



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Wednesday, November 16, 2011

Miller says teammates 'have his back'

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 16, 2011

Ryan Miller has heard the chatter. He knows folks have added his crushing blow to his teammates' lack of response and surmised the Sabres don't respect the goaltender or have his back.

"A lot's been said about it, and you know what? These guys have my back," Miller said Tuesday. "I was disappointed in the direction that started to take where people were talking about how these guys don't have my back. My whole job is to try and help these guys and be there for them, and they're there for me."

The theory that Miller has lost his team wasn't the only thing disappointing to the injured goalie, who made a surprise appearance in the First Niagara Center dressing room:

- He's disappointed the NHL failed to suspend Boston's Milan Lucic, who delivered Saturday's blow that has left Miller with whiplash and concussion symptoms.
- He's disappointed the Bruins and the league expressed doubt about how Miller got his head injury.
- He's disappointed he's out for an unknown length of time, including his second straight absence tonight when the Sabres host the New Jersey Devils.

The goalie, whose lip quivered for much of his 10-minute chat, used his most poignant remarks on his teammates. The Sabres have been lambasted for not seeking retribution on Lucic, who barreled over Miller after the goalie beat him to a loose puck. The incident happened a week after one player told The News the team has been playing harder in front of backup Jhonas Enroth than they do for Miller.

"I've been with a lot of these guys a really long time," said Miller, who has been the full-time starter since 2005-06. "For one incident and one tough stretch of hockey to start to become what it was I think is unfair to me and I think it's unfair to the guys in here.

"You guys aren't in the locker room. You guys don't know what's going on. We allow you in here for these interviews, and we don't conduct ourselves the same way as we do with each other."

Almost to a man, the Sabres admitted they should have done more than let the 6-foot-4, 220-pound Lucic skate away with a smile and a 6-2 victory.

"I appreciate that they wanted to do more," Miller said. "But I mean, what can you really do? You're going to get a suspension yourself? Lucic is a tough guy. What are you going to do? Hack him? Spear him? Cheap-shot him? Then you're not better than he is.

"I don't think we need an all-out donnybrook. I think that they tried to handle it with the power play and over the course of the night. If they want to get in and scrap, I appreciate it. ... We'll play tough, hard-nosed hockey, and we're going to have five more chances to play them. It's not about open season. It's about playing the game the right way, and playing it hard. I hope that we have the character to go out there and win those games."

Miller made it clear Saturday night he doesn't think much of Lucic. That hasn't changed, especially after Lucic's defense included the statements he didn't see Miller because his head was down and he was unable to put on the brakes.

"I've heard what he had to say," Miller said. "Do I buy it? I think he said what he had to say to avoid getting suspended. It's the NHL, man. The guy can skate. He can stop. He can turn. He can pick his head up.

"From where I would challenge him on a breakaway, that's a matter of -- what? -- like 10 feet difference that he skated. I wasn't skating out to the top of the circle. It's reasonable the puck's coming toward my crease that I swat it away, clear it. If he didn't see me, I don't even know. I don't know how that could happen."

Nonetheless, it did. The result could be an extended absence.

"I'm not as well as I'd like to be, but considering, I feel alright," Miller said. "I've just got to figure out if the neck is the source of some of these headaches, or what level these symptoms are at. Because right now it is concussion symptoms, and you have to figure out what the source is, eliminate that source where it could be the neck, and then you go from there.

"You always are concerned. Last year I thought I had a very simple 'get your bell rung,' and I missed five games. This, I don't know how to put a timeline on it, but I am encouraged that my neck feels better. Once that really feels good, I can start to make my way back."

Miller also wanted to make it clear he'll be recovering from the hit. The Bruins said Miller's concussion could have been caused by some other incidents during the game because there was no contact to the head from Lucic.

"I didn't know they were all doctors," Miller said. "Concussions are caused by many things, one of them including a whiplash motion that sends your brain moving laterally or however you're hit. It doesn't need to be a direct impact. That fact alone, I'm rolling my eyes."

While Miller was talking, the NHL's general managers were meeting in Toronto. They discussed the Miller-Lucic hit and goaltender safety, with no rule changes coming. The topic will be discussed again when they meet in March.

"We had a really good conversation about the issue," said Brendan Shanahan, the league's senior vice president for player safety and hockey operations. "There is certainly a very heightened sensitivity to the goalies in this league. Certainly they are not fair game. Players have to understand that."

Miller will take it upon himself to make sure they understand.

"There needs to be a little bit of discussion about that side of things," he said. "It's definitely something I hope the NHLPA is taking into consideration right now. I know I'll be looking to talk to the guys when I have a chance with competition committee stuff."

Weber played timely role in his return

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 16, 2011

For 15 of the Sabres' 17 games, the Buffalo coaching staff decided Mike Weber wasn't good enough to be on the ice and made him a healthy scratch. One of his appearances came during Monday's visit to Montreal.

Suddenly, the defenseman became vital. He skated 22:14, second among blue-liners to Jordan Leopold's 24:22. More importantly, he was on the ice with the game on the line.

Thomas Vanek got whistled for a tripping call with 2:11 left in overtime. For most of the four-on-three, Weber joined Robyn Regehr on the back end. They helped the Sabres kill the penalty and advance to a 3-2 shootout victory.

"I've always had confidence in myself, and the coaching staff had the confidence in me," Weber said Tuesday. "It's a great feeling to be out there in important moments of the game to help get us to the shootout. That's a pretty special feeling."

The question becomes whether Weber did enough to stay in the lineup. The Sabres host New Jersey tonight in First Niagara Center, and Tyler Myers is likely to return following his benching Monday.

"I always hope to stay in," Weber said. "I know I can play. I know I can play those big minutes like I did [Monday] night. Again, it's not in my hands. I can only do what I did [Monday] night and let them control the other things. We'll see."

Coach Lindy Ruff refused to tip his hand but did say he was impressed by Weber's outing.

"He played hard, he played well," Ruff said. "He was an important part of that game."

So why did Ruff suddenly decide Weber should play a key last-minute role? Part of the answer lies in the stat line. Weber had six hits and blocked four shots.

"He's one of our better shot blockers," Ruff said. "We tried to put the guys in the situation on the ice that best suits them. We knew that if there was a puck that was going to be going, he would probably risk any part of his body to block it."

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The Sabres welcomed two players to practice Tuesday but lost one. Forward Cody McCormick left the game against the Canadiens and was not on the ice Tuesday.

"Cody's not doing too good," Ruff said. "He got hit and wasn't feeling well. We'll see what's up."

If McCormick can't play tonight, the Sabres could call up a forward from Rochester or dress seven defensemen.

Meanwhile, Jochen Hecht filled McCormick's role on the fourth line with center Matt Ellis and right wing Brad Boyes. The full-contact practice was Hecht's first since suffering a concussion setback in late October.

"We're going to have to test and get hit the next couple days and get back into game situations," Hecht said. "The headaches weren't the big problem. It was something else that looked like it was going on. We changed some treatment, had some medicine change, and that really helped. I feel better now."

Left wing Tyler Ennis joined his teammates in a noncontact role for the first time since suffering an ankle sprain Oct. 22.

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The Sabres skated in Buffalo for the first time since Saturday's debacle in Boston that featured an inadequate response to Milan Lucic running over goalie Ryan Miller. The Sabres quickly put the kibosh on any further discussion about the incident.

"We've answered all these questions before," captain Jason Pominville said, "so it's just about moving on and focusing on what's ahead of us."

