of years ago, often espousing his love of music and Chipotle Mexican Grill.

But he let the cat out of the bag about a tough day saying goodbye to a teammate in 2009. Media and fans following quickly figured out a trade had gone down, and Stafford deleted his account shortly after Daniel Paille went to Boston. He isn't rejoining the pack.

"I was one of the originals, but it's just getting a little too big and out of control for me," said a laughing Stafford. "I enjoy reading some other guys' stuff and getting some up-to-date news. But I don't really have much to say anymore."

The Stafford situation shows some of the pitfalls athletes have run into on Twitter.

In 2009, Kevin Love of the NBA's Minnesota Timberwolves (@KevinLove) tweeted that Kevin McHale was out as the team's coach. Problem was the team had not announced it yet. During the current baseball season, Florida Marlins outfielder Logan Morrison (@LoMoMarlins) — who calls himself a "Twittaholic" in his bio — was sent to Triple-A despite 17 home runs.

Morrison has grieved the demotion. Most observers believe it was partly related to some lewd tweets on his account, which has more than 70,000 followers.

League-wide craze

In the NHL, general managers Scott Howsom of Columbus (@GMScottHowsom) and Mike Gillis of Vancouver (@GMMikeGillis) have Twitter accounts. Toronto Maple Leafs coach Ron Wilson (@coachrw63) just opened an account last weekend, and his first tweets were to advocate for hybrid icing.

The most-followed NHL twitter account belongs to Washington star Alexander Ovechkin (@ovi8) with more than 212,000 followers. By far the most popular, however, is @BizNasty2point0, which belongs to a fringe player, Phoenix enforcer Paul Bissonnette. It's an irreverent view into an athlete's life with constant chatter with fans. He has more than 140,000 followers.

Capgeek.com, the site known mostly for salary information, maintains a nearly definitive list of NHL players, executives and media on Twitter.

So many people are listed, the league announced a social media policy last month. Coaches, GMs and other front office staff are banned from tweeting on game days, starting at 11 a.m. and continuing through postgame media obligations. Players are banned from two hours before the game.

The policy also warned that any use of Twitter critical of the sport, league, another club or game officials could subject users to discipline.

Who's next?

A informal Twitter poll run by The News last week saw fans cast a landslide in favor of Patrick Kaleta as the Sabre they'd most like to see join Twitter.

The Angola native, however, has no such plans. He doesn't even have a Facebook account, and that's pretty rare for a 20-something these days.

"I mostly stay away from that stuff," Kaleta said. "I know my buddies have it and tell me the funny stuff, but I stay away.

"When we got the paper on it [from the league], I read the top part of it and it didn't apply to me. My foundation [HITS] has Facebook."

"To each is own," Roy said. "If you want to do it, you can. It can be fun. It's something I like. It may not be for everybody."

So expect to learn more about life on the road and life in the game from those players who do take part. As for the dog question, Adam had an answer for the 5-foot-5 Gerbe.

Said Adam: "My answer was get one that was hopefully not bigger than him."

Duff lands a spot on Sabres' broadcast roster

When Sylvester slides over to do play-by-play, Duff will fill hosting duties

Greg Connors

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

Rick Jeanneret and Harry Neale will be stay-at-home broadcasters for a good portion of the Sabres' road schedule, including this week's two opening games in Europe. As announced in July, Jeanneret and Neale will call just 18 road games, and 39 of the 41 home games. Jeanneret, in his 40th season with the team, is cutting back on his schedule as a transitional step toward retiring.

Kevin Sylvester and Danny Gare have been paired as the second broadcast team, and are scheduled to do 22 road games and one at home. Sylvester, of course, is host of the team's pregame, postgame and intermission shows. For the 23 games when he slides over to the play-by-play microphone, a new face will be seen doing the hosting duties: Brian Duff from the NHL Network.

Duff, 40, is starting his fifth season with the network, where he appears on the program "On the Fly." He has had various broadcasting roles with the Toronto Maple Leafs, Calgary Flames and Edmonton Oilers.

Hockey and broadcasting were two of Duff's passions while growing up east of Toronto, in Whitby, Ont. His mother was a Sabres fan, so Duff spent plenty of time listening to Jeanneret's voice on the radio. He became a huge fan.

"I would bet that I wouldn't have to look too deep into my archive and I could find some cassette tapes I made of some of Rick's great calls from when I was probably 8 or 10 years old," Duff said.

How did his mom become enamored with the Sabres up there in Maple Leafs country?

"She was a Leafs fan, she tells me, up until their final championship [in 1967]. After that, things started to get a bit lean as they traded off their best assets. With Punch Imlach's connection, she just decided she would follow Punch's new venture in Buffalo, and I think she just instantly became -- like everybody else in this market -- a fan of Gilbert Perreault."

