



Buffalo Sabres

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Boston, Buffalo ready for the main event

Bruins streaking, Sabres need points

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 23, 2011

The Sabres can say it's just a hockey game all they want. Tonight's meeting with Boston is more than that, and everyone involved knows it.

"A lot of people are talking about it," Bruins forward and Buffalo villain Milan Lucic said Tuesday. "There's a lot at stake with getting that first place in the division. Even the fans here in Buffalo are going to be excited for it. I know we're excited for it. We've been looking forward to this game as much as they have."

Folks in Sabreland have keyed on this game in First Niagara Center since Nov. 12, when Lucic barreled into Ryan Miller, concussing the goaltender and creating questions about the Sabres' integrity because they failed to respond. Over the past 10 days, nearly every hockey conversation in Buffalo has featured dialogue about that 6-2 loss.

When the sellout crowd walks to the foot of Washington Street tonight, the buzz won't be about how many shots on goal the teams will have.

"It'll be a different atmosphere. We realize that," Sabres forward Brad Boyes said. "But we need to win. They're playing very well. They just jumped ahead of us in the standings, and we need to keep pace with them. It's a game that's very valuable to us in the sense that we need to play well at home, we need to keep pace, we need to win."

For his part, Lucic expects the Sabres to challenge him to a fight. The 6-foot-4, 220-pounder is willing to answer. The ability to respond to adversity and anger has come to define the defending Stanley Cup champions. They repeatedly avoided elimination during the playoffs and have entered an even more hostile environment in Montreal, where captain Zdeno Chara is despised for a hit on Max Pacioretty that fractured a neck vertebra of the Canadiens' forward.

"We're not the ones looking for revenge, if there is one," Boston coach Claude Julien said. "That's not a big issue, and I think our team has been able to handle teams that have tried to push us around, so that's not even something we're going to lose sleep over."

The Bruins enter the game with physical superiority and an edge in the standings. Though the Northeast Division rivals each have 24 points, two behind Toronto, Boston has played one less game and arrived in town with a nine-game winning streak.

"They're probably the best team in the league right now," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said.

Said Julien: "We actually didn't have much of a choice the way we had backed ourselves against the wall there for the start of the season [3-7]. We understood that it had to be done, and we're fortunate enough to have what we consider a pretty good team.

"You go from winning a Stanley Cup to being last in your conference, if that's not a wake-up call, I don't know what is."

While the Bruins have been rolling, the Sabres have lost three of five, including setbacks in their last two home games. They are just 4-6 in Buffalo.

"If you want to get going and get some positive out, this is the team that you want to play and you want to beat," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "We've got to show we're prepared to bring our 'A' game because they have been bringing theirs for quite some time now."

Pominville is among those who have repeatedly said the Lucic-Miller incident is in the past. The Sabres grew weary of questions just two days after the collision, but many remain.

"They addressed that they weren't happy with how they responded," Lucic said. "I've always respected the Buffalo Sabres. I didn't call anyone a coward or anything like that. I never said anything along those lines. All I said was we would respond differently. That's the only thing I said. I never pointed fingers at absolutely anyone.

"I said what I said, and my answer is not going to change, especially with the hit. I was barreling down on the puck, and my main focus was the puck. A collision ensued, and unfortunately Miller got hurt on the play."

So did the Sabres' pride. While there are many ways to get it back, showing they aren't scared of the Bruins is the most immediate.

"A lot of times it's been built up to the point there's big-time disappointment because nothing happens," Julien said. "Whether something happens or not, it doesn't matter to us. It's about coming in here and focusing on winning a game. We're on a pretty good roll right now. Why would we want to change our ways and fall into that situation where you're only going to hurt your team more than you help it?"

Said Pominville: "We want to be better, and no better time to do it."

Sabres' Hecht excited and ready to play again

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 23, 2011

After watching the Sabres play 27 regular-season and exhibition games in four countries, Jochen Hecht is finally ready to join them.

Hecht, who suffered a concussion on the opening practice of training camp, has pronounced himself 100 percent and ready to play tonight when Buffalo hosts Boston in First Niagara Center.

"I'm excited about it," Hecht said Tuesday. "It's been a long time. The last game was in the playoffs against Philly, so I'm excited to get out there and play."

Hecht has played only one game since last March. He suffered a concussion late in the regular season and was sidelined again when symptoms returned. He made it back for Game Seven of the Sabres' first-round playoff loss to Philadelphia but returned to the injured list after September's collision with former teammate Shaone Morrisonn.

Hecht was close to returning several times this fall but repeatedly got blindsided by the return of symptoms. He stayed away from the ice during the first week of November, a break he credits with helping the recovery process. He also changed medications and visited a chiropractor.

"I've been doing fine since. That really pushed me over the edge," Hecht said. "I was getting frustrated. You're getting close to coming back but you're still not 100 percent. Like I said, that week helped out. The treatment right now is catching on, and I feel 100 percent again."

The 34-year-old practiced on a line with rookies Luke Adam and Corey Tropp. Adam and Hecht can both play center.

"It's possible he can play," Ruff said. "He said this time he's feeling better than the other times he got close."xleg

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Patrick Kaleta skipped the workout Tuesday for "maintenance," Ruff said. The right winger, who also missed a practice last week, is expected to play.

Left wing Tyler Ennis, who is recovering from an Oct. 22 ankle sprain, also was unable to practice.

"A little bit sore so we decided to keep him off," Ruff said. "I think some of that can be expected. We ramped up the workload, so it tells us he's not quite there yet."

Goaltender Ryan Miller, who hasn't been on the ice since a concussion-causing collision with Boston's Milan Lucic on Nov. 12, is still experiencing symptoms.

