



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Alfredsson set to return for Ottawa

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 11, 2011

Lindy Ruff didn't feel well Thursday, his voice gravelly as the Sabres' coach struggled through a bug of some sort. As much of a nuisance as the illness was, it's nothing compared to the suffering Daniel Alfredsson has inflicted on him.

The Ottawa captain is a legendary Sabre killer. He has 41 goals and 81 points in 80 career games against Buffalo. He's celebrated hat tricks and victories since coming into the NHL in 1995.

"He's been a real pain to us over the years," Ruff said in First Niagara Center. "He's a good player, and I still think he's a good player. If they get him back, they're getting a good piece back."

They're getting him back. Alfredsson is set to return to the Senators' lineup tonight in Buffalo, his first appearance since suffering a concussion Oct. 29.

"I'm expecting myself to be back and ready to go," Alfredsson told reporters in Ottawa. "I'm not going to be cautious. You've got to be aware at all times on the ice. I've said that before and it's the same. If you don't feel you're ready, then you shouldn't start playing again. I feel confident in my reaction time and whatnot, so I'll just try to play as normal."

The Senators could use the boost from their 38-year-old star, who has four goals and seven points in 10 games. They're 0-3-1 in their last four, including Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss at home to the Sabres. It's just the latest streak for the Sens, who followed a 1-5 start with six straight victories.

"We're just not sharp enough to get the wins," said center Jason Spezza, who has 13 goals and 26 points in his last 12 games in Buffalo. "We're not going to change what we're doing. It's not like early in the year when we felt like we had to rediscover what type of team we are. We know what type of team we are, but we just have to be a little bit better and execute a little bit better."

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The Sabres practiced with a full roster as Tyler Myers returned. The defenseman left Wednesday's session early after getting banged up during Tuesday night's 6-5 overtime victory over Winnipeg.

"It was a little maintenance, and it's calmed down a lot," Myers said. "I'm not worried about it at all."

Sabres left wing Tyler Ennis, who has been out since suffering a sprained ankle Oct. 22, also returned to the ice. He joined Jochen Hecht (concussion) prior to practice.

"They both skated for about 30 minutes," Ruff said. "In Tyler's case, no agility stuff, just basically lap skating."

The Senators, meanwhile, will be without agitator Chris Neil. The forward sprained his ankle during a 3-2 loss to the New York Rangers on Wednesday.

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The NHL has released the ballot for this season's All-Star Game, and four Sabres made the cut. Ryan Miller is among the 18 goaltenders nominated. Left wing Thomas Vanek and right wing Jason Pominville are on the list of 73 forwards. Myers is nominated along with 35 other defensemen.

Voting begins Monday at NHL.com/vote, and fans can also submit their selections by texting a player's last name to 81812. The All-Star Game will be held Jan. 29 in Ottawa.

Hockey game or chess match?

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 11, 2011

Jordan Leopold was among the hundreds of thousands of fans who tuned into a nationally televised game Wednesday night expecting to see hockey. Instead, he saw a chess match break out — a really, really boring chess match.

The Sabres' defenseman was among the countless people who spent Thursday wondering what effect the Tampa Bay-Philadelphia mess will have on the sport.

"We're a form of entertainment," Leopold said after preparing for tonight's game against Ottawa in First Niagara Center. "People pay money to come watch their favorite players score goals. I don't think the fans really want to watch 10 guys standing still."

That's exactly what folks saw in Tampa, though. Just 30 seconds into the game, Philadelphia defenseman Braydon Coburn got the puck at the left faceoff circle in the Flyers' zone. With the Lightning employing their 1-3-1 system — which features one player at the blue line, three at the red line and another at the far blue line — Pronger stood at the dot and waited for a forechecker.

And waited. And waited. And waited.

After 30 seconds, no one moved. As the fans booed, the refs blew the play dead, dropped the puck ... and watched the scenario repeat itself a few times.

"They have a set forecheck in the neutral zone, so we have a set breakout," Flyers coach Peter Laviolette said in his team's defense. "As soon as we get some pressure, we'll get into our outs. If they don't want us to stand there, they should come after us. Why are they going to just stand there?"

Penalties and power plays finally broke the stalemate during the second period, but by then many fans had switched channels, including Leopold.

"As a hockey fan, I was sitting there in a little bit of shock," he said. "To this point, hockey's been a pretty fluid game, except for that first period [Wednesday] night. You've got to go out and play hockey. Whatever strategies you use, that's called a game plan and you've got to stick to it. Of course, you don't like to see 10 people standing still."

Both teams stood their ground Thursday — "When we attack, we attack," Tampa coach Guy Boucher said. "When we defend, we defend" — while others took sides.

"It's not a lot of fun playing against them," said left wing Ville Leino, whose team has played the Lightning twice. "There's not much they're going to give, and there's not much they're going to do.

"We should be playing hockey, not just playing a system. Good players make plays and they do stuff. I think it's honorable to try and play hockey, and not just play the system."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff condoned the Lightning's approach, with a caveat.

"It's more pronounced than other teams, but there's probably 15 teams that play 1-3-1," Ruff said. "We play it on occasion. We like a couple different looks, though. That's his right to play whatever system he wants."

"But I think somewhere in there, there's an obligation to go get the puck if the other team has it. I believe that. ... What happened [Wednesday] night wasn't good for the game."

When the Senators visit tonight, the Sabres will indeed employ trap-style zone coverage. They practiced their 1-2-2 on Thursday, and the 1-3-1 will show up should they get a lead.

It will be different, however. While the Lightning had their "forechecking" forward stand at the blue line, the Sabres' first defender will pressure the puck carrier. He'll try to force a pass between the defenseman, then he'll try to trap the blue-liner who gets the pass in an attempt to create a turnover.

"It's a matter of are you going to pursue the puck or not," Leopold said. "That clearly wasn't the case, as you see watching the game. I was almost stunned to see that happen."

"The system they play, they just sit back and wait for you to make mistakes. It works out really well for them because there can be five guys steaming with speed, and you turn the puck over, they're going the other way on a short-handed break. That's the style of hockey they play, and you have to respect that. You have to play a chess game with them ..., and I've used that term before playing against them. It is a chess game, and you have to figure out how to get checkmate."

"[Wednesday] night in the first period was a pretty unique checkmate."

Pegula misses leadership opportunity

Bucky Gleason
The Buffalo News
November 11, 2011

Terry Pegula has the right to free speech, and the right to remain silent, like anyone else in this country. Broken down simply, he's a successful businessman who donated \$88 million to Penn State for a new arena and a Division I hockey program. He's a proud alumnus and football fan intent on giving back to the university.