Duff, who earned a broadcasting diploma from Mount Royal College in Calgary, is a familiar face on the Canadian airwaves. In addition to his NHL work, he also was a broadcaster on the National Lacrosse League's Game of the Week last season, which included some Buffalo Bandits games. He hopes to return to that role this winter.

Duff spent a good deal of time around the team during training camp. And he has spent enough time around NHL teams to know that there is a new atmosphere around First Niagara Center this season, a raising of expectations and quickening of pulses under new owner Terry Pegula.

"It goes beyond just the team," Duff said. "I think they're trying to do it right in every aspect of the business. You get the same vibe that the city has about its team, when you are around the employees who are working here around the clock, basically. You get the vibe that things are changing, that things are as good as they've ever been, from a morale and attitude standpoint.

"I'm only basing it on a few weeks and I'm not here full-time, so I might be overstating it a bit, but it certainly seems like they are pushing all the right buttons in every area, to make it all on par with what they are trying to accomplish with the team."

Short takes

- As in recent seasons, the Sabres broadcast will be simulcast on television and WGR Radio. There are 10 Sabres games scheduled to be televised on Versus, which early in January will be renamed the NBC Sports Network. Up to two games will be carried on NBC.
- Digital cable customers of Time Warner or Verizon FiOS can sample the NHL Center Ice package during an 18-day free preview, from Oct. 6 to 23. Center Ice is an out-of-market subscription package that shows up to 40 live games per week.
- There is still no resolution to the stalemate between Madison Square Garden and the Dish Network, meaning MSG is not available to Dish viewers. DirecTV, Time Warner Cable and Verizon FiOS are the options for MSG in the Western New York market.

Down on the farm, the Amerks are back

Sabres University extends East on the Thruway as Rochester will field prospect-laden roster

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 8, 2011

They're calling it Sabres University and Ron Rolston is the professor.

Rolston, the first-year coach of the Rochester Americans, has a skilled team as the Sabres and the Amerks are reunited again after four years apart. There will be plenty of teaching opportunities on a roster filled with Buffalo prospects.

"The organization has been first-class and this is a great situation," Rolston said this week by phone. "All of the players on the team are excited on a daily basis to get better. They want to grow and develop as players. That's exciting as a coach to have that level of enthusiasm throughout your team."

Rolston, hired over the summer from the U.S. Developmental Team, makes his debut as a professional coach after a long career in the college and amateur ranks. The Amerks open the season Saturday night in Hamilton and the home opener is Oct. 13 in Blue Cross Arena against Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

Sabres owner Terry Pegula purchased the Amerks in July and will be flying in dozens of alumni for the home opener, just as he did on Fan Appreciation Night in Buffalo in April. And just like the Sabres did, the Amerks personally delivered season tickets to fans during training camp. Rolston was part of the groups and was impressed by the enthusiasm about Rochester being back with Buffalo.

"It was an attitude that was everywhere," he said. "Every stop we had, the first thing you heard was how happy people were to be back in Buffalo, especially with Terry Pegula's ownership. They're excited about the resources and what they're going to put in the program here. There's a good buzz."

"This is what every NHL team wants, an affiliate that's close by," said winger Marcus Foligno. "And I think that's what you want when you're in a position to be called up too."

Rolston got things started in September by coaching the Sabres to the championship of the Traverse City Prospects Tournament and several of those players will be in Rochester.

"He was a great teacher. He was exactly what I expected, and more," said Foligno. "We got right from the get-go what he was trying to teach us, the development skills, getting us ready for main camp, and that's what we're going to expect all year in Rochester. We're looking forward to it."

"It was good for me to see the players in the organization and get a feel for them, even the ones not signed or just trying out with us," Rolston said. "All the players there were very focused in winning a championship. It's a prospects tournament and not the [AHL] Calder Cup but anytime you can win with a

group of guys, you have to do a lot of things right. You have to do a lot to win hockey games, be detailed and that carries over on a daily basis."

Foligno and former No. 1 pick Zack Kassian are the marquee names on the Rochester prospect list. They formed a dominant line with Luke Adam in Michigan that could get reunited in the AHL, although Adam is starting the season with the Sabres.

"Marcus and Zack are both big strong bodies, skate well and have great stick skills," Rolston said. "There's a lot of promise and potential in both but they know there's a lot of work to be done in their development. Rochester is a perfect place for them to start."

While Foligno and Kassian will get plenty of attention, the Amerks actually figure to be a stronger team from the net out. AHL veteran Drew MacIntyre and Williamsville native David Leggio, who won 22 games last year in Portland, will share the goaltending duties. Leggio has been nursing a concussion and may be replaced Saturday by Jeff Jakaitis while MacIntyre is in Europe with the Sabres.