"Ryan's feeling better," Ruff said. "Again, every day is a little bit different. I think you get into these situations you really don't know. You can have a bad night's sleep and think it's something else. A lot of times it's tough, but he's doing better. I talked to him on the way in, I talked to him on the way out. He's in good spirits. I think he's progressing."

* * *

Brad Boyes, who has just one assist in the last six games and no goals in 11, skated in the middle of left wing Thomas Vanek and right wing Jason Pominville. The duo has combined for 19 goals and 47 points in 20 games.

"They're the guys that have been going constantly," Boyes said. "If I get that look, it's a good chance and I'll look to take advantage of it."

Vanek was the only Sabre on the leader board Tuesday after the opening week of All-Star voting ended. He was 23rd among forwards with 44,316 votes, well behind leader Daniel Alfredsson of Ottawa (131,774).

* * *

Tropp could be the odd forward out if Hecht returns despite recording a goal and an assist in his first seven career games.

"If I'm here, I'm going to work my hardest and do everything in my power to hopefully one day come here and stay here," Tropp said. "For the most part I've been pretty happy with how I've played."

The game against the Bruins could be the first NHL meeting between Tropp and Boston defenseman Steven Kampfer. The two have been linked since college when Michigan State's Tropp slashed Kampfer near the head while the Michigan player was on the ice, an incident that got Tropp suspended for the rest of the season.

"I haven't even thought about it, to be honest with you," said Tropp, who played against Kampfer in one minor-league game last season.

"It was an unfortunate incident. Obviously, we're both in the same spots now. That's all I have to say about that."

Lucic seems to enjoy the furor he created

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

November 23, 2011

You think Milan Lucic was shaking in his skates or up all night worrying about having his nose rearranged? Uh, not quite. The Bruins winger and former boxer spent part of his teens fighting with gloves, so you can safely assume he wouldn't be losing sleep over the possibility of dropping them.

Lucic could barely contain his smile Tuesday while looking forward to playing the Sabres for the first time since he flattened Ryan Miller. You're never sure what to expect when so much hype accompanies a game. It could turn into a pile of nothing, as it often does. Lucic anticipated putting up his dukes tonight.

"Yes," Lucic said. "I'm not going to lie. Yes. We'll just wait to see what happens."

Heck, he practically welcomed the challenge Tuesday after converting a rare hat trick Nov. 12 in his last meeting with the Sabres. He took out a franchise goaltender and escaped with nothing more than a charging penalty, questioned the Sabres' toughness on his way out the door and infuriated an entire community. Miller called him a piece of ...

Lucic was the playground bully who beat up the skinny kid and challenged his friends afterward. And when they backed down, he rubbed it in their faces by telling everyone in school. He has become the biggest villain in this town since Dolphins linebacker Bryan Cox flipped half a peace sign to Buffalo in the mid-1990s.

Now, that's an accomplishment.

Sabres fans view the winger as a son of a gun, but he's actually a son of a longshoreman. He's 6-foot-4 and 220 pounds. He grew up between two brothers. He's had 40 NHL fights in four-plus seasons. He knows how to scrap. Looking back, the Sabres' failure to engage might have been self-preservation, not a lack of team unity.

If nothing else, Lucic adds more punch to what otherwise would be a Wednesday night contest in November, one among 1,230 on the NHL schedule. Both teams insisted the game would remain the main event once the puck is dropped. Boston has won nine straight games and was tied with Buffalo for the division lead.

Still, people are anxious to find out if the Sabres address a problem that should have been tackled the moment Lucic bowled over Miller. Their lack of aggression exposed them as a soft team that failed to stand up for their goaltender.

Lucic afterward sounded like he would have given himself a knuckle sandwich for what he did. He laughed and offered "no comment" Tuesday when someone asked about the Sabres' response.

Him saying nothing said enough. He was stunned. He would have led First Response if the situation were reversed.

We'll see what happens tonight.

"It's what's going to make this game exciting," he said. "There's anticipation building up to this game. Even the crowd, they're excited as we are as players. Wednesday night in Buffalo, there's probably no better place to be. The fans are going to make it exciting. I've been through it before in Montreal. It's what makes the game fun."

Sabres fans can scream whatever they want. They should know the more opposing teams and their fans whine about Lucic, the more they confirm his effectiveness. And any card-carrying Sabres fan wishes Lucic was wearing Blue and Gold rather than Black and Gold.

Lucic had 30 goals and 62 points last season and was a beast in the playoffs. Remember, the Vancouver native was despised in his own hometown last June and over the summer after he helped the Bruins beat the Canucks in the Stanley Cup final. Boston won the seventh game in Vancouver. He's a nuisance for many teams, including Buffalo.

"He's obviously a good player," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "He's usually a clean player, to be honest with you. He gets in there and works extremely hard. Obviously, we weren't happy with the hit. A lot of people were upset about it. Besides that, you have to give him credit."

The Sabres, along with every other team, could have had him on their roster. He was selected in the second round in 2006, 50th overall, long after the Sabres selected Dennis Persson and four picks after Buffalo grabbed goaltender Jhonas Enroth.

If it matters, Lucic isn't some Neanderthal. He's a pleasant person who happens to be tougher than medical school and plays with a mean streak. Add a twist of filth and plenty of jam, and he's miserable to play against.

Thing is, if you weren't so busy despising him, you would appreciate his style. And if you're looking for a fight, he's not running away.

"Never in my whole life," he said. "When I was a teenager, I did boxing because I enjoyed it. I never lost sleep about it. I've never gone into a game shaking about it or anything like that, but I can't speak for everyone else."

