



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Saturday, November 26, 2011

Sabres pull a no-show in Columbus

Enroth pulled for second time in five games

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 26, 2011

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- It was uglier than traffic near the mall. The chance to win was gone faster than those \$199 flat screens.

The Buffalo Sabres staged their own version of Black Friday, and you can be sure NHL teams will be eager to line up at their door for quite some time if they continue to put out "specials" like this one.

The Sabres handed out free goals as if they were stocking stuffers against Columbus, allowing the Blue Jackets to storm to an easy 5-1 victory in Nationwide Arena. The Jackets barely had a chance to reload their Civil War goal cannon at times, with the Sabres unable to do much of anything against a Columbus team that may have finally found its game.

"We didn't have it," defenseman Jordan Leopold said. "You look at the drop of the puck, and we didn't execute off the first draw [and iced the puck], and it kind of snowballed from there."

The Sabres added another chapter to their history of slow starts, allowing Columbus to take a 2-0 first-period lead. Buffalo took three penalties in the opening 20 minutes. The Blue Jackets scored one of their goals with the man-advantage, and their unit helped them control the play en route to a 15-6 shot edge.

If Columbus didn't repeatedly ice the puck from near center ice, the Sabres' offensive zone time might have been limited to a three-on-two break that didn't even result in a shot.

"We didn't show up in the first period, and then we took some penalties and they capitalized on the power play," said right wing Zack Kassian, who had an assist in his NHL debut. "We kind of dug ourselves a hole, and we couldn't get out."

It got even worse in the second period. The Jackets slipped two more goals on for size in just 4:29, sending starting goaltender Jhonas Enroth to the bench. He got pulled for the second time in five games.

"It's frustrating," said Enroth, who faced 18 shots. "We played pretty good against Boston, and we've got to play like that every night because the league is so tight. You can't afford to give away games like this.

"[The team was missing] maybe the extra little jump, a little more excitement. The guys playing Boston, it was a big game obviously for us. Everyone is pretty excited to play that game, but we've got to bring that every night."

A short second-period surge of adrenaline by the Sabres, which included a pretty goal by Leopold, got snuffed by another easy goal for Columbus, which had little trouble controlling play and finding open shots.

"We talked about what we wanted to do, and we didn't execute," Sabres center Derek Roy said. "We made some mental mistakes, and they cashed in on their opportunities. We didn't do a good job getting back to the front of the net, forwards and 'D.' They beat us to loose pucks. That's an area we've got to clean up."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff has kept in touch with Scott Arniel, his former assistant who coaches the Blue Jackets. There were calls for Arniel to be fired after Columbus started 2-12-1. But Ruff has watched his friend's squad improve. He said the game against the team with the fewest points in the NHL wouldn't be a gimme.

He was guilty of understatement as the Jackets extended their hot run to 4-1-2 in the last seven games.

The Sabres, meanwhile, are sliding in the opposite direction. They have a three-game winless skid (0-2-1) and are just 2-4-1 in their last seven. They get another chance at victory Saturday night when they host the Washington Capitals in First Niagara Center.

"We started the game with an icing and a penalty, and that's just execution," Ruff said. "That has nothing to do with them. ... You create momentum in those first five, six minutes or you give the opposition momentum. I thought we gave them some momentum."

Buffalo started the game with seven players from their opening-night roster missing because of injury. They ended the game with eight sidelined. Defenseman Robyn Regehr didn't play the third period with an upper-body injury and is questionable for tonight.

"We'll see," Ruff said. "Obviously, he missed the rest of the game."

Kassian won't curb his enthusiasm

Inexperience in lineup prompts team meeting led by Ruff

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 26, 2011

COLUMBUS, Ohio -- Corey Tropp surveyed the Sabres' dressing room Friday, saw all the familiar faces from his minor-league and development camp days surrounding him and smiled.

"It's the Junior Sabres," he said.

Indeed, Tropp is darn near a veteran in comparison to some Buffalo teammates. The right winger has played a whole nine games following Friday's 5-1 loss to Columbus. Former Rochester teammates Zack Kassian and T.J. Brennan have three games between them, with Kassian making his debut against the Blue Jackets. Marc-Andre Gragnani is at 35 NHL games. Luke Adam has played 41.

The inexperience in the Buffalo lineup prompted coach Lindy Ruff to gather the team for a meeting.

"We had a pretty lengthy meeting because we're at a point now with six or seven guys out of the lineup, and all the little adjustments we've been trying to make from game to game -- from special teams to what other teams are doing -- we've got to make sure that everybody is on the same page," Ruff said in Nationwide Arena. "It's not easy. Their answer would be, 'Well, that's not the way we play it down there,' and so our adjustment is to make sure they know exactly what we want at this level."

What Ruff wants from Kassian is for the big man to play with enthusiasm. The Sabres' top prospect is excited to be in the NHL two years after being the 12th overall pick in the draft, and Ruff doesn't want that adrenaline tempered.