Devils, Sabres set to meet for first time

Brian Hunter

NHL.com

November 15, 2011

DEVILS (8-7-1) at SABRES (11-6-0)

TV: VERSUS (HD), TSN2

Last 10: New Jersey 5-5-0; Buffalo 6-4-0.

Season Series: First of four meetings. Last season, [Martin Brodeur](#) outdueled [Ryan Miller](#) and [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) scored in overtime to give the Devils a 1-0 win in the initial matchup, but the Sabres followed by taking the next three. [Thomas Vanek](#) led them with 3 goals and Miller had a shutout of his own in the most recent game.

Big Story: A concussion suffered last Saturday on a collision with Milan Lucic of the Bruins has Miller on the shelf, but what would appear at first glance to be a damaging blow may turn out to be anything but for the Sabres. That's because [Jhonas Enroth](#) has been playing better than Miller and just about any other goalie out there right now. Enroth, who didn't ascend to Miller's full-time backup until late last season, is now 6-0-0 in 2011-12 and 13-0-1 in his last 14 decisions. He hasn't lost in regulation since Nov. 24, 2010, a 1-0 setback against the Penguins.

Team Scope:

Devils: Playing the defending Stanley Cup champions in the front end of a back-to-back, New Jersey rallied from a pair of third-period deficits on Tuesday to tie Boston. But the Bruins had the better of play throughout the third and finally went in front to stay when Benoit Pouliot scored with 3:01 remaining, dealing the Devils a 4-3 defeat. [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) attempted to convince coach Peter DeBoer to play him after taking part in both the morning and pre-game skates, but remained out of the lineup for a fifth straight game with a groin injury. He could play Wednesday.

"We got away from our game plan," DeBoer said. "They took us off our game plan a little bit and we didn't respond the right way. We didn't win enough faceoffs, we didn't do enough of the little things at the end to win games -- that's what good teams do."

Sabres: Better late than never was the story behind how Buffalo escaped Montreal with two points on Monday and leapfrogged Toronto into first place in the Northeast Division in the process. The Sabres trailed 2-0 heading into the third period, but [Jason Pominville](#) got them on the board 53 seconds in and [Derek Roy](#) drew them even with 7:30 remaining. The game went to a shootout, and goals by [Thomas Vanek](#) and [Brad Boyes](#) trumped one by Max Pacioretty of the Canadiens, as the Sabres claimed a 3-2 victory.

"It makes my job easier when you have Vanek and Boyes and guys like that as the shooters," said Enroth,

who made 25 saves during the game. "They're pretty much 100 percent."

Who's Hot: [Nick Palmieri](#) had his first career 2-goal game Wednesday, bringing the Devils into 2-2 and 3-3 ties with the Bruins. ... In addition to Enroth's sizzling play in net (1.76 goals-against average, .942 save percentage), Roy has overcome a slow start to post 5 goals in as many games and 10 points over the Sabres' last six games. Vanek (3-3-6) and Pominville (2-4-6) have four-game points streaks active.

Injury Report: As Kovalchuk nears his return to the lineup, New Jersey remains without forwards [Eric Boulton](#) (hand), [Jacob Josefson](#) (collarbone) and [Travis Zajac](#) (Achilles). ... Miller and forward [Tyler Ennis](#) (ankle) are out indefinitely for Buffalo, which also has forward [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) on injured reserve.

Stat Pack: The Devils scored only six goals in last season's series, three by players still with the club (Kovalchuk, [David Clarkson](#) and [Zach Parise](#)). ... Defenseman [Mike Weber](#) took the place of [Tyler Myers](#) in the Sabres lineup Monday and recorded six hits while logging 22:14 of ice time.

Puck Drop: Clarkson scored New Jersey's first power-play goal in six games and only its sixth of the season when he converted a 5-on-3 to open the scoring against Boston.

"Yeah, it was nice to get one. It was a 5-on-3. We'll take any power play goals we can get right now to try and get that on track," DeBoer said. "It was nice to get one at a key time at that point in the game."

New Jersey (8-7-1) at Buffalo (11-6-0)

Nicolino Dibenedetto

STATS

November 15, 2011

[Ryan Miller](#) is still sore about the hit that sidelined him indefinitely.

[Jhonas Enroth](#) is trying to continue softening the blow for the [Buffalo Sabres](#).

Enroth should be in net looking to win a seventh consecutive start Wednesday night as the Sabres seek to defeat the [New Jersey Devils](#) for a fourth straight time.

Miller suffered a concussion on a hit by Boston's [Milan Lucic](#) in Saturday's 6-2 loss. The collision sent Miller's mask flying, and has sidelined the 2010 Vezina Trophy winner indefinitely.

He called Lucic "gutless" after the game, and that anger may have only grown when NHL disciplinarian [Brendan Shanahan](#) deemed the hit wasn't worthy of a suspension.

"I'm not going to be happy about it, but I'm not going to speak out against it," Miller said. "We're going to move forward and we're going to play some hockey. And hopefully, I'm playing hockey sooner than later."

For now, Enroth will continue to get the bulk of the work since he's being backed up by [Drew MacIntyre](#), who has two games of NHL experience in relief for Vancouver during the 2007-08 season.

Buffalo may not miss a beat with Enroth, who has won all six of his starts this season and has a 1.76 goal-against average and .942 save percentage in eight total appearance. He made 25 saves through overtime and two more in a shootout as the Sabres (11-6-0) responded to the loss to the Bruins with a 3-2 win over Montreal on Monday.

[Thomas Vanek](#), who leads the Sabres with 11 goals and 22 points, had two assists Monday and scored during the shootout.

He has three goals and three assists in his last four games overall, and five points in his last five meetings with the Devils (8-7-1).

Enroth earned one of Buffalo's three straight victories over New Jersey, making 28 saves before adding two more in a shootout of a 5-4 road win Nov. 10, 2010.

Defenseman [Tyler Myers](#), the 2010 Calder Trophy winner, had three points in that contest. However, the defenseman is currently struggling. He has four assists on the season, has been plagued by sloppy play and was a healthy scratch against the Canadiens.

New Jersey has split the first two stops on a five-game road trip, losing 4-3 to the Bruins on Tuesday after surrendering three goals in the third period.

“We’ve got to be able to seize control and play with a little more composure,” coach Peter DeBoer said. “Overall, this year we’ve done a pretty good job of that. But (Tuesday) we got exposed by a veteran team in the third.”

[Nick Palmieri](#) had two goals against Boston after netting just one in the season’s first 15 games.

Devils left wing [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) has missed five games with a lower-body injury, and it’s uncertain when he’ll return. He has nine points, but hasn’t scored a goal in his last seven games.

Kovalchuk has four goals in his last four games at Buffalo but failed to register a point in New Jersey’s last visit, a 2-0 loss March 26 in which Miller made 30 saves for the shutout.

Sabres G Miller disappointed in Lucic, NHL

John Wawrow

Associated Press

November 15, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—Lingering post-concussion-like headaches didn't prevent Ryan Miller from airing his disappointment Tuesday in the aftermath of being leveled by Boston Bruins forward Milan Lucic.

The Buffalo Sabres goalie was unhappy with the NHL's decision not to discipline Lucic, who bowled over Miller in the first period of Buffalo's 6-2 loss at Boston on Saturday.

"I'm not going to be happy about it, but I'm not going to speak out against it," he said. "We're going to move forward and we're going to play some hockey. And hopefully, I'm playing hockey sooner than later."

And Miller didn't buy Lucic's explanation that the forward couldn't avoid a collision that was so hard that it knocked off Miller's mask.