Sabres look to deny Bruins a 10th straight victory

Brian Hunter

NHL.com

November 22, 2011

BRUINS (12-7-0) at SABRES (12-8-0)

TV: NESN (HD), MSG-B

Last 10: Boston 9-1-0; Buffalo 6-4-0

Season Series: Second of six meetings between these Northeast Division rivals. The Bruins scored a 6-2 win at TD Garden on Nov. 12 in a game that was best remembered for [Milan Lucic](#)'s hit on [Ryan Miller](#) when the Buffalo goalie came out of his net to compete for a loose puck. Miller later left the game, was diagnosed with a concussion, and hasn't played since. Lucic had a hearing with the NHL regarding the play, but was not suspended.

Big Story: While the return of Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh garnered the lion's share of attention League-wide on Monday, the Bruins quietly went about extending the NHL's longest win streak this season to nine. In a game originally set to be nationally televised before Versus switched to the Penguins-Islanders broadcast, [Tim Thomas](#) recorded his second consecutive shutout to make an [Andrew Ference](#) first-period goal hold up against Montreal.

Team Scope:

Bruins: Continuing a perfect month of November and seemingly clicking on all cylinders, Boston paid back Montreal for a home-and-home sweep suffered at the hands of the Canadiens at the end of October. That proved to be rock bottom for the Bruins, who haven't lost since. They racked up 42 goals during the first eight games of their winning streak, but Carey Price limited them to just Ference's score with 4:19 left in the first on Monday. That was enough for Thomas, who stopped 33 shots and extended his shutout streak to 133 minutes, 4 seconds.

"I have felt good the last couple of days," Thomas said. "I don't know why I'm just seeing the play well and reading what the other team's options are. Sometimes as a goalie, you get stuck in a puck focus so when a guy makes a pass you get caught on your heels. Right now I've just got a good feeling that I'm in a good position for the shot, but at the same time, my feet aren't locked in so I can move."

Sabres: During Miller's absence, Buffalo has split four games -- however, both the victories came on the road while the Sabres have lost their last two at First Niagara Center, where they're 5-6-0 for the season. Improving their home record doesn't figure to get any easier with the

additional loss of defenseman [Tyler Myers](#) for the next month due to a broken wrist that required surgery. Myers was recently a healthy scratch for a game, but then came back to score twice in a loss to New Jersey before getting hurt in Saturday's 4-2 defeat at the hands of Phoenix.

"It's important that we each try and step up a little bit and fill that void. And there's also a real good young call-up with T.J. (Brennan) here," fellow defenseman [Robyn Regehr](#) said. "I know he's really looking forward to getting in the lineup and helping us out as well."

Who's Hot: Ference has goals in back-to-back games for the Bruins. [Chris Kelly](#) assisted on Monday's tally, giving him 4 goals and 3 assists in the last five games. Thomas is now tied for the League lead with 3 shutouts.

Injury Report: In addition to Miller and Myers, sidelined for Buffalo are forwards [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion), [Tyler Ennis](#) (ankle) and [Cody McCormick](#) (upper body) and defenseman [Mike Weber](#) (upper body).

Stat Pack: Ference has a goal streak going for the first time in his 657-game NHL career. His season high for goals is 4, reached on four different occasions. ... The Sabres are second in the League with a 90.3-percent success rate killing penalties.

Puck Drop: Boston has won 10 straight as recently as the 2008-09 season, while the franchise record was established back in 1929-30 with a 14-game streak. Right now, though, the players' attention is simply on continuing to play well each night.

"We're not focusing on [the streak]," Thomas said. "We've done a good job of settling it down to one game at a time and staying in the here and now. It's mentioned every once in a while to keep it going, but that's it. I think that's the key."

Boston (12-7-0) at Buffalo (12-8-0)

Brett Huston

STATS

November 22, 2011

Only one goal was scored during the [Boston Bruins](#)' latest victory, a far cry from the offensive display they've put up during most of a nine-game winning streak that included a 6-2 rout of the [Buffalo Sabres](#).

That result isn't the only reason the Sabres could be eager for payback Wednesday night.

Boston's [Milan Lucic](#) leveled [Ryan Miller](#) with a hit that's kept the Buffalo goaltender off the ice ever since, providing an intriguing subplot in what could be a testy rematch at First Niagara Center as the Bruins try to push their win streak to double digits.

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Boston (12-7-0) scored one goal or fewer in four losses during its 3-7-0 October before putting up at least five goals in six of its eight straight wins to begin this month.

The Bruins' offensive outburst took a night off Monday in Montreal, but they still managed to extend their streak. Two days after making 23 saves in a 6-0 win over the [New York Islanders](#), [Tim Thomas](#) stopped all 33 shots he faced - including 15 in the third period - to make [Andrew Ference's](#) first-period goal stand in a 1-0 victory.

"You've got to learn to win a whole bunch of different ways over the years and that's one of the things we did last year," said Thomas, who's started six times during the streak and posted a 1.33 goals-against average and three shutouts.

The Stanley Cup champions have outscored their opponents 46-14 during a streak that's the franchise's longest since a 10-game run from Dec. 12, 2008 to Jan. 1, 2009.

Six of those came when the Sabres (12-8-0) visited TD Garden on Nov. 12 - all in a stretch of 22:12 in the second and third periods - but the big story came in the first. Miller skated out to the right circle to play a loose puck and was bowled over by Lucic, drawing a two-minute charging minor.

Miller stayed in until the end of the second before exiting with tightness in his neck. A day later, he was diagnosed with whiplash and a concussion.