And that's all, really.

He's not obligated to speak up about Penn State's decision to fire legendary football coach Joe Paterno and university president Graham Spanier any more than he's compelled to discuss his relationship with athletic director Tim Curley, one of two administrators charged with perjury in the child-molestation case.

Keeping quiet is certainly within Pegula's rights.

But is it right?

Pegula has been a leader in our community since he purchased the Sabres last February and began changing the culture in Buffalo. He instilled a level of confidence and hope and credibility that had been missing. He has been clear about his passion and his commitment to doing things the right way.

He's also the father of five. His older son played hockey, so he knows the importance of parents trusting others with children. Pegula has been a man of integrity since he arrived. By all accounts over the past year or so, he's a good person from a good family with the best intentions. And that has not changed.

But he had an opportunity to send a strong message after the Penn State scandal broke last weekend and instead waited five days to release a prepared statement. It's his decision, but he could have spoken out passionately against despicable acts and admonish the university.

Pegula shouldn't be expected to solve Penn State's problems, but he could have provided more insight given his attachment to the university and his relationship with Buffalo. Pegula was one of the first people who came to mind when the story broke, immediately after the alleged victims and Paterno. On Thursday, Pegula issued this statement:

"The events that are unfolding at Penn State University are deeply troubling and a matter of great concern to me and my wife Kim. As many have expressed, our primary concern is for the individuals and families who may have been victimized.

"Penn State's reputation has been severely tarnished. We are encouraged to see the University trustees have begun the process of restoring integrity and trust in the institution. This process will take a period of time and trust will need to be re-earned as a result of these recent disclosures.

"Penn State is supported by millions of students, alumni, faculty, staff and administrators. Our own support for Penn State and its hockey program is well known and will continue. We expect the University will carry out its educational mission with high standards and integrity."

Are you satisfied? Am I satisfied? I don't know. He addressed the issues, sort of. It's always better to hear emotion that comes with someone's voice.

Pegula declined interview requests that poured into the Sabres this week. His decision to keep quiet for a day or two, with the scandal unfolding around him, was understandable. Anyone could appreciate his need to digest an overwhelming situation before making a comment.

Perhaps he didn't want to say anything because Penn State had enough problems and he didn't feel it was his place. Or maybe he wanted to see how the school handled the controversy. Hey, I get it.

Understand, this isn't a media issue. It has nothing to do with having an exclusive interview or getting the story first. These days, a scoop lasts five minutes. Perhaps he could have answered a few questions and shared his thoughts with the people rather than issue a statement.

Was he shocked, like most people, when the story broke? Was he saddened, angry, worried, embarrassed or all of the above? Did he regret, knowing what he knows now, giving Penn State the money? Did he have different views as an alumnus, as a philanthropist, as a father?

What did he think of top aide Cliff Benson's connection to the Second Mile foundation that former Penn State defensive coordinator Jerry Sandusky, accused of molesting eight boys over 15 years, founded for at-risk children? Did they have any relationship with Sandusky or have suspicions about him? Can he clarify?

Benson, who to me seems like an affable guy with a good sense of humor, also was unavailable. Why?

Pegula could have called a news conference or, if that wasn't possible, set up a conference call. The organization has said many times it wants to be more transparent with open lines of communication. Presumably, it meant in good times and bad.

His prepared statement addressed certain issues, but I'm not sure it was the right message. It wasn't what I expected from someone known for his human touch and strong leadership. Leaders immediately stand up in the face of turmoil and speak against what they perceive as wrongdoing or, in this case, much worse.

Penn State learned the hard way this week.

Unfortunately, it was too late.

Senators seek to end four-game skid against Sabres

Brian Hunter

NHL.com

November 10, 2011

SENATORS (7-8-1) at SABRES (9-5-0)

TV: SNET-E, TVA, MSG-B

Last 10: Ottawa 6-3-1; Buffalo 6-4-0

Season Series: Second of six meetings this season, and second in seven days between these Northeast Division rivals. It took six rounds of a shootout, but Buffalo won 3-2 in Ottawa last Saturday when Derek Roy put the puck past Craig Anderson. Roy and Jordan Leopold had regulation goals for the Sabres, while Milan Michalek and Erik Condra scored for the Senators.

Big Story: Buffalo has won three straight and is pushing Toronto for the division lead, but there could be a bit of a goaltending controversy brewing. Ryan Miller is a past Vezina Trophy winner and Olympic star, but he recently suffered a personal four-game losing streak and turned in a less-than-convincing performance in a win Tuesday, allowing five goals on 31 shots. Meanwhile, backup Jhonas Enroth has won all four of his starts with a 1.41 goals-against average and .952 save percentage, improving to 13-3-2 in his brief NHL career.

Team Scope:

Senators: During its six-game winning streak to end the month of October, Ottawa scored 23 goals, an average of nearly four per game. Since then, the Senators have averaged two goals in an 0-3-1 slump that continued with Wednesday's 3-2 home loss to the Rangers. Captain Daniel Alfredsson has been absent from the lineup dating back to the final game of the win streak due to a concussion, but he took the morning skate Wednesday and was expected to travel with the team to Buffalo.

"I think (the results) were good," said Alfredsson, who passed his baseline exam and has met the NHL protocol for returning to action. "I was happy with what I did, so I don't think it's an issue at all ... I'm just going to take it one day at a time and we'll go from there."

Sabres: At the end of the season it's the top eight teams from each conference that make the playoffs and nobody questions how you compiled the points, so Buffalo isn't going to apologize for the fact its 6-5 overtime win over Winnipeg on Tuesday didn't exactly follow the normal Lindy Ruff blueprint. The Sabres had to rally from deficits of 2-0, 3-2, 4-3 and 5-4 before finally prevailing on Thomas Vanek's second power-play goal of the game with 25 seconds left in overtime. Roy also had a pair of power-play tallies to overcome Miller's shaky performance.

"Obviously, we all know that Ryan needs to be better. He was fighting it, there's no doubt," Ruff said.

"But I liked the fight the team put up. That's even more important than the fight that Ryan was putting

up."

Who's Hot: Michalek has goals in consecutive games for the Senators and his 10 goals entering Thursday were tied for second in the League, one behind Phil Kessel of the Maple Leafs. ... Vanek reached 10 goals with his pair on Tuesday. Jason Pominville, the Sabres' leading scorer, had a goal and a pair of assists. His 18 points were fourth in the League heading into Thursday's action. Roy is suddenly hot after a slow start, recording 3 goals and 2 assists during a three-game points streak.