They will play behind a strong defense corps featuring prospects like T.J. Brennan, Brayden McNabb, Dennis Persson, Drew Schiestel and Alex Biega.

"That group of defensemen held up pretty well [during NHL training camp]," said Sabres coach Lindy Ruff. "You can throw out the 1-2 big mistakes because just the battle and composure they showed inside the games should bode well for the American League. If you have a good defense, it starts there."

Offense is a question mark, especially with Adam and Matt Ellis currently with the Sabres.

The Amerks lost a lot of offense from last year's Portland team, both up front and with the promotion of defenseman Marc-Andre Gagnani to the NHL. Then veteran Ales Kotalik declined his AHL assignment. They'll need Kassian and Foligno to score and the same goes for prospect Corey Tropp. Veterans like Derek Whitmore, Colin Stuart and Michael Ryan, back after three seasons out of the organization, need to contribute.

"We're pretty young up there and guys are going to have to step up," Rolston said. "We have two players overseas with Buffalo. You may not get them back and you have to plan for that and go with what you have."

The schedule is different in Portland for Sabres prospects because Rochester is actually in the AHL's Western Conference. So there are road trips to places like Texas, Oklahoma City and Abbotsford, B.C. And there are some weekends with three games in three nights.

"That will be different for guys from Portland," he said. "Last year they didn't really play outside their division. So there's more travel. And especially for a young team, they have to get experience and learn from older guys how to take care of themselves."

Vanek leads Sabres to 4-1 win vs Ducks in Finland

Associated Press

October 7, 2011

HELSINKI (AP)—Thomas Vanek scored two power-play goals, leading the Buffalo Sabres past the Anaheim Ducks 4-1 in their NHL opener Friday.

Vanek, the top goal-scorer for Buffalo the last five seasons, set the tone with his first goal at 4:02 in the first period. Ville Leino of Finland, playing in his former home stadium, then made it 2-0 on his debut for the Sabres.

Nate Guenin replied for Anaheim in the second period, but Vanek helped restore the Sabres' two-goal lead by setting up Jason Pominville.

Vanek then scored his second of the night later in the period. Pominville also had two assists, as did Luke Adam.

"The puck was bouncing for us a bit tonight and we played a good first period with the two-goal lead," Vanek said. "We tried to get pucks to the net and it paid off early on."

Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff was happy with the way Leino played on a line with Brad Boyes and Tyler Ennis.

"Leino did a heck of a play, taking the puck from his own skates before scoring," Ruff said.

Doing so in his first game for a new club was nothing new for Leino, who dominated the ice for Finnish team Jokerit in the same arena before leaving for the NHL.

"I have done it for every team where I've played, and was lucky to do it again," Leino said. "It was cool to do it here in Finland."

Anaheim coach Randy Carlyle felt his team had allowed Buffalo an easy game.

"We did not do a very good job of transferring the puck from our defense to the forwards, and had to spend the first half of the game too much in our own end," he said.

"We played more as individuals in parts of the game versus a team."

Anaheim hit the post twice in the last period on shots by Francois Beauchemin and Luka Sbisa.

Sabres Top Ducks 4-1 in Helsinki

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 7, 2011

The Sabres beat the Ducks 4-1 in their season opener in Helsinki, Finland. Thomas Vanek notched the first goal of the season for Buffalo on the power play at 4:02 in the first period. Assists go to Luke Adam and Jason Pominville. The man advantage came with with Anaheim center Saku Koivu in the box for hooking. Ville Leino got on the board next sending home a feed from Andrej Sekera. Brad Boyes got the second assist on the goal that came at 7:36.

Both teams started the second with four skaters. Buffalo's Robyn Regehr and Anaheim's George Parros got involved in a minor kerfuffle that sent both parties to the box. Anaheim got on the board at 4:32 in the second as Maxime Macenauer won a draw back to defenseman Nate Guenin who fired a shot home for his first NHL goal. Buffalo would come right back, though. Jason Pominville got his first goal of the season at 5:45 with assists going to Thomas Vanek and Luke Adam. Vanek would get back on the scoresheet. On the powerplay at 11:59 he was battling in the crease and banked one off an Anaheim defender for his second of the day. Pominville and Christian Ehrhoff were credited with the assists.

It was an uneventful third period with no goals from either side. Anaheim controlled most of the play in the Buffalo end as the Sabres focused on defense and preserving their lead.

Pominville head of Buffalo's home-grown leadership

Corey Masisak

NHL.com

October 7, 2011

HELSINKI -- The "Residents of Pominville" have reason to rejoice before the season even begins.

Jason Pominville was named captain of the Buffalo Sabres at a private team function Thursday, one day before the team faces the Anaheim Ducks in the 2011 Compuware NHL Premiere at Hartwall Arena (1 p.m. ET, TSN2).