Lucic - who Miller called "gutless" - wasn't suspended by league discipline czar [Brendan Shanahan](#), a decision Miller said he wouldn't speak out against despite not being pleased.

Shanahan's lack of action left many to wonder what sort of retribution Buffalo might provide Wednesday, though Miller doesn't seem to agree that payback is the right course.

"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 Nov. 15. "I try to have their backs. I trust they have mine, so that's the end of that one."

The Sabres had won four straight prior to visiting Boston, but they're 2-2-0 since as backup [Jhonas Enroth](#) - who has a 6.12 GAA in three games versus the Bruins - has posted a 2.56 GAA.

Buffalo outshot Phoenix 45-29 on Saturday but lost 4-2.

"We missed too many opportunities," coach Lindy Ruff said. "Point blank. We missed empty nets. We hit a few posts. It isn't good enough."

To make matters worse, the Sabres lost [Tyler Myers](#) to a broken wrist, an injury that will keep one of their top defensemen out four to six weeks.

[T.J. Brennan](#) was recalled from AHL Rochester to take the place of Myers, who joins Miller, defenseman [Mike Weber](#) and forwards [Jochen Hecht](#), [Tyler Ennis](#) and [Cody McCormick](#) on the injured list.

[Thomas Vanek](#) has a four-game goal streak against Boston that started with a 7-6 shootout victory Jan. 1 - the Bruins' last visit to Buffalo.

Boston center [Tyler Seguin](#), who had two goals earlier this month against Buffalo to give him a team-high 11, hasn't scored in four games.

HECHT IS READY TO GO

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 22, 2011

The look on [Jochen Hecht](#)'s face said it all. After weeks of stalled comeback attempts, the 34-year-old declared himself 100 per cent healthy and available to play in Wednesday's grudge match with the defending Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins. It's been a long road back for Hecht, who has yet to play this season after suffering a concussion on the second day of training camp in an innocent collision with teammate Shaone Morrisonn.

"I'm excited about it," said a smiling Hecht this morning. "It's been a long time. The last game was in the playoffs against Philly, so I'm excited to get out there and play."

Hecht had appeared to be making progress a couple of times earlier this season but was forced to shut it down because of post-workout headaches - most notably during the team's trip to Germany. He credits a recent week off and a change in his treatments to the speedier recovery process this time around. He admits the last few weeks have been difficult at times.

"It was getting frustrating. You're close, you're coming back, but you're still not 100 per cent. But like I said, that week really helped. The (chiropractic and active release) treatment right now is catching on and I feel 100 per cent again."

Hecht practiced at center today on a line with rookies [Luke Adam](#) and [Corey Tropp](#), a trio that Hecht jokingly referred to as "two young kids and the old guy."

[Tyler Ennis](#) didn't skate today, and Lindy Ruff said his injured ankle had become sore due to the increased workload over the past few days. "Some of that can be expected," said Ruff. "It tells us he's not quite there yet." ... Ruff also said that while [Ryan Miller](#) is feeling better, he still isn't symptom free ... [Patrick Kaleta](#) was absent from practice with a maintenance day.

In Kaleta's absence, today's practice lines looked like this:

Vanek-Boyes-Pominville

Leino-Roy-Stafford

Adam-Hecht-Tropp

Gerbe-Gaustad-Ellis

The red-hot Bruins come into Buffalo riding a nine-game winning streak, the longest such streak in the NHL this season. It's a far cry from the 3-7 start they got off to, which everyone immediately credited to a Stanley Cup hangover. Well it appears that a few Tylenol and some

Alka-Seltzer rid the B's of that hangover because they've been on fire ever since. Check out some of these gaudy numbers from the current streak:

- This is Boston's longest win streak since a 10-game stretch from Dec. 12, 2008-Jan. 1, 2009. They haven't lost since a 4-2 setback in Montreal on October 29.
- They have outscored their opponents by a 43-14 margin, and have scored fewer than four goals just twice in the nine games (2-1 vs. Columbus on Nov. 17; 1-0 @ Montreal on Nov. 21). In their first 10 games, they scored just 22 goals and allowed 25.
- Boston's goal differential of plus-26 is 11 more than second place Pittsburgh.
- Boston carries a 162:11 shutout streak into tonight's game, with their last goal allowed being a Derek MacKenzie score on Tuukka Rask at 2:49 of the second period in the win over Columbus on Nov. 17
- The Bruins have scored 10 goals in their last 45 power play opportunities (22.2%), which snapped an 0-for-22 stretch after scoring on their first power play opportunity of the season.

Sabres just want to win

Bruins' Lucic expects retaliation for hit on Miller back on Nov. 12.

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 23, 2011

Admit it, Sabres fans, Milan Lucic would look pretty good wearing blue and gold. Forget for a moment the hulking Boston Bruins winger is public enemy No. 1 here, his wicked open-ice hit that recently concussed goalie Ryan Miller still fresh in many minds heading into tonight's first-place showdown.

As Lucic showed when he plowed into Miller as both chased a loose puck Nov. 12, he's a beast, arguably the NHL's best mix of ferociousness and talent.

Off the ice, Lucic smiles a lot. He's an engaging, honest and thoughtful personality. When the Sabres never responded to his thump in any meaningful way, the 30-goal scorer laughed at them, saying the Bruins, winners of nine straight, would've taken care of business.

Wouldn't anyone want that moxie on their team? Isn't that what the Sabres have been missing for years?

Naturally, Lucic believes he'll finally face retaliation tonight.

"Yes. I'm not going to lie. Yes," Lucic said Tuesday inside the First Niagara Center when asked if he expected the Sabres to challenge him. "So we'll just wait to see what happens."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said he respects Lucic's game – to a point.