Injury Report: Alfredsson remains day-to-day for Ottawa, which has defenseman Matt Carkner (knee) and forward Peter Regin (shoulder) on injured reserve. ... Buffalo forward Ville Leino and defenseman Tyler Myers are day-to-day with undisclosed ailments. Forwards Jochen Hecht (concussion) and Tyler Ennis (ankle) are on injured reserve.

Stat Pack: Third-year Senators defenseman Erik Karlsson entered Thursday tied with Marc-Andre Bergeron of the Lightning for the lead among defenseman with 13 assists. ... The Sabres won two-thirds of their faceoffs against the Jets, with Pominville and Paul Gaustad combining to go 27-7 on draws.

Puck Drop: "To be brutally honest, after those first two, I was just like, 'Yeah. OK we're going to do this again, huh?'" Miller said following Tuesday's game. "I tried to just slowly keep myself in the game. It helped that the guys kept putting goals up. You don't plan nights like that and you certainly don't like to see too many of them, but it's good we came out on the winning side.

"Again, we're going to have to learn some lessons from this one, and personally I just need to take away where I can be better and where I can make a difference. There are some situations out there where I need to start to get a little more in sync with my guys."

Ottawa (7-8-1) at Buffalo (9-5-0)

Matt Beardmore

STATS

November 10, 2011

The Buffalo Sabres know they need to play better defensively even though they've produced good results lately.

The Ottawa Senators are heading in the opposite direction without captain Daniel Alfredsson.

Buffalo goes for a season-high fourth straight victory and sixth in a row in this Northeast Division matchup Friday night when the visiting Senators try to end a season-worst four-game skid.

Although the Sabres (9-5-0) pushed their winning streak to three with Tuesday's 6-5 overtime victory over Winnipeg, coach Lindy Ruff has major concerns about the play of his blueliners.

Tyler Myers and Andrej Sekera each were a season-worst minus-3 against the Jets.

"They didn't play well," Ruff said following Wednesday's practice. "They made some bad decisions, and it's been a little bit of our problem where we haven't had six guys play well back there. ... We made some ill-advised reads, we made a couple of tough plays into traffic and we got to clean those plays up."

While veteran defenseman Robyn Regehr said the important thing was that the Sabres found a way to win, there's no question the club needs better play from 2010 Vezina Trophy winner Ryan Miller.

Back in net Tuesday after a two-game benching behind backup Jhonas Enroth, Miller survived a three-goal first period and finished with 26 saves to avoid losing five consecutive games in regulation for the first time.

"It's not the easiest situation right now for me," Miller said. "... I want to help. And I want to get victories."

It's uncertain if Ruff will go with Miller or Enroth, who improved to 4-0-0 with a 1.41 goals-against average after making 25 saves in Saturday's 3-2 shootout victory in Ottawa.

The Sabres have won seven of eight in this series since dropping nine in a row to the Senators.

Ottawa (7-8-1), which has won its last two trips to Buffalo, opens a six-game trip with the first of three visits there this season.

It's uncertain if Alfredsson will be available after missing the last five games with a concussion. The Senators are 1-3-1 without him - and winless since a 6-0-0 run - following Wednesday's 3-2 loss to the New York Rangers.

"It's just day by day and talking to the coaches and seeing what they think," Alfredsson said after skating with the team prior to Wednesday's defeat. "This is a little different than any other injury I've had, so I want to make sure I feel good. ... I'll take it one day at a time and go from there."

Ottawa, which last lost five straight during an 0-9-2 skid Jan. 14-Feb. 9, has killed 11 of 12 penalties in the last four games but has gone 0 for 11 on the power play.

Craig Anderson has allowed 12 goals while starting each of these contests. He stopped 31 shots Saturday but was beaten on three of Buffalo's six shootout attempts, including the winner by Derek Roy.

Roy had two of the Sabres' season-best four power-play goals Tuesday and assisted on another.

Jason Spezza leads the Senators with 16 points but has only one over his last five games. He did not make the scoresheet Saturday, though the center has 13 goals and 13 assists during a 12-game point streak in Buffalo.

He scored twice with two assists the last time the Senators were in western New York, a 6-4 loss March 13.

"THE ONLY JOB I EVER WANTED"

Beloved broadcaster Rick Jeanneret joins Sabres Hall of Fame

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 9, 2011

For 40 years now, hockey fans across Western New York and Southern Ontario have grown up with the unmistakable voice of Rick Jeanneret. His passionate delivery and trademark calls of Buffalo Sabres hockey have become the soundtrack for some of the most memorable moments in franchise history. Just thinking about phrases like “top shelf where momma hides the cookies” and “scary good” will bring a smile to Sabres fans of all ages.

Jeanneret joined an elite group of individuals last night when he was inducted into the Sabres Hall of Fame, along with Dale Hawerchuk. It was a much deserved – and some will say long overdue – honor for the native of Niagara Falls, Ontario. But there was a time when Jeanneret wondered if he’d even make it through the first few years, let alone four decades.

As a Canadian working in the United States, Jeanneret required a work Visa that had to be renewed each season. Thinking he’d save the club some trouble, he suggested an easier solution to the yearly paperwork.

“Before my third year I said to them ‘You might want to invest in a Green Card for me and it would save you a lot of money every year.’ They looked me as if to say ‘You’re not going to be here very long, so we’re not going to invest anything in you.’ But here I am 37 years later, and nobody else is around from that era.”

Even without that Green Card in his pocket, Jeanneret continued to grow into his position. While there isn’t any single moment that told him he was in it for the long haul, he slowly figured out that there was one particular way to gauge his success.

“I felt accepted by the fans, and I think that was my first clue that this was working out pretty good. Because if the fans seem to like what you’re doing, you’re getting a lot of encouragement from that direction.”

As a youngster, Jeanneret grew up listening to legendary announcers like Foster Hewitt and Danny Gallivan. He also enjoys the work of some of his contemporaries like Bob Cole, Pat Foley (Chicago) and Gary Thorne. As he puts it, “there’s an awful lot more guys that I do enjoy listening to than those that I don’t.”

Even with all the outside influences, Jeanneret says his style is all his own.

“I did not pattern myself after anybody, it just happened. I admire the delivery of several different announcers, and still do. But I don’t try to emulate any of them, and never did – not consciously anyway.”

One person that did influence him professionally was legendary Sabres announcer Ted Darling. While many people refer to Jeanneret as the voice of the Sabres, he says that is a title that should be reserved exclusively for Darling.

“In my mind, he always will be the voice of the Sabres. He was taken away from us far too soon as far as I’m concerned, and he deserved that adulation. I’m perfectly comfortable with being called the Sabres announcer. I’m good with that.”

Darling is also responsible for Jeanneret’s favorite broadcast blooper of his career.