"I think he said what he had to say to avoid being suspended," Miller said, referring to Lucic having a hearing with NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan on Monday. "It's the NHL, man. The guy can skate. He can stop. He can turn. He can pick his head up."

Pausing and then adding with a laugh, Miller said: "If he didn't see me then, I don't even know how that could happen."

In speaking with reporters for the first time since being diagnosed with a concussion and whiplash on Sunday, Miller chose his words carefully during a 9-minute interview after he sat out practice.

Miller provided no timetable for when he might be able to play, saying he's still feeling soreness in his neck and experiencing post-concussion-like symptoms.

Miller was hurt 14 minutes into the first period when he skated out to the right circle to play a loose puck that Lucic was attempting to chase down when the two collided. Lucic was issued a two-minute minor for charging.

Saying he felt fine after the hit, Miller continued playing through the end of the second period when he began experiencing tightness in his neck and fatigue. Backup Jhonas Enroth took over at the start of the third period.

The 2010 Vezina Trophy winner did stick around following the game to speak to the media, during which he called Lucic "gutless."

Miller revealed that he and the team went ahead with announcing he had a concussion in a bid to make a case that Lucic should be suspended.

Sabres general manager Darcy Regier was expected to raise the issue of protecting goalies at league meetings being held in Toronto on Tuesday.

This is the second time Miller has sustained a concussion in eight months. He missed four games in March after being struck by shots to the mask in consecutive games. Miller also missed 13 games late in the 2008-09 season with an ankle injury, which he hurt while being upended behind his net by then-New York Rangers forward Scott Gomez.

Shanahan defended his ruling on Monday night, and called it “irresponsible” for the Sabres to suggest that it’s open season on goalies.

The Sabres didn’t escape criticism either for their failure to rally to Miller’s defense following Lucic’s hit. Following the game, Lucic expressed surprised that the Sabres didn’t attempt to get retribution during the game.

Miller called the criticism unwarranted.

“Lucic’s a tough guy. what are you going to do, try to hack him, spear him, cheap-shot him? Then you’re no better than he is,” Miller said. “I try to have their backs. I trust they have mine, so that’s the end of that one.”

The Sabres acknowledged a team meeting was held a day later in Montreal to discuss how they reacted to Miller getting hit.

“We’ve discussed this as players, we’ve discussed it as a team and we want to move forward,” captain Jason Pominville said. “What was said was said, and we’ve got to look forward to what’s ahead of us and not focus on what’s behind us.”

The Sabres bounced back by overcoming a 2-0 third-period deficit in a 3-2 shootout win over the Canadiens on Monday night. It was their fifth win in six games and pushed them into first place in the Northeast Division.

It was a game in which defenseman Tyler Myers—the NHL’s 2010 rookie of the year—was a healthy scratch for the first time in his career. He was relegated to the press box mostly because of his sloppy play: Myers has only four assists in 16 games, and has been on the ice for seven goals against in his previous four outings.

Myers was also on the ice when Miller was bowled over, and among the players who failed to go after Lucic.

“We’ve handled it as a team and it won’t happen again,” Myers said.

NOTES: Coach Lindy Ruff said he’s not made a decision on whether Myers will return Wednesday, when the Sabres host New Jersey. ... LW Jochen Hecht has resumed practicing, but there’s no timetable for his return. He’s been out since sustaining a concussion in training camp in September. ... C Cody McCormick’s status is uncertain after he sustained an undisclosed injury against Montreal.

MILLER TALKS

Ryan Miller met with the media today in Buffalo

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 15, 2011

Ryan Miller spoke to reporters today at First Niagara Center for the first time since the NHL decided not to suspend Boston's Milan Lucic for his hit on Miller on Saturday night. Miller left the game after two periods, and the team announced Sunday he has a concussion.

Following are some of the highlights of Miller's 10-minute talk with the media:

What is your injury status today?

I'm not as well as I'd like to be, but considering, I feel alright. Just trying to kinda get through where my neck is pretty sore, trying to figure out if that's more of a source of headaches or if what I was really feeling was my head started really hurting. I went from feeling great in the first period of the game, to feeling extreme tiredness and the onset of tightness in my neck. I talked to (team doctor) Bill Hartrich today, and he said it's really common when you have a whiplash that you feel it the next day. I do have a lot of that. I have the concussion symptoms and a little bit of whiplash.

What is your short term prognosis?

I just want to get to the point where my neck feels good and I can start to figure out where the headaches are really coming from ... Right now I have to figure out if the neck is the source of some of these headaches or what level these symptoms are at. Because right now, it is concussion symptoms. You have to figure where that source is, eliminate that source if it could be the neck and you go from there. If you're headache free then that's great. I do think my neck feels better today than it did.

One thing I was disappointed with was the assessment of what came out of Boston, and some of what came out of the league, was it wasn't a headshot. That was their conclusion as to why a concussion didn't come of that. I didn't know they were all doctors. Concussions are caused by many things, including a whiplash motion that sends your brain moving laterally or however you're hit. It doesn't need to be a direct impact. So with that fact alone, I'm rolling my eyes.

James Reimer in Toronto has missed three weeks with whiplash symptoms - are you concerned with that diagnosis?

You always are concerned. Like last year, I thought I had a very simple “get your bell rung” and I missed five games. This, I don’t know how to put a timeline on it. But I am encouraged that my neck feels better. Once that starts to feel good I can make my way back.

Were you satisfied with the team’s response to the Lucic hit?

I don’t think we need an all out donnybrook. These guys in here have my back. If that exact thing happens again, I’m sure there will be a very different reaction. I try and have their backs, I trust they have mine.

Are you angry about the league’s decision not to suspend Lucic?

I’m disappointed but it’s out of my control. I had my sound bite, you know how I feel. I don’t think that’s changed much.

On Lucic’s claim the he didn’t see Miller coming at him:

I heard what he had to say. Do I buy it? I think he said what he had to say to avoid getting suspended. If he didn’t see me? ... I don’t know how that can happen.

Do goalies need to be protected better by the rules?

I think this lies outside of that. I don’t think I was that far out of the net considering it was a free puck moving towards my crease. I went to make a reasonable play on the puck that many goalies make when a free puck is coming. That lies on the outside. What we see more is around the crease and guys crashing. Even our own defense is taught to collapse so it brings more people. I think there needs to be a little bit of discussion about that side of things, and it’s definitely something that I hope the NHLPA is taking into consideration right now. I know that I’ll be looking to talk to the guys on the competition committee when I have a chance.

Sabres' Weber impresses in Myers' spot

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 16, 2011

BUFFALO — Despite sitting 15 of the first 16 games, rugged defenseman Mike Weber impacted the Sabres' 3-2 shootout victory in Montreal.

Weber, a regular nudged out the lineup by the Sabres' depth this season, skated 22:14 on Monday in place of the struggling Tyler Myers. The 23-year-old even killed a Canadiens power play late in overtime.

"It's not easy, but I think when the preparation and the opportunity meet, he has to be ready to play," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said about Weber on Tuesday inside the First Niagara Center. "I think he's put the work in and he's proved that he was ready, even though it was short notice."

How does a guy go from a spare part to playing in crunch time so quickly?

"We liked the way he had played in the game," Ruff said. "He was doing a nice job for us."

Weber's fearlessness helped get him on the penalty kill, too.

"We knew that if there was a puck that was going, he would probably risk any part of body to block it," Ruff said.

It's unclear if Myers, a minus-3 twice last week, will return tonight against the New Jersey Devils. The three defense pairs from Montreal took drills first Tuesday. Myers practiced with several partners.