"Not for that incident I can't. As a player, (yes)," Ruff said. "I was around him at the Team Canada (Olympic) camp. He plays the game hard. But I can't respect that play."

The fallout from that play has been harsh. The Sabres' reputation has taken a hit. Fans and players are embarrassed. Assistant captain Paul Gaustad, who was on the ice for the hit, has lamented his inaction.

Was Lucic surprised they never pushed back?

"Uhhh, no comment," he said.

Of course, none of the Sabres said they would go after Lucic or anyone else. But what can they say, really? It's 2011; old time hockey has mostly disappeared.

Players and coaches have tried to focus the talk on the game. Both teams have 24 points, something lost in the hoopla surrounding Lucic. Tonight's winner will own at least a piece of the

Northeast Division's top spot. The Bruins have shaken off a miserable start and proven why they won the Stanley Cup in June.

"I don't know what to expect," Ruff said. "We got to try to win a game, obviously. They're playing well. They're Stanley Cup champions. They're a good team. They're playing as good as any team. They're probably the best team in the league right now."

Is there pressure to play differently in a game with so much buildup?

"I don't know from who," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "We go out there and want to win every game we play in. This is no different. The pressure is on us every night to win a game."

Lucic added: "It's definitely going to be a hard-fought game. ... I think there's more at stake than just getting revenge. It's just goes to show in the standings, and I think that's what we're focused on more than anything, just to keep the streak going and secure first place in the division."

Still, in reality, first place the day before Thanksgiving means very little. The Lucic drama, the possibility of payback has people buzzing. A villain's in town.

"That's what's going to make this game exciting, the anticipation building up to this game, even in the crowd they're excited for this game as much as we are, the players on both sides," Lucic said. "Wednesday night in Buffalo, there's probably no better place to be. The fans are going to make it exciting. I've been through it before with Montreal. It's what makes the game fun."

The game wasn't very fun for the Bruins earlier this season, as their Cup hangover lingered throughout October. Fresh off their first championship in 39 years, they started 3-7, scoring only 21 goals. Now they're undefeated in November, having scored 42 times during their nine-game run.

What happened? The Bruins knew they were already beginning to lose the grip on the season.

"You go from winning a Stanley Cup to being last in your conference," Bruins coach Claude Julien said. "I think if that's not a wake-up call, I don't know what is. I think for the longest time we probably thought, 'We're going to be OK here.' But I think we were getting to the point we were playing with fire. We had to turn it around sooner than later."

"Mentally, our guys kind of got themselves, I guess, in the right place and started competing the way we know our team can."

The rampant parity throughout the league makes the run even more impressive.

"You got to get a few breaks," Ruff said. "I think they've played well enough. I think if you asked them there was a couple games they'd probably say they didn't deserve to win. But when you get on a run a lot of good things happen."

Sabres' Hecht plans to make season debut tonight

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 23, 2011

When Jochen Hecht walked into the dressing room following practice Tuesday, the Sabres center greeted the cameras and reporters at his stall with a wide grin.

For weeks, the 34-year-old had only given updates about the setbacks he's endured after suffering a concussion early in training camp. Finally, Hecht could talk about his return tonight against the Boston Bruins at the First Niagara Center, his first game the April 26 playoff finale.

"Yeah, I'm excited about it," Hecht said. "It's been a long time."

Counting the postseason, Hecht, who also had a concussion late last season, has only played one of the last 33 games and five of the last 46.

His recent recovery had been riddled with setbacks. When he appeared close to playing, he'd suddenly be unable to practice. The Sabres shut him down earlier this month, and he returned symptom-free.

"When I took that week off again and just changed treatment a little bit, that really helped," said Hecht, who began seeing a chiropractor and taking different medicine. "I've been fine since. Not really pushing it over the edge."

Did Hecht ever feel like he'd never get back?

"No. It was getting frustrating getting close to coming back but you're still not 100 percent," he said. "That week helped out. My treatment right now is catching on. I feel 100 percent again."

Hecht practiced between rookies Luke Adam and Corey Tropp on Tuesday.

"Two young kids and the old guy," Hecht joked.

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff wouldn't confirm Hecht would play.

Notes: Ruff mixed up some trios Tuesday, putting center Brad Boyes on the No. 1 line with Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville. Derek Roy went back between Ville Leino and Drew Stafford. ... Winger Patrick Kaleta sat practice (maintenance day). Meanwhile, soreness forced winger Tyler Ennis (ankle sprain) to sit the session. "Some of that can be expected," Ruff said. "We've ramped up the workload. So it tells us he's not quite there yet."

Sabres' Hecht Close to Return; Miller Update

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

November 23, 2011

Buffalo, NY -- It's been a long-time coming for Buffalo Sabres forward Jochen Hecht.

Sidelined since April 26 -- Game 7 against Philadelphia -- Hecht has been dealing with concussion symptoms for almost seven months. Now, he could be poised for a return in to one of the most highly anticipated matchups of the young season.

"It's possible he could play," head coach Lindy Ruff said Tuesday. "Obviously he's feeling better. It's something that on a daily basis, one day he comes in and says 'Yeah, it feels a lot better than it did before.' He said this time he's feeling a lot better than the other times when he got close."

Hecht changed up treatments after taking a week off and has been skating with the team after being cleared for contact last week.

"I'm excited about it. It's been a long time," he said after practice. "I'm excited to get out there and play."

It remains to be seen if Hecht will get back in to the lineup. Patrick Kaleta missed practice Tuesday for a maintenance day, which led Hecht to be on a line with rookies Luke Adam and Corey Tropp during practice. As per usual, Ruff declined to talk about lineup issues.