"I think it is a great honor. I think it is going to be a good challenge, and I'm up to the task. I'm definitely excited about it," Pominville said. "I think you have a lot of different type of characters on the team, and I'm not the only guy who is going to step up and say things. I think I might be more of a 1-on-1 guy, just kind of going up to the guy and talking to him.

"I don't know if the yelling and screaming method still works in today's game, but there will probably be a little of both with the team. Hopefully we won't have to see any of that, but if we do, we have certain guys who can do it in different ways."

Pominville has posted five consecutive seasons of at least 20 goals and 50 points for the Sabres, including 22 goals and 52 points last season in 73 games. A measure of his consistency is those 73 contests were the first time he hadn't played in all 82 for Buffalo since his rookie season in 2005-06.

The Sabres were without a captain at the end of last season after trading Craig Rivet, who spent two-plus years in the role, to Columbus.

This also is not the first time Pominville has held the captaincy -- he was captain in March and April 2008 as the captaincy was rotated on a monthly basis during 2007-08 season.

"I think at the end it was an easy decision," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "Jason prepares himself well for games. He's a consummate pro. He's well respected amongst his teammates, and I think the way he plays speaks for itself."

Also named to the leadership group Thursday were alternate captains Thomas Vanek, Paul Gaustad, Drew Stafford and Derek Roy.

Those five players, plus goaltender Ryan Miller, have played together since the 2006-07 season, and four of them (Pominville, Roy, Gaustad and Miller) have been together since their days in the American Hockey League.

The Sabres spent lots of money this summer to acquire new players to complement their "core group," but this was a signal that Buffalo still will rely on those players a great deal.

"We kept it to that same core -- it is their time," Ruff said. "I expect a lot out of them, being first on the ice and obviously setting an example -- a leader is someone who players want to follow.

"We spent time talking with Darcy (Regier, GM) in management, and Terry (Pegula, owner) was involved, but we felt this was the right move for this group that has grown up together -- that this should be their team."

Sabres, fans are subject of documentary

Greg Sukiennik

ESPN.com Page 2

October 7, 2011

There's every indication this could be a memorable NHL season in Buffalo, where the Sabres have suddenly amassed one of the league's highest payrolls and lofty expectations to match.

That could, in turn, make for a memorable film for Mary Wall, who will spend the season following the team and its fans for a documentary.

Wall, a native of Hamburg, N.Y., just south of Buffalo, works as a production assistant on the NBC comedy "The Office." She's also a Sabres fan, dating to the days when players such as Hall of Famer Gilbert Perreault and Mike Foligno patrolled the ice at the old Memorial Auditorium. She plans to follow the team all season and tell the stories of people who love their city and their hockey team.

The Sabres have been in business for 41 years and have never won the Stanley Cup -- though they've come close. Buffalo has been in business for centuries and is trying to get back a measure of the prosperity it once enjoyed. Wall sees parallels between the city's struggles to rebuild and the team's quest for the Cup -- and the resilience both have shown.

"Frankly, if the Sabres won a Stanley Cup, I couldn't make this documentary any more. I had to make it before they won the Cup, and if it happens while I'm shooting, that would be delightful," she said in an email.

Casting calls were held in August at locations around the city. Shooting will also take place on the Sabres' season-opening European road trip and in other NHL cities where ex-Buffalo residents congregate. While Wall isn't ready to share the fans' stories yet, she can sense the anticipation.

"I was definitely not surprised by how much people love the team. I've spent enough time in Buffalo to know that," Wall said. "However, there are a lot of people with Sabres tattoos. A lot."

Hopes have soared on America's North Coast since Terry Pegula bought the Sabres in February and uttered the most famous words in franchise history not spoken by broadcaster Rick Jeanneret: "Starting today, the Buffalo Sabres' reason for existence will be to win a Stanley Cup."

As if on cue, the Sabres, who started the 2010-11 season dreadfully, surged to a playoff berth and battled the second-seeded Flyers in the opening round before losing in seven games.

Wall had experienced this kind of run before, in 2006, when a roster bereft of big-name stars came within 20 minutes of the Stanley Cup finals.

"Everyone talked about it everywhere, but it wasn't just talk. There was this electric energy that ran through the city with it," Wall said. "And then they lost. Yet fans were still waiting (at the airport) late into the night to welcome the team home and thank them for a great season. They had just lost! That particularly spoke to me about the sense of community and support in Buffalo. People stick through the tough times together and keep hoping."

That same feeling came back even stronger last spring, Wall said.

"I was visiting my family at Easter and felt that same energy around the team that I felt in 2006, but it was a very focused energy," she said. "With Pegula coming on board, people were (and are) so convinced that we will win the Stanley Cup, if not this season, in the next few years."