Myers said he's treating tonight's contest like he's playing.

"It's just a matter of coming back and getting back to the intensity that I should be," he said.

Naturally, it was difficult being healthy scratch for the first time in his three-year career.

"It was a tough day yesterday," said Myers, who has zero goals and only four assists. "I can't deny that. It's never fun when something like that happens. I think it's all about how I respond. I can't hang my head and worry about what other people are saying or what people think."

Ruff added: "It's hard a lesson. It's something he has to take and realize he had to be a better player in some areas. He has to be better with the puck. He has to be a little bit stronger getting it

back. This should be something that really helps him.”

Notes: Sabres winger Cody McCormick got hit during Monday’s win and “wasn’t feeling well,” Ruff said. He missed practice Tuesday. The Sabres might need to recall someone. They have no extra forwards. ... Sabres center Jochen Hecht (concussion) skated in a full practice again Tuesday on the fourth line. The 34-year-old, who hasn’t played yet this season, keeps suffering setbacks. “The headaches weren’t a big problem,” said Hecht, who hasn’t experienced one in more than two weeks. “Something else looks like it was going on. We changed some treatment, had some medicine changed. It really helped.” Ruff wants to ramp up Hecht’s workouts soon.

Miller says teammates have his back

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 16, 2011

BUFFALO — Ryan Miller's aware of the blistering criticism. He knows the Sabres' toughness has been questioned for days, ever since Boston's Milan Lucic steamrolled him. His teammates never responded to the lethal open-ice hit, which concussed the goalie and ignited a firestorm.

The Sabres' inaction Saturday instantly earned them a reputation throughout the NHL. They've been called "gutless," "soft" and other embarrassing names.

If they don't respond to the sight of their woozy franchise goalie laid out, his mask knocked off from the 6-foot-3, 228-pound winger's impact, what will they defend?

Still, "these guys in here have my back," Miller said Tuesday, his first public comments since he called Lucic a "piece of (expletive)" twice following Saturday's 6-2 loss to the Bruins.

"People were talking about how these guys don't have my back," Miller said inside the First Niagara Center dressing room. "My whole job is to help these guys and be there for them, and they're there for me. I'm disappointed in the direction that started to take.

"I've been with a lot of these guys for a really long time. For one incident and one tough stretch of hockey to start to become what it was I think is unfair to me and I think is unfair to the guys in here."

Miller called the hit an "anomaly" and said the Sabres are "prepared for anything."

"If that exact thing happens again, I'm sure there will be a very different reaction," Miller said. "I try to have their back, I trust they have mine. So that's the end of that one."

Miller appreciates his teammates' regret over the incident. Following the game, Paul Gaustad and Tyler Myers, two players on the ice, acknowledged they should've done more.

"I appreciate that they want to do more," said Miller, who didn't think a "donnybrook" needed to erupt. "But, I mean, what can you really do? Are you going to get a suspension yourself? Lucic is a tough guy. What are you going to do? Try to hack him, spear him, cheap-shot him. You're no better than he is.

"We'll play tough, hard-nosed hockey, and we'll have five more chances to play them. It's not about open season; it's about playing the game the right way and playing it hard."

Expect the Sabres to showcase more grit when the Bruins visit next Wednesday.

Coach Lindy Ruff clearly addressed the passive response with his team Sunday in Montreal, a day before the Sabres rallied to down the Canadiens 3-2 in a shootout.

Other than Miller, no one wanted to discuss the issue Tuesday.

"I'm case closed on it," said Ruff, who was criticized by NHL discipline czar Brendan Shanahan for saying it was "open season" on goalies. "I said my piece."

Sabres captain Jason Pominville added: "Obviously, we talked about it after the game, about how we just wanted to move on. I mean, we've answered all these questions before."

It's easy to forget, but the Sabres have won five of their last six entering tonight's home tilt against the New Jersey Devils. Goalie Jhonas Enroth has four of the wins.

When Miller plays again is unknown. The 31-year-old's experiencing headaches. He said he has "concussion symptoms" and a "little bit of whiplash." Two cases aren't always alike, but Toronto goalie James Reimer hasn't played since suffering whiplash Oct. 22.

"Not as well as I'd like to be," Miller said about his health. "Considering I'm just trying to get through where my neck is pretty sore, I'm trying to figure out if that's more a source of headaches."

Miller, who also suffered a concussion in March, felt fine during the first period Saturday. Lucic leveled him with 6:50 left. In the second, however, his head started "really hurting" and he felt "extreme tiredness." He left after 40 minutes.

"Last year, I thought I had a very simple get-your-bell rung, and I missed five games," Miller said. "This, I don't know how to put a timeline on it, but I'm encouraged that my neck feels better."

The Sabres, like most other teams, are usually coy with injuries, even obvious ones, labeling them "upper" or "lower."

Why did they come out and say Miller had a concussion? They wanted the league to suspend Lucic, which it didn't. His only punishment was a minor charging penalty.

"It didn't quite work out the way we thought it could," Miller said. "I'm definitely disappointed

in that. You just move forward.”

Lucic has contended he couldn't get out of the way as the two chased down a loose puck in the left circle, which rankles Miller.

“I was setting up for a breakaway. He mishandled the puck,” Miller said. “I think he was mad he lost the puck. I've heard what he has to say. Do I buy it? I think he said what he had to say to avoid being suspended. I think it's the NHL, man. The guy can skate. He can stop, he can turn, he can pick his head up.”

Sabres general manager Darcy Regier brought up goalie protection at the NHL GM meetings Tuesday in Toronto. He was unavailable for comment.

Sabres' Miller Questions Ruling, Says Team Has His Back

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

November 15, 2011

Buffalo, NY -- Through just 17 games this season, the year of Buffalo Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller has been a tumultuous one to say the least.

First, a rocky start brought on criticism from fans fueled by the rather hot start of backup goaltender Jhonas Enroth. After that, as most have come to see by now, was the blast in Boston from Bruins' forward Milan Lucic on a breakaway attempt.

The puck rolled way ahead of Lucic, so Miller went out to play it. Rather than letting up, Lucic reared back and checked the Sabres goalie to the ice rather forcefully. Miller stayed in the game for another period, but had to miss the third period due to a delayed onset of concussion symptoms.

Even though Lucic was penalized, Buffalo had been hoping Lucic received an additional suspension for what they felt was a blatant attack of a goaltender that could have been prevented.

The NHL's disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan didn't feel the same, and concluded that Lucic would receive no further punishment because it wasn't a direct blow to the head of Miller.

When speaking with reporters on Tuesday, the long-time Buffalo netminder made his opinion on the matter heard.

"The one thing I was disappointed with in the assessment or what came out of Boston and some of what came out of the league was that it wasn't a head shot. That was their conclusion to why the concussion didn't maybe come from that," said Miller. "I didn't know they were all doctors. Concussions are caused by many things, one of them including a whiplash motion that sends your brain moving laterally. It doesn't need to be a direct impact. That fact alone, I'm rolling my eyes."

Days after the hit, Lucic answered a question about why the hit happened from his perspective. He said that he had not seen Miller heading up to play the puck. Miller answered about Lucic's reasoning, saying he doesn't buy it. Not one bit.

"I think he said what he had to say to avoid getting suspended," said the Buffalo goalie. "It's the NHL, man. The guy can skate. He can stop, he can turn, he can pick his head up. He last touched it around the red line, and I touched it about the faceoff dot. That's like, from where I would challenge him on a breakaway, that's a matter of what -- like 10 feet of difference I skated? I wasn't skating out to the top of the circle. It's reasonable, the puck's coming towards my crease that I swat it away, clear it. If he didn't see me, then I don't even know. I don't even know how that could happen."