The top two lines during Tuesday's practice were Brad Boyes centering Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville, with Derek Roy centering Ville Leino and Drew Stafford. When asked after practice about Boyes making the jump to the top line, the coy Ruff said: "That's just for the Boston guys if they were watching."

Top goaltender Ryan Miller has been out since the Sabres' last tilt against the Boston Bruins, and the head coach provided an update on him Tuesday.

"Ryan's feeling better," Ruff said. "Every day is a little bit different. I think you get in these situations and you really don't know. You could have a bad night's sleep and think it's something else, so a lot of times it's tough. He's doing better. I talked to him on the way in and I talked to him on the way out. He's in good spirits, and I think he's progressing."

Tyler Ennis did not skate with the team Tuesday. Ruff telling reporters that the forward was sore after they ramped up the workload on him last week. He concluded that Ennis is "not quite there yet."

The Sabres and Bruins do battle at the First Niagara Center Wednesday evening.

Moorestown native to make debut for Sabres against Bruins tonight

Randy Miller

Cherry Hill Courier-Post

November 23, 2011

T.J. Brennan's cell phone keeps ringing.

A lot of calls have been coming in the last couple days from South Jersey.

The kid who grew up in Moorestown will have a dream-come-true moment tonight in Buffalo when he makes his NHL debut for the Sabres against the defending Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins.

"My [mom](#), she spread the word around town pretty quickly," the 22-year-old blueliner told the Tonawanda (N.Y.) News. "I have a pretty big family, so they were really excited. My phone was going crazy."

The fourth of Terry and Kim Brennan's five children, T.J. received his first NHL call-up last week, only to be scratched for a [game](#) against Carolina and then immediately returned to the American Hockey League's Rochester Americans.

Back again as of Monday, Brennan is expected to stick around and see action at least for the next month or so filling in for Sabres injured defenseman Tyler Myers, who is sidelined with a wrist injury.

"These guys drafted me a few years back and are dressing me for a reason," said Brennan, a third-year pro who was the Sabres' [second-round draft pick](#) in 2007. "I just try to remember that. Keep it simple early on until I get some confidence and see what happens."

There will be some familiarity tonight for Brennan, who will start out being paired with Marc-Andre Gragnani, his defense partner in the AHL last season.

"It definitely helps that I've played with (Gragnani) before, so we're just trying to find that [chemistry](#) that we had last year," Brennan said. "Hopefully, I don't get too nervous."

[Playing](#) with Gragnani last season, Brennan really opened eyes, amassing 15 goals and 24 assists over 72 games with the Portland Pirates in his first AHL season.

This season, he has 3 goals, 4 assists and was a minus-3 in 17 [games](#) with Rochester.

A 6-1, 205 pounder, Brennan is known as an offensive defenseman who skates well and has a left-handed slapshot that's been clocked at almost 100 mph.

His defensive game has been improving since 2009-10 when he was coached in his first pro season by former Flyers forward Kevin Dineen, who is now head coach of the Florida Panthers.

Playing sound defense will be his goal tonight.

“We have a lot of skilled forwards,” Brennan said. “I’ll just try to get the puck to them as quick as possible. I’m a defenseman, so keep the puck out of my net. It’s that simple.”

Brennan has had quite a journey to the NHL. As a 10-year-old, he began playing [hockey](#) at the Medford Ice Arena. Then he became a legitimate prospect as a teen when skipping his senior year at Moorestown High School to take his game to the highest level of Canadian juniors in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League, two seasons for the St. John's Fog Devils and then another with the Montreal Juniors.

A season and change later, Brennan is an NHLer.

“I haven’t exactly taken your average route,” he said. “I just firmly believe if you want to do something you’ll do it. If you want to get there, you’ll get there. You need a little luck along the way, which I think I definitely got. But it started off as a dream and now it’s starting to come true, I guess I’d say. It’s exciting.”

Lucic expects Ruff stuff

Bruin figures he will be a target in Buffalo tonight

Kevin Paul Dupont

Boston Globe

November 23, 2011

BUFFALO - Rugged Bruins winger Milan Lucic figures he has a fight waiting for him here tonight, the residue of his infamous entanglement 11 days ago with Ryan Miller that left the Buffalo goalie hurting, coach Lindy Ruff fuming, and Sabres teammates apologizing for standing idly by in the aftermath of Lucic's shot heard 'round the world.

For all of that, the 23-year-old Lucic figures something wicked his way comes when the two clubs face off at the First Niagara Center.

"Yes . . . I am not going to lie . . . yes," a smiling Lucic said matter-of-factly when asked yesterday afternoon if he expects someone on the Sabres roster to engage him.

Inside the Buffalo dressing room, there are few obvious candidates to try to square things with Lucic for the hit that left Miller concussed. Paul Gaustad would seem the most likely, because he at least has the size (6 feet 5 inches, 212 pounds) to stand toe to toe with the 6-4 Lucic. Gaustad said he was "embarrassed" by his club's nonresponse the night of the incident.

Following yesterday's late morning workout, Gaustad greeted a clutch of reporters amicably and said he would talk after showering, but he did not reappear by the time the club's public relations staff rounded up the media posse for Ruff's daily briefing.

Ex-Bruin Brad Boyes, dealt to Buffalo last February, has but 169 career penalty minutes in his six-plus NHL seasons, and the slick forward would rank among the least likely candidates to call out No. 17 in Black and Gold. But Boyes has been around long enough to understand, as he calls it, "the realm of hockey," and he figures something is bound to happen tonight.