“I was doing color for Ted one night, and he said that Ron Stackhouse ‘fell on the *uck.’ I remember that one very well. Pat Hannigan fell on the floor. He literally fell out of his chair, on to the floor laughing. He was no good whatsoever. So I had to jump in because Ted froze. And of course if you freeze, that just points it out. So I tell a story about Mike Walton the night before jumping from one balcony to another at a hotel in St. Louis, and he slipped and fell through a plate glass window. Now I’m trying to tell this with a straight face, but I start laughing as I explain that Walton got cut for something like 80 stitches. The whole thing was just a disaster.”

Jeanneret said Rob Ray was one of his favorite players to watch over the years, and that “scary good” team that made it to Game Seven of the 2006 Eastern Conference Finals in Carolina will always hold a special place in his heart.

“At the beginning of the season they were picked more for last place than they were the playoffs,” he recalls. “They did such wonderful things that year. I went into the dressing room after the final game in Carolina – and I very seldom ever go in the dressing room – and shook everybody’s hands. There were a lot of tears and swearing, and that’s expected after you lose a game like that. I told each of them ‘it was a helluva ride guys, a helluva ride. Thanks a lot.’”

It’s been speculated in recent years that it would take a Stanley Cup championship for Jeanneret to retire. While the thought of doing nothing but being “Papa” to his six grandchildren sounds appealing, it’s not a move that he’s ready to make. He’s cut back on his schedule for the past few seasons, taking vacations during extended road trips in January and February. This year he’ll call 59 games on radio and TV, with the remainder covered by Kevin Sylvester and Danny Gare.

The only long term plan that Jeanneret wants to make right now is a late February trip to Florida to spend time with his wife and family.

“I’ve had a lot of people make it perfectly clear that they don’t want me to retire. And I don’t want to retire. That’s why I’m hoping this reduced schedule as its set now will allow me to continue on.”

Lindy Ruff has been in Buffalo for more than half of Jeanneret's career – 10 years as a player, and now 14 as the team's head coach. Just like the fans, he has tremendous respect for what Jeanneret has meant to hockey in Buffalo over the years.

"I have nothing but great memories and great calls," Ruff says. "You can all the way back to 'May Day' and you can go earlier than that. Our recent playoff successes: the Pominville goal and 'Now Do You Believe?' There are so many lines, so many great moments. There are so many great calls on goals in situations in a game. Coupled with the fact that Rick is one hell of a guy."

Jeanneret's self-deprecating sense of humor is one of his most endearing qualities. He's never acted bigger than the game, even though his iconic calls will carry on throughout Sabres history. For him, it's always been about the fans.

"I had no idea where I was going or how long I was going to be around. I had every confidence in myself – but sometimes it doesn't work out that way. There are some peaks and valleys in life, but it's treated me very well. My rapport with the fans has been incredible, and that's the number one thing with me."

DOMINATING THE DRAWS

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 10, 2011

In Tuesday's game against Winnipeg, the Buffalo Sabres finished the night winning 50 of 75 faceoffs against the Jets. It was the highest single game total by the Sabres since the NHL started tracking faceoff stats in 1998, and the most by any team since Minnesota won 52 against Carolina on October 7, 2010.

Leading the way for Buffalo was the duo of Paul Gaustad (15-5) and Jason Pominville (12-2), who combined to go 27-7 in the game. The 12 wins were a career high for Pominville, who has quietly developed into one of the team's most reliable faceoff artists.

After not even taking faceoffs during his junior career or in the minors, Pominville started taking them last year when the Sabres were battling through injuries to regular faceoff workhorses like Derek Roy and Tim Connolly. He was also used sparingly when centers got kicked out and occasionally on the power play, finishing with a 43.2 faceoff percentage (67/155) in 73 games.

Pominville is already at 52.4% (55/105) after 14 games this season, something that assistant coach Kevyn Adams credits to him simply being a good student of the game.

"Jason is very diligent about faceoffs," explains Adams. "He works hard after practice, and studies a lot of video. He's also very focused in the faceoff circle; he knows what he needs to do."

Adams said Pominville's success is a carryover from what they started last season, and he thinks it will only get better based on the early returns.

Pominville

"We started working together last year, and he'd take the odd faceoff in a game. But now this year, he's gotten to where he's taking a lot and he feels comfortable. He's even comfortable in his own zone and that's always the big test. It's a little easier in the offensive or neutral zone. But from day one he's been good in his own zone."

Having spent much of the year playing on a line with Luke Adam, the two have been splitting up a lot of the faceoff duties based on their strong side – Pominville is a right shot who excels on the right side, while Adam is a left-handed shot who takes most of the draws on the left side.

Pominville is quick to credit Adams and Gaustad for his continued faceoff development

“Having Paul and Kevyn here, being able to talk about it and practice them every day, I think it’s benefitted me. It’s an important part of the game – if you want to start with the puck you need to win faceoffs.”

INJURY UPDATES: After missing Wednesday’s practice with what he simply termed as a “maintenance day,” Tyler Myers was back on the ice today and expects to play Friday against Ottawa ... Tyler Ennis skated today for about 30 minutes. Ruff said there wasn’t any agility skating involved, just several laps around the ice. His status remains week-to-week.

Roy shakes off slow start

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 11, 2011

BUFFALO — Inevitably, at some point in November, Derek Roy shakes off a slow start, catches fire and begins roaring toward the slick numbers he regularly posts. The Sabres center had zero goals in the opening 11 games two years ago, and then finished with 26. He tallied just twice in his first 17 contests three years ago, yet had 28 goals by the end.

This season, Roy limped out of the gate, compiling one goal and four points in 11 games.

Now, fresh off his two-goal, three-point effort Tuesday, Roy's on a three-game point streak entering tonight's tilt against the Ottawa Senators at the First Niagara Center.

Roy wasn't experiencing a normal slump this year, though.

The 28-year-old hurt his hamstring during a July workout, an injury that's dogged him all season. Then, in his second preseason appearance, Roy injured his shoulder, shelving him until the season opener.

Don't forget, Roy tore his quadriceps in December. So in nine months, he played one real game and endured three injuries.

Overcoming the sore hamstring has been arduous. Roy stopped working out for about three weeks in the summer. He's been receiving treatment regularly. On many days, he's been the first player in the building and the last one to leave.

"It's just a long process of trying to get that injury back," Roy said.

Today, Roy's returning to form, producing chances beside linemates Ville Leino and Drew Stafford and burying his power-play opportunities. He's starting to perform like last season, when he compiled 10 goals and 35 points in 35 games.

"Every day's getting better and better," Roy said. "I feel like I'm getting the timing back and movement. It's fun to be out contributing and being able to skate out there and battling with the guys."