Adding to the injury and the lack of a response from the league in which he and the Sabres initially thought was worthy, is the criticism that started to circle around the team from those outside the

organization. The pointed view summarized that since the Sabres failed to respond to their goaltender hitting the ice as forcefully as he did, that maybe his teammates aren't going to put themselves on the line for that.

Miller asserted that that assessment is absolutely false.

"These guys in here have my back. I was disappointed in the direction that was starting to take where people were talking about how these guys don't have my back. My whole job is to try and help these guys and be there for them and they're there for me," Miller remarked.

"I've been with a lot of these guys for a really long time. For one incident and one tough stretch of hockey to start to become what it was, I think is unfair to me and I think is unfair to the guys in here."

For those that have opined that the team doesn't play quite the same for Miller as they may have used to, the franchise goaltender made quite a statement to that as well.

"You guys aren't in the locker room. You guys don't know what's going on," Miller asserted. "We allow you in here for these interviews. We don't conduct ourselves the same way as we do with each other. We're speaking to the fans, we're speaking to you guys, we're speaking because there has to be a voice around the team and there has to be an excitement and a buzz about our team and people love to talk hockey. Those kind of issues, we don't deal with that. And we certainly don't deal with it in the media."

Miller said he didn't necessarily mind the reaction that his teammates had, and respects that they're taking it out on themselves for not doing anything.

"What we have said, and what Paul [Gaustad] has said and some other guys have said, I appreciate that they wanted to do more," the netminder said. "But, what can you really do? You're gonna get a suspension yourself? Lucic is a tough guy, what are you gonna do -- try and hack him, spear him? Cheap shot him? Then you're no better than he is."

Miller said he's still dealing with effects from whiplash and symptoms of a concussion that are causing headaches. He said they have to determine the source of those headaches before they can take the next step with trying to get him back on the ice. In the meantime, Miller's neck is feeling better than what it used to due to some soft-tissue work.

"Hopefully I'm playing hockey sooner than later and it's not going to be an issue," said Miller.

The Sabres will be without their normal starting goaltender against the New Jersey Devils Wednesday at the First Niagara Center.

Sabres' Hecht Cleared for Contact; McCormick Sits

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

November 15, 2011

Buffalo, NY -- The Buffalo Sabres got on the ice for their first practice home since their latest trip to Boston and Montreal.

A step forward has been made for forward Jochen Hecht, who has been cleared for contact by the team.

"Today was the first day I did contact out there -- as little as it was," Hecht said, after missing the team's first 17 games with concussion symptoms. "[The next game] is out of the question, but I'm going to have to test and get hit in the next couple of days and get back in to game situations."

Lindy Ruff is staying cautiously optimistic with the ordeal.

"It's a good thing again," the head coach said Tuesday after practice. "We've been to this stage before and it's a good sign. We're gonna ramp it up in the next few days, and hopefully it's just a day-by-day process to get him to the point where he can play again."

Hecht practiced on the team's fourth line with Matt Ellis and Brad Boyes. He was there in place of Cody McCormick, who wasn't even on the ice.

Ruff said that McCormick wasn't feeling too well after a hit suffered against Montreal, and they'll re-evaluate him on Wednesday.

The top line at Tuesday's session highlighted Derek Roy centering Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville, the line that produced two goals in the third period to tie the game in Montreal. The second line featured Luke Adam centering Ville Leino and Drew Stafford.

Once again, Tyler Myers was the seventh defenseman at practice. Myers said afterwards that he's preparing as though he'll be playing Wednesday against New Jersey. His head coach said that he's yet to make a decision as to whether or not Myers would play.

The Sabres meet the Devils Wednesday night at the First Niagara Center.

Kassian not the answer to Sabres 'toughness' problem

Matthew Coller

WGR 550

November 15, 2011

Let's get this out of the way right now: Zack Kassian is not coming to the rescue.

Saturday night against the Bruins, forward Milan Lucic plowed Ryan Miller as the Sabres' goalie came out of his net to play the puck on a botched breakaway. With Miller laying on the ice, the Sabres hardly rushed to his defense and failed to retaliate at any point during the game, as Miller sat out the third period with a concussion. The buzz amongst fans has been that Buffalo should add a Rob Ray type or bring up the Lucic look-a-like prospect Kassian.

Earlier this week, I wrote that Kassian is developing quickly in Rochester. No doubt, his offensive production has exceeded early season expectations. The Sabres' 6-foot-3, 228 lb. prospect has seven goals and six assists in 15 games for the Amerks.

For a 20-year-old with only three games of AHL experience before this season, he's ahead of the curve with his stick handling, passing and ability to finish in front of the net. Coming into the season, many expected Kassian to be a mean, somewhat clumsy power forward with an incredible physical presence. It's been exactly the opposite.

Kassian has been in a grand total of one fight in 15 games. Friday night against the defending Calder Cup champ Binghamton Senators, he made a brilliant pass to set up a power play goal and sniped another one from the top of the circle. He also recorded as many hits as the Amerks' mascot.

Yes, he's well known for the blind-side hit in the OHL that earned him a lengthy suspension. He also made a reputation for another dangerous hit during the World Juniors in Buffalo that caused him to miss two games with another suspension. But, two dirty hits do not a tough guy make. [Neither does a fight at a bar.](#)

Zack Kassian is enormous. He wants to be scary. "That's what got me drafted to Buffalo, to be big and physical," he said after the Amerks' season opener. So far, he's only been big.

Keep in mind, learning how to play physical on a nightly basis is part of the process toward making him into a star. If he was ready to go toe-to-toe with players like Lucic, he would already be in the NHL.

"Everything has to get better," Kassian said after being asked about his physical play. "I'm developing every aspect of my game."

Consider that players like Paul Gaustad, Cody McCormick, Robyn Regehr and Pat Kaleta have been in the NHL for years and fought plenty, yet none were willing to stand up to Lucic after he crushed Miller. Gaustad said he was unhappy that no one – including himself – stood up. The bottom line was: even NHL veterans weren't up to the challenge. How would a rookie would be?

We keep hearing about his mean streak, eventually it will show up. The one fight he was in, Kassian jumped into a brawl to defend teammate Marcus Foligno, who had just boarded a Grand Rapid Griffins player. It was a good sign for those who project Kassian to be the next Lucic.

But, Lucic does that 70-plus times per year. Lucic also slams opponents on the forecheck, pushes defenseman around in front of the net and is ready and willing to take on anyone who comes at him.

Give Kassian time. Someday, that may be him. That day is not today. The Sabres will benefit in the long run far more by letting Kassian learn how to become a consistent force, rather than throwing him to The Beast.

Rochester Amerks' Alex Biega driven, determined to succeed

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat and Chronicle

November 16, 2011

He's not the biggest guy on the ice; actually Alex Biega is always going to be one of the smaller players in pro [hockey](#).

He might be the 5-foot-11 that the [Rochester Americans](#) list him at, if they measure him when he's wearing skates.

He's also not from the Dan Boyle or Brian Campbell mold of defensemen, where the opponent immediately goes on the defensive when he gets the puck on his stick.

But based on what he has done to get where he is right now, with the Amerks in the American Hockey League, somehow it's easy to project Biega making his way to the National Hockey League.

Just what he went through to get into Harvard University should be all the proof anyone needs. When it comes to determination, Biega doesn't take no for an answer.

Six or seven tries at the SATs, two more with the SAT II, and countless hours with tutors.