"Lucic is a big, tough player," noted Boyes, once a first-round Maple Leafs draft pick, "and though that isn't our style, we are a tough team. We don't back down from anyone. We keep going after it. We'll want to show that we're tight."

On Nov. 12 at TD Garden, with 6:48 to go in the first period, a charging Lucic plowed into Miller as the veteran backstop ventured far from his net, attempting to field a puck as it slid toward the dot in the faceoff circle to his right. Photos of the play show a fully upright Miller poised and seemingly bracing for a collision as Lucic arrives. Miller was spun around and lost his helmet upon taking the brunt of Lucic's impact high and to the back of his left shoulder.

"A collision ensued," Lucic recalled yesterday, "and unfortunately, Miller got hurt."

Ruff, who yesterday tried to shift the focus of tonight's game to what it means in the standings - an age-old dodge in the coaching business - was incensed in the immediate aftermath of the incident. Lucic received only a minor penalty for charging, and two days later, he avoided supplemental discipline when league vice president Brendan Shanahan essentially said the on-ice officiating crew made the right call.

The lack of a stiffer penalty, Ruff mused, would make it “open season” on goalies leaguewide. But NHL goalies have carried on their duties without incident and remain among the most protected players in all of pro sports.

Two days after the incident, Ruff met individually with his players over the course of some five hours, and was said to make it clear to them that their nonresponse in Boston was unacceptable. The next day, on local radio station WGR, Ruff said, “There are situations inside of a game that call for a lack of discipline and this was one of them.”

Does tonight present another of those situations? Perhaps, although such cases of anticipated revenge often prove to be far more hype than hurt. Bruins fans well remember how the Bruins didn’t react to Matt Cooke’s vicious check to Marc Savard’s head in Pittsburgh on March 7, 2010. Eleven days went by before Shawn Thornton finally pummeled Cooke in a fight at the Garden. Outcome: a 3-0 Penguins victory.

“To be honest, I don’t know,” said Bruins coach Claude Julien, informed that Lucic had said he expected someone from the Sabres to confront him tonight. “We’re not looking for revenge.”

Later, Julien added, “We handled teams that have tried to push us around. We’re not going to lose any sleep over it.”

Ditto for Lucic. Through the years, many NHLers who have been cast as fighters have noted the angst inherent in the job. It’s not something they typically discuss during their careers, but often in retirement they disclose the mental wear and tear that comes with engaging in the sweet science. Lucic doesn’t sound as if he’ll ever fret about it.

“Never in my whole life,” said Lucic, noting how he grew up accustomed to fighting, be it with his two brothers or when taking boxing lessons as a teen in Vancouver. “I never lost sleep about it, or ever gone to a game shaking about it. From my point of view, I’ve always enjoyed it.”

Such a mind-set could be due, in large part, to Lucic’s bountiful strength and skill for the fight game. When enraged, he is among the game’s most ferocious and feared brawlers. If someone were to take him on tonight simply to fulfill Ruff’s wishes, it’s likely that Lucic would punch through the battle in perfunctory, if not courteous, fashion.

But if he were first to be taunted, or nailed with a cheap shot or questionable check, it could trigger Lucic’s lunatic fringe.

Opponents around the league are well aware of the hurt he can inflict. Why did none of the Sabres come after him over the 43:12 that remained in that game in Boston? Most likely because none of them preferred being shipped home as Causeway pate.

“He’s a specimen,” said Thornton, another of the game’s feared combatants. “Not many like him. He can score 30 goals and he’s as tough as anyone in the league.”

We’ll find out this evening if the red rain comes pouring down. For one night, will old-time hockey return to the new NHL?

Bruins know Sabres have fight

Fisticuffs in the air

Stephen Harris

Boston Herald

November 23, 2011

BUFFALO — Dire forecasts of retaliation between NHL teams is an easy topic.

In reality, predictions of open warfare, when one team has a score to settle with another, very rarely come to fruition.

The Sabres will quite likely feel the need for revenge, and a little face-saving, when they host the [Bruins](#) tonight. Buffalo, no doubt, is still plenty steamed at the B's, specifically Milan Lucic, for his open-ice hit last week that injured star goalie Ryan Miller. And the Sabres surely heard the criticism of their lack of immediate response to the hit.

So it may well be that at the top of their to-do list tonight is to have someone drop the gloves and have a go with Lucic. That's kind of what the imposing Bruins winger expects. He is ready, willing and able.

“Obviously,” he said. “I mean, hitting a goalie, there's kind of a code there. No matter if it was accidental or not, you're going to have to stand up for your actions. I truly believe in that. That's why I'm not scared to stand up for it. They've been talking a lot about not having the right response, so who knows what'll happen? They might feel this is their time to respond.

“But you know how we are as a team. We're going to stand in there strong and do whatever we need to do. We'll make sure we protect ourselves and each other and try to win a game. We've shown in the past that we are team-tough and we do stick up for each other. Obviously, we have lot of guys here who are good with that stuff. I think that's what makes us such a good, tight-knit group, that we do stick up for each other.”

The way Lucic sees this going is similar to the way the Bruins dealt with Pittsburgh's Matt Cooke when the teams met after Cooke's devastating hit on Marc Savard. After that hit, the B's, too, were criticized for having no immediate response.

“Yeah, I mean, you can look back at the whole Matt Cooke thing,” said Lucic. “The next game, he stood up and fought Shawn Thornton, and it was over and done with. I expect sort of the same thing. If it ends up being a brawl, well, then it ends up being a brawl.”

The obvious guy to invite Lucic to dance will be winger Cody McCormick, a 6-foot-2, 210-pound veteran pug who has had 42 NHL fights, including 16 last season and four this year. Lucic was a much busier pugilist early in his career than now; he totaled 23 fights in his first two years, but just 11 over the past two seasons. He has none this year.