Roy "wasn't generating enough" recently, Lindy Ruff said, and it worried the Sabres coach.

"When he's on his game, you see the opportunities," Ruff said. "When the sheet shows up, it shows that he's either set up or generated his own opportunities. Those numbers have gone up greatly in the last four or five games.

"Now he's taking advantage. He's making quicker plays. He's making quicker decisions with the puck, which have led to better opportunities."

In the Sabres' 6-5 overtime win against Winnipeg, Roy tallied all three points on the power play, where he had briefly lost his place late last month. Roy also scored on a Leino feed — his first in 10 games — Saturday in Ottawa, and then netted the shootout winner in the 3-2 triumph. On Friday, Roy assisted on Stafford's goal in a 2-1 win over Calgary.

That was Stafford's last goal and his first in eight games. Leino, meanwhile, has only one goal and three points this season. His assist Saturday was the newcomer's first point in seven contests.

Still, the trio, the Sabres' No. 2 line, has been creating chances since it formed recently.

"That line's starting to go good," Ruff said. "It hasn't showed up on the score sheet for Ville, but they've been able to provide some offense for us."

Stafford added: "For our line, when Roysie's going, when Ville's going, it's awesome out there. We're moving the puck around and we're getting chances."

Leino, who signed a six-year, \$27 million contract in July to play center, struggled early, then moved back to the left wing. The Finn's starting to feel more comfortable now.

"I feel good, last five games I feel I've played really well," Leino said. "I haven't been scoring, getting the pucks in the way I want it. The good thing, we're making a lot of chances, I'm getting a lot of chances with the guys.

"I feel comfortable and I know exactly where I should be. I don't have to think too much. I'm happy I'm making plays. The puck's following me around a little bit. I'm having fun out there."

Incredibly, despite skating more than 212 minutes in 14 games, Leino only has 10 shots, five in the last three contests.

"Yeah, I got to shoot more," said Leino, a strong puck carrier. "It's always what the coaches are telling me. Sometimes I need to remind myself and maybe somebody should behind me, too. (I) try to make too many passes. I've been playing better now, and that's why I'm getting a lot more shots, a lot more chances. So I just got to keep playing the way I am and first think shot, not pass."

Notes: Winger Tyler Ennis (ankle sprain) and center Jochen Hecht (concussion) skated together for about 30 minutes Thursday. Ennis can't do anything agility-related yet, however. ... Defenseman Tyler Myers practiced a day after leaving the ice early. He'll play tonight. Myers got banged up Tuesday and bumped Wednesday. ... Ottawa legend Daniel Alfredsson, a Sabres nemesis for 16 years, plans to return from post-concussion syndrome tonight. The 38-year-old has 41 goals and 81 points in 80 games against the Sabres. "He's been a real pain to us over the years," Ruff said. "He's a good a player, and I still think he's a good player." ... Myers, goalie Ryan Miller and wingers Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek are on the 2012 NHL All-Star Game ballot. ... The Sabres will wear special camouflage jerseys during warm-ups tonight for Veteran's Day.

Shaone Morrisonn finding fun with Rochester Amerks

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

November 11, 2011

Along the way to his career going backward, a strange thing happened to Shaone Morrisonn.

The 10th-year veteran defenseman found out that life with the Rochester Americans wasn't all that bad.

Not that Morrisonn wants to stay in the American Hockey League. Hardly. Having played the past six full seasons in the NHL (five with the Washington Capitals, one with the Buffalo Sabres), he has every intention of proving he still belongs there.

But in the meantime, he has adapted to the career detour.

"I'm having fun," he said after practice Thursday as the Amerks prepared for tonight's 7:35 home game against the Binghamton Senators. "I haven't had this much fun in a while."

Morrisonn never expected to be enjoying time in the AHL. He was saddened and perhaps disillusioned when he cleared waivers on Sept. 27 and was assigned to the Amerks by the Sabres.

The first few weeks weren't easy. Hamilton and Binghamton aren't Montreal and Boston. He made do, however, and now he's fairly comfortable.

"At first, you want to be in a better league," he said. "You want to be in the best league and it really took some time to mentally get over it.

"But you take the position, this is a chance to work on things that you maybe wouldn't be able to work on if you were somewhere else."

One of those things is doing more with the puck; making some plays, being more creative offensively. With the Capitals, and then Sabres, he wasn't asked to lead the rush or be the quarterback on the power play.

It's a work in progress. He has one assist in 12 games, but coach Ron Rolston said he is pleased with his play.

"When I was in Washington I was a stay-at-home defenseman," Morrisonn, 28, said. "I played with guys like (Mike) Green and (Joe) Corvo; it was their show.

"Over time you get molded into that. You hone that (skill), but then you kind of lose other parts of your game and you get locked in that category."

Coming back to the AHL has allowed him to reintroduce those things to his game. He needs to show NHL teams he's not just a one-dimensional player. Whereas he played around 16 to 19 minutes a game in the NHL, Morrison is on the ice nearly half the game for the Amerks.

"I feel like I can do things that I wouldn't do up there," he said. "You have to continue to get better."

Rolston rewarded Morrison for his efforts last weekend. He asked him to wear the "A" as an alternate captain for road games.

"He's a leader," Rolston said. "He's done a good job for us during a really adverse situation in his career. The way he's handled things, the professionalism.

"He's a competitor, he's a good teammate and we thought it was something he deserved."

Morrison said while it's an honor, he said a lot of players fill the role.

"Everybody can be a leader, you don't have to have a letter," he said.

Billionaire Golisano Readies Bid for Dodgers

Craig Karmin and Matthew Futterman

The Wall Street Journal

November 11, 2011

A self-made billionaire who is the former owner of the Buffalo Sabres hockey team is preparing to bid for the Los Angeles Dodgers, making him one of the first to declare an interest in buying the storied franchise who actually has the money to pull off the transaction.

Tom Golisano says his financial resources and knowledge of the finer points of baseball make him an attractive candidate for a team that is mired in a protracted bankruptcy proceeding, though his lack of a connection to Southern California could prove problematic.

He said one of his representatives has been in contact with the Dodgers and with the Blackstone Group, which is handling the auction. The sale price for the franchise is likely to be in excess of \$1 billion, according to sports-finance experts.

"Baseball has been my favorite sport all my life," Mr. Golisano said in an interview with The Wall Street Journal. "I would welcome the opportunity to own such a fine franchise."

He also pointed to the resurrection of the Sabres under his eight-year ownership as evidence that he is capable of turning around a troubled sports franchise.