What's different this time?

For starters, under previous ownership, the Sabres were sellers at the trade deadline and on the free-agent market. General manager Darcy Regier has made up for lost time and lost players with a vengeance, trading for Flames defenseman Robyn Regehr and signing Canucks defenseman Christian Ehrhoff and Flyers forward Ville Leino to front-loaded, cap-friendly contracts. Former Calder Trophy winner Tyler Myers is locked up for the next eight seasons. Forward Drew Stafford, who blossomed as a scorer last season, is signed through the next four.

Let's put it this way: Before Pegula arrived, it would have been highly unlikely for the Sabres to trade a fourth-round draft pick under any circumstances, let alone for negotiating rights with a soon-to-be free agent, as they did with Ehrhoff. Fans would have already been fretting about keeping Myers. And jet-powered flying pigs would have spun laps around Niagara Square before the Sabres had the highest payroll in the NHL -- a distinction they held through most of training camp.

Billionaires simply do not drop out of the sky in Buffalo, let alone billionaires who once had season tickets at The Aud. But here was a man who cried at his introductory news conference when he saw Perreault in the audience and told fans accustomed to penny pinching, "If I want to make some money, I'll go drill a gas well."

Pegula backed it up, opening the checkbook for the free-agent spending spree and plowing millions into facility improvements. Those investments would make headlines in any NHL city. But in Buffalo, it has fans downright giddy.

As one fan wrote during an online chat with team president Ted Black, "Do you have any idea how stoked the fans are for this year? It's never been like this." Another fan wrote "Thanks for all you guys are doing here. It means so much to our city."

So Wall isn't the only one hoping for a Hollywood ending to her documentary.

"Maybe more than what (the Sabres) mean to Buffalo is what they are to the residents, and I think the team is something to believe in and to rally around," Wall said.

Sabres Arrive Two Hours Late in Berlin

Allison Jagow

WGRZ

October 7, 2011

BERLIN, GERMANY (WGRZ) - Sports reporter Adam Benigni has been following the Sabres throughout their Europe trip. The team arrived in Berlin Friday night, two hours late.

The arrival time there was 3 a.m. which is 9 p.m. local time. The Sabres morning skate is cancelled, due to the late arrival.

They'll play the LA Kings at the O2 World Arena at 2 p.m., and then fly home to Buffalo right after the game.

They'll arrive home early Sunday morning.

Adam continues his coverage from Europe tomorrow. You can follow his tweets on Twitter. Just search for the hashtag #Sabres Europe.

Sabres Broadcasters Call Helsinki Game from Buffalo

Matt Pitts

WGRZ

October 7, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WGRZ) -- Broadcasting a game while not actually there can be tricky. For a seasoned pro like Sabres Play-By-Play announcer Rick Jeanneret, who's done it before, it was just another day in hockey.

Friday, the Buffalo Sabres opened the regular season with a 4-1 win against the Anaheim Ducks in Helsinki, Finland. Jeanneret, along with Harry Neale and Rob Ray, called the shots, goals, and saves from right here in Buffalo at the First Niagara Center. All they had to do, was tell viewers what they saw on a TV monitor in the booth from which they normally call Sabres home games from.

Jeanneret was O.K. with not going overseas, and said this is a common practice in broadcasting games from Europe in the U.S. "There's a lot of logistics that were involved that were going to make it difficult. It's very expensive to do."

He's actually done this before. A few years ago, Jeanneret broadcasted a Sabres game on WBEN Radio from the station's studios because he couldn't travel due to bad weather.

He admits that it can be challenging to do when you only see what the cameras allow you to see. "You don't have the opportunity to look around and see what might be happening behind the play or ahead of the play, so you are limited to a certain extent."

When asked how to overcome these limitations, he has a rather humorous response. "When in doubt, lie!"

Team, fans ready for Sabres season

Nalina Shapiro

WIVB

October 7, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Sabres are excited and ready to go, that's what a spokesperson in Finland told News 4 Friday morning on the phone.

The team might be thousands of miles away, but that doesn't mean fans are any less excited.

When it was still called the HSBC Arena, new Sabres owner Terry Pegula said, "Starting today, the Buffalo Sabres reason for existence will be to win a Stanley Cup."

Starting Friday, the Sabres will begin their quest for hockey's top prize. At 1 p.m. they will face off in Helsinki, Finland against the Anaheim Ducks.

"Well we've been over here since Sunday morning, we landed in Germany. We're obviously in Finland right now. Things have been great, the team is really excited to finally play a meaningful regular season game," said Sabres spokesman Mike Gilbert.

"I'm sure the fans back in Buffalo are excited to get this season underway," Gilbert said.