The B's busiest fighter, Shawn Thornton (five bouts this year), knows a thing or two about this subject. His expectation for tonight: nothing.

"Sometimes when these things get built up, they end up being a lot less than expected," said Thornton. "Usually, in my experience, that's how it's been. So I don't know what's going to happen, but going on past experiences, I don't think it will be much of anything. There might be a response.

"But we're obviously a team that can take care of itself. So we're not putting too much thought into it. We've got to win some games. We've still got to keep climbing the standings."

The Sabres, publicly, have said much the same.

"I don't think there's going to be any premeditated stuff," said Buffalo defenseman Robin Regehr. "First and foremost, let's win this hockey game."

Bruins center Gregory Campbell also figures there's a good chance no extra rough stuff will occur.

"From our end, honestly, I don't think anyone has even talked about it," said Campbell. "It's kind of an internal issue for their team. We're a big, physical team, so we're not that easily intimidated. That's something that's an issue they're going to have to take up with the guys in their room. It's not something we're really worried about.

"If you look at the situation and how they handled it, it sounds like they were disappointed in themselves with how they handled it. Obviously, Miller is an All-Star goalie, maybe the best player on their team. So if you're a betting man, maybe you'd expect something to happen.

"But again, there have been a lot of games that had a lot of buildup to them, and nothing came of it."

That's certainly true. But the betting here is the Sabres must take to the ice eager for a fight. It'll certainly be interesting to see how it unfolds.

Bruins notes

Sabres coach **Lindy Ruff** said Miller, who is sidelined by a concussion suffered on Lucic's hit, "is feeling better every day. He's in good spirits, he's progressing." . . .

The Sabres also lost key defenseman **Tyler Myers** for up to six weeks with a broken wrist. . . .

If fists fly between Lucic and McCormick, they have already fought once, on March 10, 2011, with Lucic winning a clear decision.

Bruins, Sabres preaching focus rather than revenge

Mark Diwer

Providence Journal

November 23, 2011

When the likes of Jim Schoenfeld in the 1970s and Rob Ray in the 1990s played for Buffalo, any opponent who did to a Sabres goalie what Milan Lucic of the Boston Bruins did to Ryan Miller on Nov. 12 would have had no chance of finishing the game without a black eye or worse.

But the days when running over a goalie was guaranteed to ignite a bench-clearing brawl are long gone.

The Bruins and Sabres meet on Wednesday night for the first time since Lucic demolished Miller. While fans — especially those on the Buffalo side — might be lusting for blood, both teams are playing down the revenge factor.

Coach Claude Julien said on Tuesday that the Bruins will put winning the game first.

“The one thing I’m not going to do is focus on that, because it is a game that’s important for both teams,” he said. “That win is more important than anything right now.

“We’re not the ones looking for revenge. We’re looking to win a hockey game, so that’s not a big issue. Our team has been able to handle teams that have tried to push us around. That’s not even something we’re going to lose sleep over.”

Lucic, when asked by the Boston Globe’s Kevin Paul Dupont whether he expects to fight on Wednesday, answered, “Yes ... I’m not going to lie ... yes.”

“I don’t know what the fans are wanting,” Sabres center Paul Gaustad told the Buffalo News on Monday. “We want to get a win. I think that’s what we have to focus on: Playing our game, execute our system and try to win. ... We’re trying to win the two points. You have to focus on our systems and execute what they’ll do with their systems.”

That was veteran defenseman Robyn Regehr’s story, too, and he’s sticking to it.

“All that other stuff, you can’t think about it or talk about it too much,” he said. “You have to try to win a game. There’s certain things that happen spontaneously and so be it. It happens when you’re playing a good, hard, physical, aggressive game. I don’t think there’s going to be any sort of premeditated stuff if that’s what you’re implying. First and foremost, let’s win this hockey game.”

When asked about Lucic’s postgame putdown of the Sabres — “You know, we wouldn’t accept anything like that. We would have taken care of business. But we’re a different team than they are,” the Bruins’ winger said last week — Gaustad pleaded ignorance.

“I don’t watch the media or read the newspapers, so I don’t know exactly what he said. It’s his opinion and we tried to put that in the past and focus on the stretch of games we’ve had here,” Gaustad said.

Gaustad, 6-foot-8 Tyler Myers, captain Jason Pominville, Andrej Sekera and Thomas Vanek were the Sabres on the ice when Lucic bowled over Miller. None lifted a finger in retaliation.

Miller has been out with concussion symptoms since the hit, and will not play on Wednesday.

There’s no doubt that the Bruins, after shaking off their Stanley Cup hangover, have their swagger back. Boston struts into Wednesday’s game riding a nine-game winning streak, during which they’ve outscored the opposition, 43-14.

Since dropping both ends of a home-and-home to Montreal at the end of October, which left the Bruins in 15th place, last in the Eastern Conference, they have moved all the way up to third before Tuesday night’s games.

In their last loss — in Montreal on Oct. 29 — the Bruins allowed themselves to be baited into retaliation penalties by the Habs’ P.K. Subban. Since then, Boston has stressed discipline. It paid off in Monday night’s 1-0 road win when Montreal had only 7:37 in power-play time.

“I think discipline has more than one meaning,” center Greg Campbell said. “I think obviously we want to stay out of the box because Montreal has a really good power play, but it also means in our game plan to stay disciplined and not let them get to us. (Montreal) has an ability to frustrate us in more than one way, so I think (Julien) just wanted us to stick to the game plan. But also play physical, play our game and not play careless.”