Dodgers owner Frank McCourt put the team into bankruptcy court in June after Major League Baseball rejected his plans to recapitalize the team with a new deal for the Dodgers' media rights.

The biggest problem for Mr. Golisano is the growing public campaign, especially in the media, to ensure that the baseball team's new owner is an "Angeleno."

While he suggested he might move to Los Angeles if he became the team's owner, he has never attended a game at Dodger Stadium and is a lifelong New York Yankees fan. His outsider status could count against him when competing against local bidders with roots and connections in the city, especially after the city's experience with Mr. McCourt, a Boston developer who moved to Los Angeles after acquiring the Dodgers in 2004.

MLB has accused Mr. McCourt of using as much as \$189 million in team funds to finance his lavish lifestyle. Mr. McCourt has said the figure is closer to \$100 million and has apologized for his actions.

MLB rejected a \$2.7 billion media-rights deal Mr. McCourt secured earlier this year, because it feared he would use too much of the money to pay personal debts. After refusing to sell the franchise for months, Mr. McCourt reached a settlement with MLB to begin a sales process both sides hope to wrap up by Opening Day.

Mr. Golisano, 69 years old, made his fortune as the founder of Paychex Inc., a payroll-processing company he started in Rochester, N.Y., with \$3,000 in 1971. Forbes magazine recently estimated his wealth at \$1.4 billion, but Mr. Golisano said that number was low.

His experience with the Sabres might work in his favor. He said that under his ownership, the Sabres' season-ticket holders nearly tripled to 16,000 and the National Hockey League team improved from an also-ran to a top contender after he bought it out of bankruptcy court in 2003 and upgraded the arena.

Mr. Golisano sold the team earlier this year for about \$175 million for what he said was a substantial profit. He said he left the team on solid financial footing and that the new owner is contractually obligated to keep the Sabres in Buffalo.

While Buffalo fans generally credit Mr. Golisano with rescuing the franchise from collapse or relocation, he has also faced criticism for not spending the maximum amount allowed under the league's spending cap.

"There is no direct relationship between how much you spend and how much you win," he said. "You have to meld as a unit. It's more than just the highest-paid players. Look at the last World Series."

Mr. Golisano is also known for his unsuccessful runs for governor of New York state. He helped found the Independence Party of New York and was its gubernatorial candidate in 1994, 1998 and 2002. These days he spends most of the year in Naples, Fla., and is involved with a number of philanthropic causes, including the William J. Clinton Foundation.

11th heaven for Alfredsson

Senators captain expects to play Friday

Bruce Garrioch

Ottawa Sun

November 11, 2011

BUFFALO - On the 11th day of the 11th month of the 11th year of the century, the Senators will welcome back No. 11.

Captain Daniel Alfredsson was along for the ride as the Senators packed their bags for one of their longest road trips of the season, and he expects to suit up Friday against the Sabres.

Alfredsson will take winger Chris Neil's place. Neil suffered an ankle injury in Wednesday's 3-2 loss to the Rangers and won't be available to play in Friday's game or Saturday in Toronto.

Alfredsson, 38, less than two weeks removed from suffering a concussion after a ugly elbow from Rangers winger Wojtek Wolski, skated on a line with Stephane Da Costa and Nick Foligno and declared himself ready to go.

"(The odds are) pretty good. It was good (Wednesday) and again (Thursday). I'm expecting myself to be back and ready to roll," said Alfredsson.

"I'm not going to be cautious. You've got to be aware at all times on the ice. I've said that before. If you don't feel you're ready, then you shouldn't start playing again. I feel confident in my reaction time and I'll just try to play as normal."

If Alfredsson is "normal," then he'll be one of the Senators' best players as the club tries to snap a four-game losing streak to start a stretch of six straight on the road.

"It would be a huge boost for our team to get our captain back in the lineup," said centre Jason Spezza. "He does a lot for our team on and off the ice. It would definitely give us a bit of a jump.

"He's feeling pretty good. He's definitely recovered well from injuries in the past. I think this early in the season he wouldn't come back unless he was 100% and ready to contribute."

Coach Paul MacLean, who said Neil got hurt after taking a knee from New York's Brandon Dubinsky in the third period of Wednesday's game, was pleased to hear Alfredsson was ready. The stats show it's a good night for a return. In 80 career games against the Sabres, Alfredsson has 41 goals and 40 assists — more than a point a game.

"Isn't that good news? I can't wait till (Friday). I may not sleep," said MacLean. "Actually, I should sleep better. He averages 30 goals a year. He has a track record of doing it and it gives you a second line the other team has to respect."

There was concern when Alfredsson first suffered the injury, with plenty of uncertainty about head injuries — especially with Pittsburgh’s Sidney Crosby sidelined since January.

Alfredsson said he has kept in contact with team physician Dr. Mark Aubry. One of the foremost concussion experts in North America, Aubry assured Alfredsson he wouldn’t be out for an extended period.

“It was frustrating for a while,” admitted Alfredsson. “I can’t say I felt terrible, really. I had headaches the day it happened. Since then, I haven’t taken any medication or anything. I’ve been able to be up and moving. I just had to be cautious about how much I did.

“I was pretty confident that it was going to settle down. When I talked to (Aubry) a week after, it was getting to the point where it was going to get better soon. All I know is the way I feel. I feel ready. I feel confident about going back. Otherwise, I wouldn’t.”

Da Costa's da real deal

Don Brennan

Ottawa Sun

November 11, 2011

OTTAWA - Paul MacLean was wearing a smile Thursday, and not just because it brought another chance to chat with the media, which he said (he did) is his favourite time of the day other than having a cup of tea or glass of wine with his wife.

Apple (what hockey players often call an assist) turnovers aside, the Senators coach was pleased with the play of his team in its last outing.

And why not? If it wasn't for the inexcusable giveaway by a veteran of 1,073 games (Sergei Gonchar) who should know better, and the understandable mistake by a rookie with 12 games experience (David Rundblad) who has lots learn, two of the Rangers' three goals Wednesday night would have been avoided.

Minus those gaffes, the Senators defeat the hottest team in the conference 2-1, while leading on the shots clock 31-17, despite committing twice as many (19-8) giveaways.

They then wouldn't be packing with them a four-game losing streak while embarking on a stretch of road games that starts Friday in Buffalo and continues on through Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver.

Nonetheless, MacLean was enthusiastic when speaking of the opportunity to "show the Canadian people what kind of team the Ottawa Senators are." Not to spoil the surprise, people, but what they are is exciting. Not to mention hell on a sportswriter at deadline.

Eleven of the Senators' 16 games have been decided by one goal. They've lost the last three, but have won six.