"Tutors left, right and center," Biega said, as if they formed a line on the ice. "My first NHL game I'm going to have to give my check to my dad for paying for them."

Now, if only the same care and determination went into the wardrobe. His teammates say too often Biega's sense of style doesn't fit the hockey-rink fashion genre.

"He looks like he's coming straight from the country club some days with his Ralph Lauren Polo vest," winger Derek Whitmore said.

As if on cue, Biega emerged from the Amerks dressing room with a sweater of Post-it Note yellow.

"See what I mean," Whitmore said.

Who ever said hockey was a fashion show. For Biega, it definitely is not on the ice. Just get the job done; who cares if it's pretty.

"He's very competitive and he battles out there," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said. "He does have stick skills, the ability to shoot the puck and pass, which, if you are small, you have to have."

Biega obviously has the smarts, too. That's due in large part to his parents. "They knew the value of an education so they preached that at a young age," said Biega, who left Harvard with a degree in sociology.

His father, Peter, played [college football](#) in Canada at Bishop's University in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Peter wasn't a hockey player but built a rink in the backyard, and on the nearby lake, at their home in suburban Montreal.

Hockey became a passion for the four Biega children: Alex, 23; Michael, 22; Danny, 20, and Marc, 18.

All four attended Salisbury School, a prep school in Connecticut. The oldest three played at Harvard; Marc is a senior at Salisbury and is considering his collegiate options. Danny was a third-round draft pick of the Carolina Hurricanes in 2010 and is a junior at Harvard.

Alex could have gone to play for Rimouski of the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, too. Sidney Crosby was playing there at the time and the assistant coach was Guy Boucher, now head coach of the NHL's Tampa Bay Lightning.

"A lot of people at home were going to major junior (in Canada) but I saw a game at Clarkson, and just to see the atmosphere of college hockey, it just drew me in," said Alex, a fifth-round draft pick (147th overall) by the Buffalo Sabres in 2006. "The lifestyle, everything about it. They say college is the best four years or your life and I can attest to that."

He chose a college where the classroom very much mattered, too. There are some schools where an athlete can leave with a degree, with or without ever truly applying himself. That doesn't happen at Harvard.

"I'd be going to class next to people who were looking at me like I was the stereotypical athlete," Biega said. "You'd be sitting next to people in class who don't even know what hockey is."

"The work was pretty demanding but it really helped. I'm definitely not a procrastinator anymore."

Just being accepted by Harvard was the really tough part. Biega said it took six or seven tries at the SATs to finally score high enough to meet Harvard's standards. "I kinda of chipped away, 50 points at a time," he said.

"And it wasn't until June of my senior year (2006). A lot of scholarship offers (from other schools) were getting picked up because I waited."

During his time at Salisbury and Harvard, Biega did whatever was necessary to improve his game. When he wasn't studying, or reading — "I try to read a book every two weeks on things like [investing](#) money or mental preparedness" — he was in the weight room.

"He's one of the strongest guys I ever played with," Whitmore said.

Now he's out to prove he's very much a prospect for the Sabres. As an AHL rookie a year ago with Portland, he scored 3 goals, 15 assists and 18 points in 61 games. Through 14 games with the Amerks, he has 3 assists.

"He's very professional in terms of being here early and doing what he needs to do to get ready to play, in the way that he conducts himself," Rolston said.

Biega very much understands what is expected, from giving back to the fans to being prepared to play.

A degree from Harvard is nice to have, too.

"Hopefully I don't have to use it until I'm 40 and after a long career in the NHL," he said.

Inaction on Goalie Hit Is Criticized

Jeff Z. Klein

The New York Times

November 16, 2011

TORONTO — Brendan Shanahan, the N.H.L. director for player safety, was handed something of a rebuke by general managers Tuesday at their annual fall meeting. Many agreed that the Boston Bruins' Milan Lucic should have been suspended for the hit he delivered on Buffalo Sabres goalie [Ryan Miller](#) last Saturday.

Shanahan declined to suspend Lucic, who crashed into Miller, as the goalie came out of his crease, without making an effort to skate past him. Lucic received a two-minute charging penalty. Miller sustained a concussion.

“Some people in the room felt it should have been a suspension, some people felt that the right decision was made,” Shanahan said, adding that the general managers expressed “a heightened sensitivity to the well-being of our goaltenders.”

Darcy Regier, Buffalo's general manager, and Coach Lindy Ruff called for Shanahan to suspend Lucic or else it would be “open season” on goalies, as Ruff said.

“I think Buffalo's comments afterward are a bit irresponsible,” Shanahan said, adding: “The general managers stressed to me the extreme importance of goaltenders. Certainly goalies are not fair game, and players have to understand that.”

Under rules dating to the 1960s, goalies cannot be hit, no matter where they are on the ice.

“As a message to the players around the league, if anybody does think that it's a tactic and a tactic that is a smart gamble on their part, it won't be,” Shanahan said.

Ray Shero, the Pittsburgh Penguins' general manager, said: “Several of the general managers brought up the fact there's only 60 goaltenders in the league. We have to be pretty careful.”

In other news, the N.H.L. said that concussions had fallen 50 to 60 percent in the first month of the season under stricter rules governing checks to the head and boarding, with suspensions and fines issued by Shanahan.

“I give the credit for that to the players,” Shanahan said. “The strides that the players have made and their efforts so far are commendable.”

The general managers also agreed to take steps toward adopting a hybrid icing rule next season to reduce races to the puck that have resulted in severe injuries. In September, Edmonton's Taylor Fedun broke a femur after crashing into the boards on the kind of race common under current icing rules.

The general managers agreed not to seek legislation to penalize Tampa Bay's 1-3-1 trap or Philadelphia's refusal to advance the puck against it, which brought their game last week to a standstill several times.

"We've had over 8,000 games since we took the red line out, and this is the first time we had a particular incident like this," said Colin Campbell, the vice president for hockey operations. Offside rules using the red line were abolished after the 2004-5 lockout.

And to help replay reviews better determine when a goal is scored, the general managers approved the installation of finer mesh in goal nets and to reposition the cameras in the nets.

Devils vs. Bruins: Ilya Kovalchuk sits, while Devils lose, 4-3

Rich Chere

Newark Star-Ledger

November 16, 2011

BOSTON — The [Devils](#) have spunk, but the Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins have an ingredient that elite teams can usually find when they need it most.

Pete DeBoer's squad, still trying to find itself 16 games into the season, got an education tonight that they couldn't have learned at Harvard.

"I think our effort was there. We did a lot of things well," DeBoer said. "We made some mental mistakes and didn't play with enough composure in the third. You can see they're a veteran team. They have veteran guys throughout their lineup and I thought the experience at some positions was critical in the third period.

"They played with some composure and we lost ours. It was a good lesson for us. We didn't do enough of the little things at the end to win the game. That's what good teams do."

Consequently, the Devils came up short after a five-goal third period as they fell to the Bruins, 4-3, at TD Garden. It was Boston's sixth straight victory.

"I think we played pretty good in the third. I think we have to learn to shut down the game and play more defensively," rookie defenseman Adam Larsson said. "But they're skilled and they played good."

For the fifth straight game, the Devils played without their most dangerous offensive player. [Ilya Kovalchuk wanted to play](#) and tested his sore groin in the morning skate and again in the pregame warmup.

In the end, DeBoer felt it was too risky to use the explosive winger.

"He's real close. We'll see how he wakes up (today in Buffalo) and we'll make a decision," DeBoer said. "It's not easy. He wants to play and we want to play him, but we have to do what's right."