Saying the fans are excited might be an understatement. Overnight in downtown Buffalo, they were pumped.

The Sabres haven't made it out of the first round of the playoffs the last two seasons, but this year, fans think they can go all the way.

Sabres fan Mark Szymczak said, "This owner has got all of Buffalo motivated. He's not in it for the money he's in it to win it."

Sabres fan Joe Lucarelli said, "It's cup or nothing, Terry Pegula's doing a great job, it's cup or nothing. Come on guys."

Fans say they feel good about new additions like blueliners Robyn Regehr, Christian Ehroff and center Ville Leino. The team also has a new captain winger Jason Pominville, who will be leading the team, hopefully to the top.

Saturday, when the Sabres take on the LA Kings in Berlin, the First Niagara Center will probably be packed. The team is inviting you to come party at Pucktoberfest. There will be European beer, food and entertainment. That starts at 11:30 a.m. and at 2 p.m. you can head inside and watch the game on the jumbotron.

Top concussion doc says Rick Martin case based on thin science

Randy Starkman

Toronto Star

October 7, 2011

It was hailed this week as a significant discovery on the concussion front, the news that former Buffalo Sabres great Rick Martin was suffering from a neurodegenerative disease linked to repeated brain trauma when he died of a heart attack last March.

The news hook to the story was that Martin was the first non-enforcer to have his brain examined and show signs of chronic traumatic encephalopathy (CTE).

“Rick Martin’s case shows us that even hockey players who don’t engage in fighting are at risk for CTE, likely because of the repetitive brain trauma players receive throughout their career,” said Chris Nowinski, co-coordinator of Boston University Center for the Study of Traumatic Encephalopathy, in a press release. “We hope the decision makers at all levels of hockey consider this finding as they continue to make adjustments to hockey to make the game safer for participants.”

But top Canadian neurosurgeon Dr. Charles Tator, one of the leading voices on the concussion issue, believes Boston University researchers are “grandstanding” and basing their views on thin science. He said more in-depth research is needed to advance our understanding and, hopefully, treatment and prevention of this type of brain degeneration.

“Unfortunately, the Rick Martin case was poorly documented,” said Tator. “For example, we don’t have a clear idea about how many concussions he did have. We know he had that huge hit, but did he have 10, did he have 20?”

“It’s incomplete, it’s fragmented, we need the details. They didn’t do their homework before they rushed to have a press release. . . . We need more science and less grandstanding.”

Tator said the fact Martin wasn’t a fighter may not be that significant.

“They made a big deal out of that he wasn’t an enforcer, wasn’t a fighter, but fighting only accounts for 10 per cent of concussions maximum,” said the founder of ThinkFirst Canada.

Boston University did not respond to a request for comment.

The Bedford (Mass.) Veterans Administration Medical Center, in collaboration with Boston University and the Sports Legacy Institute, has the largest CTE “brain bank” in the world with the brains of nearly 100 former pro athletes and promises from 500 more to donate theirs when they die.

Nowinski, a former university football player and pro wrestler with a concussion history of his own, is a driving force behind the initiative and was featured prominently Wednesday night in a CBC documentary on The National concerning Martin and CTE.

It was reported that Martin only had “stage 2” of CTE and exhibited no outward signs of brain injury at age 59, while most cases at his age had advanced to stage 3 or 4. But Nowinski told the CBC that the disease would have taken its toll on Martin if he’d lived longer.

“Who knows how quickly and who knows how badly, but he would have eventually developed dementia had he lived long enough,” Nowinski said. “No question.”

But Tator vehemently disagrees.

“Nobody in the world has enough information to make that statement,” said Tator. “But the CBC accepted everything he said at face value.”

Tator pointed out that much more research needs to be done before any conclusions can be drawn.

“When you hear Boston University talk about this, you think you put on skates you’re going to get CTE, which isn’t the case at all,” he said. “This almost serves just to scare people away from playing sports. We want people to play sports, we want them to play safely, we don’t want to turn everybody into couch potatoes where they just watch brains being sliced on television.”

Tator is part of the sport concussion study being performed at the Krembil Neuroscience Centre at Toronto Western Hospital. They’ve examined four brains of CFL players who had a history of concussions and found CTE in two of them. Tator said they are also interested in obtaining the brains of professional hockey players and have spoken with some leagues.

Dr. James Kissick, team doctor for the national sledge hockey team and former team physician for the Ottawa Senators, also preached caution in terms of drawing any conclusions at this point.

“I think in terms of research, when we have one subject in a criteria you have to be careful about making too many inferences from it,” Kissick said.

Ducks don't do much right in season-opening loss

Jeff Miller

The Orange County Register

October 8, 2011

HELSINKI, FINLAND – Coach Randy Carlyle's emphasis on starting strong didn't translate Friday in this foreign land, the Ducks losing their season opener to Buffalo, 4-1, at Hartwall Areena.