"Early on in the year, when we got down, we probably felt like we had to open things up right away, but we probably believe in the system a little more now that we've won those close games," said Jason Spezza.

"You stick to the plan and you hope throughout the game that you get a late goal. Instead of opening it up and letting them get more scoring chances, we try to limit their chances still and create something for ourselves.

"Paul is trying to teach us how to play a style of game that's going to be successful in the playoffs, when our team does get to that level."

In the meantime, the Senators will spend this season running cold and hot, like they've done with a six-game winning streak and a four-game slump in their past 10. So will individuals.

One rookie who was en fuego Thursday was Stephane Da Costa.

When he was on the ice, the puck followed him. He set up Nick Foligno's second-period goal and had some glorious chances himself, including one which saw him magically juggle the puck with his stick past a Rangers blueliner.

Da Costa's maligned defensive play is improving as he learns angles — during one battle he stripped the puck from a surprised Brad Richards. I didn't think Da Costa was close to ready for the NHL this season. I've changed my mind. With his passing, vision, growing confidence ... I can even see a little of the "younger Adam Oates" comparison made by Bryan Murray.

"It's a great compliment," said Da Costa. "Now I'm under pressure. I've got to make good passes."

That he grew up in France, the 22-year-old Da Costa was asked if he had even heard of Oates, who retired in 2004 and stands as one of the most creative playmakers ever. Of course he did.

"From NHL '94," Da Costa said, referring to the video game.

Da Costa did meet Oates' old triggerman, Brett Hull, when he was a 17-year-old playing in the NAHL.

"It was a charity game in Texas and he was the coach of the veteran team, with Mark Messier, the Hanson brothers ...," said Da Costa. "I was on the other team. At the end of the second, I switched to the old team. I played with Messier. I just wanted to pass it to him all the time."

Murray gets even more criticism for his free-agent signings than he does compliments on his drafting.

But Da Costa, a Merrimack grad he convinced to become a Senator, is going to be a good one.

Alfredsson set to return Friday

James Gordon

Ottawa Citizen

November 11, 2011

Daniel Alfredsson is set to return to the Ottawa Senators' lineup after missing five games with a concussion, and the hope is he'll immediately create a different kind of headache for opposing defencemen.

After starting out with a surprising burst of scoring — that was supposed to be the Senators' weak link this season — the Senators have fallen back into the middle of the NHL pack on offence.

The current dip coincides with the loss of Alfredsson, who took an elbow to the head from New York Rangers winger Wojtek Wolski on Oct. 29 and didn't return.

Not only did the injury take the most dynamic member of the Senators' second line out of the mix, it also allowed opponents to really key in on the top trio of Colin Greening, Jason Spezza and Milan Michalek.

The result: Those three combined for all of two points over the following four games.

Now, on 11/11/11, No. 11 returns against a team he has dominated over the years.

"I feel ready and I feel very confident about going back — otherwise I wouldn't be," said Alfredsson, who has 40 goals and 81 points in 80 career games against the Sabres.

"I'm not going to be cautious," he added. "You've got to be ready at all times on the ice. I've said that before, so it's the same. I think if you don't feel you're ready, you shouldn't start playing again."

While Alfredsson was frustrated about missing time, he was also encouraged by his colleagues' overall play without him.

"I'm seeing a pretty good team," he said. "Obviously some turnovers cost us last game (a 3-2 loss to those same Rangers), but other than that, we're doing a lot of good things which, when you're losing, (are) not going to be noticed.

"But I think we've come a long way from the beginning of the year to where we are now."

It was tough to tell who was happiest about the captain's return: The man himself, linemates Stephane Da Costa and Nick Foligno, or head coach Paul MacLean.

“Isn’t that good news?” MacLean said with a big grin following a brief, up-tempo practice Thursday afternoon. “Can’t wait until (Friday). Won’t even sleep tonight. Or I should sleep better tonight.”

“I think he averages 30 goals a year — he’s done it, he has a track record of doing it,” MacLean explained. “That gives you a second line that the other team has to respect and obviously, with the leadership and how he plays and everything else that goes with it...for us right now, a little shot in the arm offensively would be a real good thing.”

Despite dropping four straight contests to drop back below the .500 mark, the Senators clearly remain a very upbeat group.

There certainly is big difference between this skid and the one that saw them lose five of six to start the season. The earlier setback was peppered with blowouts and atrocious defensive play, whereas the past few outings arguably could have gone either way.

“A lot of our game is real solid,” MacLean said. “Since the first day of training camp, we’ve been working on getting out of our zone, getting out of our zone, getting out of our zone, playing defence fast, and really, it’s been a main focus for us. And we’ve done that.”

“We’ve done a good job of tracking the puck, playing without the puck,” he continued. “Where we haven’t done a good job is with the puck. We haven’t taken care of the puck.”

MacLean was referring to a combined 46 turnovers charged to the Senators over the past four games. While the NHL’s extended stats are notoriously unreliable, anyone with reasonable vision could spot the myriad mental lapses in those contests.

It’s a continuing concern, though a little more offence could cover up the occasional slip as well.

“What we’ve lacked in the last three games, to me, is one more goal,” MacLean said. “Just some more offence and you know, Daniel brings that to us, but also our team as a group can probably get to the net better, shoot the puck more often and have people get to the net maybe a little bit harder and stay there a little bit longer.”

ALL-STAR SENS?

Fans voting for the starting lineup at this year’s NHL all-star game in Ottawa will have five Senators to choose from, including Alfredsson.

“Obviously, it would be special to play in your home town, there’s no question, but that’s not something I set out as a goal before the season,” Alfredsson said. “I think it would be a great bonus. I want to come back healthy and play as many games as I can and see where it goes. But it would be a lot of fun.”

Spezza, Michalek, Erik Karlsson and Sergei Gonchar are the others on the list.

MIGHTY MICHALEK

Paul MacLean was asked during training camp whether or not he thought Michalek was a potential 40-goal scorer. The winger notched his 10th of the season Wednesday, putting him on pace to score 51 over a full schedule.

MacLean didn't answer then and he wouldn't offer a prediction Thursday either.

"I'm still not going there," he said with a chuckle. "He's got a long way to go — he's only at 10. I think, like I've said lots of times in this room, Milan's a real good player and I think he's showing us that he's a good player, he's energized, that he wants to play, and I hope he gets as many as he can."

Senators prediction panel: Game 17

James Gordon

Ottawa Citizen

November 11, 2011

The Ottawa Senators travel to Buffalo to take on the Sabres. Which team will come out on top? Our prediction panel weighs in.