So Kovalchuk watched from the press box.

"It was the coach's decision. It's always the coach's decision," he said. "But I'm pretty sure I'll play (tonight against the Sabres)."

The third period was electrifying.

Boston snapped the 1-1 deadlock six seconds after the faceoff. Patrice Bergeron won the draw with Patrik Elias and Bruins captain Zdeno Chara quickly gave Brad Marchand the puck.

Marchand cut inside on Larsson and then walked in alone on Johan Hedberg for a shot past the goalie's stick side.

"I didn't really see the guy there," Larsson said. "It was a good faceoff by them. I wasn't really ready there."

The Devils answered at 2:08 when Andy Greene's pass from along the left wing boards found Nick Palmieri in front for his first of two goals. With some fancy stick work and foot work, Palmieri redirected the puck past Bruins goalie Tim Thomas.

Palmieri's second, on the rebound of an Adam Henrique shot at 6:56, erased a Shawn Thornton goal.

At that point the Devils almost had a penalty shot. David Clarkson and Ryan Carter complained that Bergeron closed his hand on the puck in the crease with 4:05 to go.

"I think he did," Clarkson said. "But you've got to remember it's tough for the refs to see. I went to whack at it and he put his hand on it. But that isn't what cost us the game. They're a good team. They came back in the third and showed that."

Benoit Pouliot won it when he scored on a rebound with a soft shot inside the left post with 3:01 remaining.

"We didn't deserve to win because of the way we played in the third period," Elias said.

Devils lose to Bruins

Mark Everson

New York Post

November 16, 2011

BOSTON — Taking a swipe at the Devils' strategy, Bruins coach [Claude Julien](#) made the point that playing for a tie isn't playing to win.

The Devils have gained 11 of their 17 points this season by getting to overtime, but they were taken to school last night by the [Stanley Cup](#) champs, who had the more decisive ambition.

The Devils were swamped by an 18-6 third period shot tsunami, kept alive by Johan Hedberg's heroics, before finally falling 4-3 to the Bruins last night.

"That's why we were the better team in the third. We didn't sit on our heels," said Julien, the former Devils coach. "We wanted to win the game, not just get the point."

The Devils may be guilty of that less lofty objective, tied after two for the ninth time in 16 games. Or perhaps they were simply overrun by a better, faster team. Either way, or both, it made for a thrilling, electric third period in which the final result appeared inevitable, and became so when [Benoit Pouliot](#) snapped the tie with 3:01 left in the game.

"Tonight we got exposed by a veteran team," Devils coach Pete DeBoer said. "They played with some composure and we lost ours."

The Devils have yet to score more than three goals without aid of an empty-netter this season, and the schedule is virtually one-fifth finished.

To that end, they're likely to have two-time 52-goal scorer [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) back in the lineup tonight in Buffalo. Kovalchuk sat out his fifth straight with a groin injury last night, after nearly talking his way into the lineup.

"I'm pretty sure I'll play [tonight]," Kovalchuk said. "I think it was because they're back-to-back games."

The lack of scoring last night, by both teams, lasted past the halfway point. The Devils had amassed their familiar shot edge, 20-12, before [David Clarkson](#) snapped their 0-for-22 power play drought with a 5-on-3 goal at 10:46 of the second.

Clarkson tied [Zach Parise](#) for second-most goals on the team with five, one behind Patrik Elias.

Meanwhile, the Bruins had averaged six goals during the five-game winning streak they extended to six last night, 30 goals in five when the Devils had scored 34 in their previous 15.

It took a Hedberg mistake for the Bruins to get the on the board. Hedberg had the puck behind the net when Gregory Campbell stole it and centered, giving [Chris Kelly](#) an empty net to tie the game at 14:52 of the second.

Boston pounced for the lead six seconds into the third, when Patrice Bergeron won the opening draw back to Zdeno Chara, who sent [Brad Marchand](#) on a breakaway down the middle, splitting Adam Larsson and Andy Greene. Marchand scored his sixth past Hedberg's stick.

Nick Palmieri tied the game again at 2:08, steering home Greene's pass from the left boards to the right edge of the crease, back-dooring [Tim Thomas](#) to snap his seven-game goal drought.

Kovalchuk convinces Devils coach into game-time decision

Mark Everson
New York Post
November 16, 2011

BOSTON – [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) talked Devils coach Pete DeBoer into giving him a chance to play Tuesday night against the Bruins.

After the bulk of his players left the ice following their morning skate here Tuesday morning, DeBoer told the press that he was going to rest Kovalchuk at least until Wednesday's visit to Buffalo.

Kovalchuk remained on the ice, testing what DeBoer confirmed was a groin injury, and then chatted with the coach, and DeBoer changed his mind.

"I spoke to him on the ice and he said he felt really, really, good, so we'll let him take warmups and decide then," DeBoer told The Post, finally.

"It feels pretty good. I'll take warmups tonight and we'll make a decision from there," Kovalchuk said. "By the time I wake up [from the ritual afternoon nap], we'll see how it feels.

"We're on the same page. That's the way it's been with this guy since Day 1," Kovalchuk said.

Some 15 minutes earlier, DeBoer had made the decision that couldn't be wrong, to give extra rest to the two-time 52-goal scorer, suffering what he says is his first groin injury of his career.

"He's your best player," DeBoer said. "The lineup looks better, we're a better team when he's in the lineup."

In explaining his initial decision, DeBoer said he wanted Kovalchuk to take and give hits, which test groin injuries.

"The next step is for him to take some contact," DeBoer said in his initial, and subsequently amended, meeting with the press. "I asked him how he was. If I pushed the issue, he would have played. If it was a playoff game tonight, he would have played. That's where we're at."

DeBoer initially said that using Kovalchuk only for power play duty was not an option.

"Because of the injury, a groin injury," DeBoer said. "He's getting cold on the bench then going on and exploding? If it was a different injury, we would have looked at something like that."

Those concerns remained, but were not final.

Kovalchuk had missed four games, since Nov. 3, when he suffered the injury in the final minutes of a loss in Philadelphia. He'd been hopeful of returning earlier, following special treatments, but reached a plateau that prompted three days of rest before joining practice Monday.

DeBoer acknowledged Monday that he is still trying to find the right role and style for Kovalchuk. He pointed at the Devils three victories in the four games he missed.

"We buckled down, really concentrated on fundamentals and systems," DeBoer said. "When we do that, personnel can be interchangeable.

"Having said that, in order to get our game to the next level, we have to incorporate the Kovalchuks and [Travis] Zajacs around the world into that philosophy."

It might mean less puck-lugging, more passing, more dumping, more forechecking. For the moment, the Devils will just welcome him back, if he plays Tuesday.

When he returns, the lifelong left wing might return to the right wing "experiment" with [Zach Parise](#) and now [Adam Henrique](#) at center.

DeBoer said the game plan will remain as it has all season.

"We don't change anything philosophically, other than the power play, you don't have the one-timer there," DeBoer said. "We don't make changes based around him, but you're obviously a different team.

"When he's in the lineup he has the ability to back teams off, create things out of nothing. It's a weapon, that only a handful of guys in the league can do that."

It's always an issue, whether a team is best served by pounding a star into square holes, or molding the team around the super talent. DeBoer seems to favor the former.

*

The Bruins have won five straight, scoring 30 goals. The Devils have scored 33 goals in 15 games this season, entering Tuesday's game. . . [Johan Hedberg](#) is expected to start for a second straight game, after winning a 3-2 shootout in Washington Saturday. Martin Brodeur is expected to face the Sabres Wednesday in Buffalo. The Devils' five-game road trip ends in Tampa Saturday and Florida Monday.