This was a night when the big line didn't produce, Finland legend Teemu Selanne didn't score and goaltender Jonas Hiller couldn't do enough.

Thomas Vanek scored twice for the Sabres and also assisted on a third goal. Teammate Jason Pominville had a goal and two assists.

Hiller returned after appearing in only three games after the All-Star break last season because of vertigo symptoms. The Sabres pressured him throughout, particularly in the second period when they had 16 shots on goal.

Hiller finished with 21 saves. He didn't face a shot in the third period as the Ducks pressed the Sabres but couldn't solve goalie Ryan Miller.

Down 2-0 after one period, the Ducks cut their deficit in half when Nate Guenin scored at 4:32 of the second.

The goal was the first of Guenin's career. He was appearing in his 18th NHL game. Maxime Macenauer, who was making his NHL debut, assisted on the score.

But just barely a minute later, Buffalo restored its two-goal lead when Pominville scored.

The Ducks had an opportunity to tighten things again early in the third period but couldn't score on an extended power play, 44 seconds of which was a two-man advantage.

After the game, the Ducks were scheduled to fly to Sweden, where they'll play the New York Rangers on Saturday. The game starts at 10 a.m. Pacific time.

Ducks Buffaloed in Helsinki as teams put their best Finns forward

Lisa Dillman

Los Angeles Times

October 8, 2011

Reporting from Calgary, Canada—

The celebratory homecoming for one Finn could not have gone better or more smoothly.

Not only did he score a goal but his team emerged with a one-sided victory in its NHL opener Friday in Helsinki, Finland.

It was Ville Leino and the Buffalo Sabres doing the scoring and the winning, not national hero Teemu Selanne and the Ducks. Buffalo, behind three power-play goals, defeated the Ducks, 4-1, at Hartwall Arena. Thomas Vanek led the Sabres with two goals and an assist.

This was the arena with a big mural on the outside of Selanne, the favorite son of Finland, who, at age 41, was returning home to play an NHL regular-season game for the first time.

But the Ducks' big scoring threats, including Selanne, were silent, including a five-on-three advantage for 39 seconds in the third period. The lone Duck goal came from defenseman Nate Guenin, at 4:32 of the second period, to cut the Sabres' lead to 2-1.

It was set up by a nice win off the faceoff by center Maxime Macenauer. For Guenin, it was his first NHL goal and the first point for Macenauer.

Mike Richards stars as Kings beat Rangers in Sweden

Helene Elliott

Los Angeles Times

October 8, 2011

The Kings' expectations soared when the team acquired center Mike Richards from Philadelphia in June. L.A. has reason for more optimism after his impressive debut Friday.

Richards scored the tying goal and set up the winner as the Kings opened the season with a 3-2 overtime victory over the New York Rangers at the Ericsson Globe arena in Stockholm.

With the Kings on the power play, Richards took a pass from Anze Kopitar and fed Jack Johnson, who had driven low on the left side. Johnson spoiled Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist's homecoming with a quick shot four minutes eight seconds into sudden-death play.

"A four-on-three is the biggest prime opportunity in hockey," Johnson told NHL.com. "We had drawn up something and were waiting for an opportunity to drive through."

Richards brought the Kings even at 2-2 at 15:01 of the third period when he redirected a pass from Brad Richardson, who was moved up to the second line because Dustin Penner (lower-body injury) could not play. Richardson went wide and confused the Rangers' defense before finding Richards.

"It was nice to finally get started," Richards told NHL.com. "For me, there was a lot of anticipation to get this started."

Dustin Brown, the right wing on that line, got the second assist.

"I thought they played well," Kings Coach Terry Murray told the Associated Press. "They were energized, and they did a good job overall in their checking responsibilities."

Each team scored in the first period. Kopitar, silencing questions about his recovery from ankle surgery, put the Kings ahead with a one-timer at 10:51. He was set up on a backhand pass from Justin Williams after a Rangers turnover. The Rangers tied it at 15:22 on a bad-angle goal past Jonathan Quick by defenseman Ryan Callahan, who was among the game's most effective players and took 11 of the Rangers' 26 shots.

Rangers center Brad Richards, who spurned a free-agent offer from the Kings over the summer, played a key role in giving New York a 2-1 lead at 10:28 of the third period. He won a battle along the end boards and sent the puck in front, where Brandon Dubinsky swatted at it before Marian Gaborik prodded it home.

Mike Richards brought the Kings even, and Johnson produced their only power-play goal in five tries after Rangers defenseman Ryan McDonagh was sent off for tripping Willie Mitchell 2:51 into overtime.