Ottawa Senators (7-8-1) at Buffalo Sabres (9-5-0)

James Gordon, SenatorsExtra.com editor/Citizen hockey writer

Senators 3, Sabres 4

The Sabres are sizzling right now, while the Senators have lost four straight. This actually has all the makings of a letdown game for Buffalo, but I have a feeling Derek Roy, Thomas Vanek and whoever starts in goal (Enroth? Miller?) will get the job done at home. Alfredsson's return will help, but not enough.

Record: 11-5

Exact scored predicted: 0

Wayne Scanlan, Citizen columnist

Senators 4, Sabres 3

This losing can't go on forever, plus the Sabres have had some issues keeping pucks out of their net, so I'm going to look for the Senators to get an Alfie boost here.

Record: 12-4

Exact scores predicted: 1

Ian Mendes, Sportnet.ca Senators reporter and blogger

Senators 2, Sabres 4

I was leaning towards taking the Sens in this one. Alfredsson is coming back and they always play well in Buffalo. But I was Jedi mind-tricked by James Gordon when walking off the elevator at the hotel here in Buffalo. He made me second-guess my pick and now I'm taking the home team.

Record: 6-10

Exact scores predicted: 0

Graeme Nichols, writer/editor, The Sixth Sens blog and podcast

Senators 2, Sabres 4

Ottawa's lost four in a row and Buffalo's won three? Like the Rangers game, I'm going to ride the streaks.

Record: 12-4

Exact scores predicted: 1

Steve Lloyd, host, Healthy Scratches on Team 1200

Senators 5, Sabres 2

The Sens have dropped four straight but they've actually played quite well during that stretch, with key mistakes doing them in. That was without Daniel Alfredsson. The captain's back. He always plays well coming off an injury and has been a thorn in the Sabres side for years.

Record: 9-7

Exact scores predicted: 0

Peter Raaymakers, writer/editor, Silver Seven Sens blog

Senators 3, Sabres 1

This is a tough game to predict, because there are so many variables that aren't nearly certain. We don't even know for sure which goalie will play for Buffalo, let alone how that one will perform. But I'll pick Ottawa, because I think they'll get at least one win on this road swing, and Buffalo is as likely a place as any to pick it up.

Record: 13-3

Exact scores predicted: 0

Russell, host, SensUnderground podcast

Senators 2, Sabres 4

I have a feeling that the Sens will get a split out of this weekend. However, as I would chew tin foil before I ever picked the Laffs to beat us, I'll have to say the Sabres take the Friday night match.

Record: 12-4

Exact scores predicted: 0

Jeremy Milks, writer/editor, Black Aces blog

Senators 2, Sabres 5

This should be easier than it is. The Sens lose 3 in a row then win 6 straight and now they've dropped their last 4. Just get on the train and ride it till the diesel runs out. So I'll take Buffalo to cruise through this one.

Record: 9-7

Exact scores predicted: 0

Alfie eager to help Senators conquer big road test

Captain expects to return to lineup Friday against Sabres; ailing Neil out for weekend

Rob Brodie

OttawaSenators.com

November 10, 2011

It's a cross-country trek that figures to test the Ottawa Senators' mettle.

Good thing they'll have their captain back in tow to steer the ship.

"Isn't that good news?" Senators head coach Paul MacLean said with a broad grin when asked about [Daniel Alfredsson](#)'s expected return to the lineup Friday night, when Ottawa visits First Niagara Center in Buffalo to take on the Sabres (7:30 p.m., Sportsnet East, Team 1200). "I can't wait till tomorrow."

Alfredsson, who's been sidelined for five games while dealing with the effects of a concussion he suffered Oct. 29 against the New York Rangers, confirmed earlier today it's most likely he'll be good to go against the Sabres.

"I'm expecting myself to be back and ready to go," he said following a practice in which MacLean described him as "one of the better players on the ice."

The Senators have gone 1-3-1 in Alfredsson's absence and MacLean has no doubt has presence on the team's second line alongside rookie [Stephane Da Costa](#) and [Nick Foligno](#) will make an impact.

"That gives you a second line the other team has to respect," said MacLean. "Obviously, there's the leadership and everything else he does. But for us right now, a little shot in the arm offensively would be a real good thing."

Though he's never previously dealt with a concussion, Alfredsson doesn't plan to alter his style or ease himself back into the mix slowly.

"I'm not going to be cautious," he said. "You've got to be aware at all times on the ice — I've said that before and it's the same (now). If you don't feel you're ready, then you shouldn't start playing again. I feel confident in my reaction time and whatnot, so I'll just try to play as normal."

While Alfredsson's return is a definite plus, there was one piece of bad news today. MacLean revealed winger [Chris Neil](#) twisted an ankle during Wednesday night's 3-2 home-ice loss to the Rangers and won't be available for Friday's game in Buffalo and Saturday's contest with the

Maple Leafs in Toronto (7 p.m., CBC, Team 1200).

"Right now, he's being assessed," MacLean said when asked if Neil's absence might be long-term. "He won't be able to play this weekend, but I'm not sure beyond that."

As for the trip itself — which also includes stops in Calgary (Nov. 15), Edmonton (Nov. 17) and Vancouver (Nov. 20) — the Senators (7-8-1) see it as an opportunity to break out of a four-game winless skid that included three straight one-goal losses at Scotiabank Place.

"We just go game by game and try to improve all the time," said Alfredsson. "We know it's going to be a tough stretch with a lot of travel, but I think we can make the most of it and make it a team-building trip. Have some fun on the off days and play hard during the games."

While the results haven't been satisfying in the last week or so, MacLean looks at the bigger picture and still likes where his team is at.

"A lot of our game is real solid," he said. "Since the first day of training camp, we've been working on getting out of our zone and playing defence fast. It's really been a main focus for us and we've done a really good job of that the last four games. Playing without the puck, we've done a good job."

"Where we haven't done a good job is with the puck. We haven't taken care of the puck and what we've lacked the last few games is just one more goal."

Added centre [Jason Spezza](#): "We're just not there, we're just not sharp enough to get the wins. But we're not going to change what we're doing. It's not like early in the year, when we felt like we had to rediscover what type of team we are. We know what type of team we are, but we just have to be a little bit better and execute a little bit better."

Around the boards

MacLean hasn't decided on his goaltending starter for Friday night, but acknowledged that backup [Alex Auld](#) is likely to see some action during the upcoming trip ... The Senators are 2-4-0 on the road this season but have won two of their last three away from Scotiabank Place ... Spezza has 26 points (13-13) during his last 12 games in Buffalo, dating back to Oct. 27, 2008 ... Alfredsson recorded a hat trick, including his 1,000th career National Hockey League point, during Ottawa's 4-2 victory at then-HSBC Arena on Oct. 22, 2010.