Late goal dooms Devils in 4-3 loss to Bruins

Tom Gulitti

The Bergen Record

November 16, 2011

BOSTON – In the end, the Devils learned Tuesday night why the Boston Bruins are the defending Stanley Cup champions and how they still have some ground to cover to reach that level.

Devils right wing David Clarkson (23) and left wing Zach Parise (9) vie for the puck against Boston Bruins defenseman Zdeno Chara (33) in the first period of Tuesday night's game.

The Devils dictated play for most of the first two periods against the Bruins, but things spun out of control a bit in a wild third. Benoit Pouliot delivered the deciding blow in the back-and-forth battle, scoring on a rebound with 3:01 left in regulation to snap a tie and lift Bruins to a 4-3 victory at TD Garden.

“We made some mental mistakes and didn’t play with enough composure in the third,” Devils coach Pete DeBoer said. “You can see they’re a veteran team. They’ve got veteran guys through their lineup and I thought experience at some positions was critical in the third period. They played with some composure and we lost ours. It was a good lesson.”

The game was tied at 1 after 40 minutes with the Devils holding a team that had averaged six goals a game in winning its previous five to a Chris Kelly goal off a stick-handling misplay by goaltender Johan Hedberg with 5:08 left in the second period.

The tone was set for the third period, when Brad Marchand scored on a breakaway just six seconds in to give Boston a 2-1 lead. By 6:56 into the third, the game was tied at 3 with right wing Nick Palmieri scoring twice for the Devils to wipe out Bruins’ leads.

Palmieri answered Marchand’s goal by shoveling home a feed from Andy Greene at 2:08. Then after Shawn Thornton scored off a backhand to put Boston up, 3-2, at 3:40, Palmieri put home an Adam Henrique rebound for the first multi-goal game of his career.

Still, the Devils were on their heels for much of the final period, being outshot, 18-6. If not for Hedberg (33 saves), the game might have been out of reach instead of tied in the last four minutes.

Hedberg had trouble controlling the rebound of Joe Corvo’s right-circle shot, however, and Pouliot was there to chip it in for his second of the season.

“You can’t exchange rushes with a team like that,” Devils captain Zach Parise said. “I thought we were in control. That’s a really good team. The defending Stanley Cup champs are a great team and we were right there with them the whole time. But they had that flurry of some great, great chances toward the end that Johan withstood really well.

“We just can’t give up that many opportunities.”

The first two periods gave no hint of what was to happen in the third. The Devils controlled much of the play 5-on-5 and finally scored a power-play goal — David Clarkson’s 5-on-3 one-timer from the left circle — to take a 1-0 lead 10:46 into the second. That snapped the Devils’ power-play drought at 22 straight.

Even after Hedberg’s misplay, the Devils appeared in good shape heading into the third. Marchand’s goal, which came off a set play on the faceoff to open the period, changed everything.

“I was expecting a 1-0 or a 1-1 game,” DeBoer said. “It kind of opened up there in the third. To our credit, we pushed back every time they got one, but again late in games like that I think we’ve got to be able to seize control and play with a little more composure. Overall this year, we’ve done a pretty good job of that, but I think we got exposed by a veteran team in the third.”

Rookie defenseman Adam Larsson was among those who struggled. He was caught out of position on Marchand’s goal. But as DeBoer noted, Larsson “wasn’t alone” in struggling.

“It’s funny how it works,” center Patrik Elias said. “The way we play in the third period usually ends up in that result. We didn’t play well. We didn’t deserve to win by the third period the way we played. They could have scored three or four more goals. We had so many breakdowns there and Heddy had to make a couple of great saves for us to stay in the game.”

“We fought back and were battling, battling, battling,” Hedberg said. “Unfortunately, I don’t know, a fluky, fluky shot ended it.”

Bruins 4, Devils 3

NHL.com

November 15, 2011

BOSTON – One of the tools head coaches have at their disposal to get players to stay in line is ice time.

On Tuesday, Boston Bruins head coach Claude Julien put that tool to use and it paid off.

After he was a healthy scratch Saturday night against Buffalo, Bruins forward Benoit Pouliot scored the game-winning goal with 3:01 left in regulation to lift Boston past New Jersey, 4-3, at the TD Garden.

Earlier in a wild five-goal third period by the two teams, Boston winger Brad Marchand bounced back from a six-minute benching in the second period to score a goal just six seconds into the third.

The Bruins have now won six in a row.

With [Johan Hedberg](#) (33 saves) starting a second straight game in net and [Ilya Kovalchuk](#) missing a fifth straight game due to a groin injury, the Devils gave the defending Stanley Cup champs their stiffest test of the streak. The Bruins won the first five by a combined score of 30-10.

"We got away from our game plan," said Devils head coach Pete DeBoer, whose team dropped to 4-1-1 in its last six outings. "They took us off our game plan a little bit and we didn't respond the right way. We didn't win enough faceoffs, we didn't do enough of the little things at the end to win games – that's what good teams do."

The Devils broke a scoreless tie at 10:46 of the second period, when they snapped a 0-for-22 power-play drought on a [David Clarkson](#) 5-on-3 goal. New Jersey finished the night 1-for-5 with the man-advantage.

So I think that we played a pretty good game, and obviously the end result is not what we're looking for, but all in all it was a good game. - [Nick Palmieri](#)

"Yeah, it was nice to get one. It was a 5-on-3. We'll take any power play goals we can get right now to try and get that on track," said DeBoer. "It was nice to get one at a key time at that point in the game."

Clarkson's goal freed Brad Marchand, who had taken a roughing minor away from the puck on [Adam Henrique](#), from the penalty box. The Bruins winger took just one more shift in the period before he sat and watched Pouliot take his spot on the line with Tyler Seguin and Patrice Bergeron.

Chris Kelly's goal at 14:52 tied the score for Boston.

To open the third period, Julien turned to Marchand's line and the speedster put Boston ahead for the first time on the night.

"You just want to bounce back. I didn't want to hang my head," said Marchand, who has four goals in three games. "I wanted to go out and show that I could be better. I think [Julien] was kind of giving me a little pat on the butt that I had to do better in the game. I didn't have a good first couple periods. I wanted to come out in the third and play stronger and try and help the team win."

A wild series ensued, as at 2:08 [Nick Palmieri](#) pulled the Devils even. Then Shawn Thornton's first goal of the season gave the Bruins the lead again at 3:40 of the period. Palmieri answered again at 6:56, as he pounced on a loose puck in the slot and beat Tim Thomas (27 saves) with a wrist shot.

Before his two-goal outburst, Palmieri hadn't scored in seven games for the Devils.

"It's no secret that I've been struggling to score lately, so getting a couple goals is definitely nice," said the New Jersey winger. "But the win is the most important thing, so [I'm] still a little bit disappointed that we lost. But you've got to look at the positives as well as the negatives. So I think that we played a pretty good game, and obviously the end result is not what we're looking for, but all in all it was a good game."

The Bruins missed several chances to grab the lead again before Pouliot finally cashed in. Nathan Horton hit the crossbar and missed a couple other point-blank chances. With Kelly jamming in front, Joe Corvo got a shot through to Hedberg who deflected right to Pouliot for the winning goal.

"At the end I felt like coach had a little more confidence in me and put me out there late and I just put the puck on net," said the Bruins forward, who signed as a free agent last summer. "It wasn't a hard shot but it went in anyway, so that's good."