Afterward, the NHL fined Rangers defenseman Mats Zuccarello the maximum \$2,500 but did not suspend him for boarding Kyle Clifford in the first period. A minor penalty was called on the play.

The Kings will conclude the NHL's Premiere Series Saturday against the Buffalo Sabres at Berlin's O2 World Arena. According to the Kings' website, Jonathan Bernier will start in goal. FS West will televise the game at 11 a.m. PDT.

Kings' power play comes through in nick of time

Shawn P. Roarke

NHL.com

October 7, 2011

STOCKHOLM, Sweden -- After falling short too many times last season -- and too many times in regulation of Friday's game against the New York Rangers -- the Los Angeles Kings finally found success on the power play in overtime and rode it to a season-opening 3-2 victory.

Defenseman Jack Johnson got the goal in the final minute of overtime after Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist made saves on Anze Kopitar's shot from the point and Mike Richards at the side of the net, but he couldn't stop Johnson as the Kings won at Globe Arena in the 2011 Compuware NHL Premiere opener for both teams.

The Kings were 0-for-4 on the man advantage in regulation.

"Obviously, it was great to get that goal on the power play," Johnson said. "I didn't think we were that frustrated on the power play even though we didn't score. We moved it around pretty good."

The goal -- and the way it was scored -- was just what coach Terry Murray wanted to see. He wants shots from the top of the umbrella and then wants his forwards moving into holes and creating matchup problems, and that's just what happened on the winning play.

"That was great composure by Kopitar hanging onto the puck and looking for the low play with Richards," Murray said. "That play comes from Jack Johnson staying (in) on the pinch and not driving in and out."

The Sabres naming Jason Pominville captain is a sign that the forward -- who has grown up in the organization -- is ready to take on even more responsibility. [READ MORE >](#)

Even with Friday's power-play glory, it is hard to forget the team missed on its four chances in regulation. It was a bitter reminder of last season's struggles, when the Kings were 21st in the League at 16.1 percent.

Many around the team, including Murray, believes the man-advantage struggles hurt the team in the standings and, ultimately, played a big part in their first-round playoff loss.

This summer, the club added some pieces they believe will help in that department, mainly Richards and Simon Gagne.

Los Angeles received the game's first three power plays, but could not score on any of them. Success on just one of those opportunities would have put some distance on a Rangers team that clearly was struggling early on, managing just four shots in the first period.

The Kings got a fourth power play with just 2:03 remaining, but once again came up empty -- creating just two viable chances with the game tied at 2-2. Advantage No. 5 -- an offensive-zone penalty by Ryan McDonough -- finally allowed the Kings to net the winner.

"Obviously, every single guy on the power play last year knows it wasn't good enough and it has to be better," Kopitar told NHL.com before the game. "It's going to take practice and it is going to take games. We know that some nights it's going to go good and some nights it is not going to go good. But we have to try to stay consistent with what we are doing and just go from there."

Patience may not be a huge commodity for the Kings. They need to get off to a fast start -- especially with the expectations being heaped upon them after a bold bounty of moves this summer. Man-advantage success will have to be a huge part of that team success.

"Last year we were not as consistent as we wanted to be, and at critical times in the season, it did not come through for us," Murray said. "We are working toward that kind of consistency and also an attitude where the younger guys are maturing and they recognize those critical moments and that it is time to take it to the next level."

Despite Friday's struggles, there are signs of hope for the Kings. They did generate some chances in the game and forced Lundqvist to be incredibly sharp. They also showed a willingness to get the puck back to the top of the team's umbrella system, which has been a point of emphasis in training camp.

"I want the puck on (Drew Doughty's) stick as much as possible and then you have a rotation with Kopitar and Mike Richards," Murray said earlier this week. "Both are great players that can shoot the puck and score. If we just get that done as a basic fundamental, then I think our power play has an opportunity to be a very effective power play."

The players believe this, as well.

They look at the players on the power play -- Doughty, Kopitar, Richards, Johnson, Gagne and Dustin Brown as the main components -- and know the talent is there.

"I think we have added some ingredients to that power play that will definitely help," defenseman Willie Mitchell told NHL.com. "It'll give it some confidence; some players that will be calm and say, 'Hey, we're fine. We have five Olympians on our power play.' It's going to score goals. It has to, right?"

The answer, the Kings say, is yes. It just may take some time.

"I think it's just getting everybody together," Richards told NHL.com. "Getting the chemistry with the people on the ice, I think that is the biggest thing. Power play and penalty kill wins a lot of games. We know that, and we have to put emphasis on both of them. Power play is not something that you can just X's and O's, you have to have to have people reading off each other and creating chemistry. You look at the best power plays and they have been together for years. We have some work to do, but at same time, we have the skill level and the players to do it."