"Young enthusiasm is important to our team," Ruff said. "You want to see that emotion. You want to see the intensity. You would like at some point to say, 'Hey, you've got to pull back.' It's a lot easier than trying to kick him in the backside and say, 'You've got to get going.' "

Kassian became the latest rookie summoned after forwards Patrick Kaleta (lower body) and Brad Boyes (ankle) became the sixth and seventh players from the opening-night roster to get sidelined with injuries. The 6-foot-3, 228-pounder, who has the rare blend of skill and toughness, made what was likely the most anticipated Buffalo debut since goaltender Ryan Miller got his initial call-up in 2002.

"You dream about this since you were a little kid. To finally have it come true, I'm very excited," Kassian said. "When I got sent down I just wanted to work my butt off down there and try to play as best as I can and hopefully get the call. The call came. Now it's time for me to show what I've got."

Kassian had seven goals and 14 points in 18 games with the Amerks. He made headlines throughout his junior career with his ability to play physical, but he's begun his professional career concentrating on becoming a player.

"I've been put into a lot of situations offensively that I've succeeded pretty well with," the right winger said. "When you're put in those situations, you don't want to waste time in the penalty box. You want to improve as a player. The toughness in my game will always be there. It's about developing other skills."

Kassian had to sheepishly laugh when he began to describe the players he tries to emulate.

"Buffalo fans probably don't want to hear it, but Milan Lucic," Kassian said of the Boston forward who is a Buffalo villain after concussing Miller this month. "He's a good player. Todd Bertuzzi, [Jarome] Iginla, those power forward guys that are tough but also have an offensive upside."

Kassian began the game on a line with Matt Ellis and Adam, who skated alongside Kassian during the preseason prospects tournament in Traverse City, Mich., and for most of training camp.

"It's unfortunate about Boysie getting hurt, but at the same time it's a great opportunity for Kass," Adam said. "He's a great player, and it'll be a lot of fun. He's a big, strong, powerful guy. He creates a lot of offense down low just fending off the defenders and sticking his backside out, making plays."

...

The Sabres returned home following the game to get ready for their fourth straight weekend of back-to-back games. They host the Washington Capitals tonight in First Niagara Center.

The Capitals are just 3-6-1 in their last 10 games following a 6-3 loss to the New York Rangers on Friday afternoon. The preseason Stanley Cup favorites have had internal issues with benchings and diminished production from star Alexander Ovechkin. He ended a six-game scoring drought Saturday with his first goal at home this season.

...

Adam was among the Sabres who posed in cowboy gear earlier this week to get ready for Miller's annual "Catwalk for Charity." The sixth edition of his event is titled "Wrangling for a Cause" and will have a country-western theme.

The fundraiser, which benefits Miller's Steadfast Foundation, will take place at 6 p.m. Dec. 4 in the Town Ballroom on Main Street. It combines live music, fashion and an auction to benefit the charity, which is dedicated to assisting those affected by cancer, and especially childhood forms of the disease. For ticket information, visit www.thesteadfastfoundation.com.

Highs and lows define Sabres

Vanek, Pominville spearhead offense

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 25, 2011

The first quarter of the Sabres' schedule is over. If the next three quarters are anything like it, fans in Buffalo should grab the motion-sickness pills. The roller coaster-like peaks and valleys can certainly churn the stomach.

The Sabres ended their opening 21-game run in the middle of the Eastern Conference. They enter tonight's game in Columbus in seventh place with 25 points and a 12-8-1 record. Along the way, they've won on the road and lost at home. They've won with rookies and lost their franchise goaltender. They've lost respect and won some back.

Now they've got to compete with a significant chunk of their lineup on the sidelines. Seven players from the opening-night roster are injured, including goalie Ryan Miller, defenseman Tyler Myers and forward Tyler Ennis.

"We're really going to have to grind through a session here where we're down a lot of manpower," coach Lindy Ruff said Thursday after a short Thanksgiving practice session. "Playing against a healthy team last night, a full lineup against six guys out, that effort was worthy of a win [during a 4-3 shootout loss to Boston]. We didn't get it. We're disappointed. But I'm just telling you, we play that way, play that hard, we'll get the W's."

The Sabres have started the year with their share of high points:

- * Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville have been offensive stars, ranking fifth and seventh, respectively, in NHL scoring.

"They've led this team right away," left wing Nathan Gerbe said. "Watching Van, the way he's played the beginning of this year has been pretty inspiring. He's been one of the best players in the league, and it really carries through the team."

- * They've been rude guests, spoiling the home team's fun en route to a 7-2 record away from Buffalo. The victory total is tied for most in the league.

- * Their special teams have been impressive, with the team ranking fourth in penalty killing at 88.3 percent and seventh in power play at 20.5 percent.

- * Rookies Jhonas Enroth, Marc-Andre Gragnani and Luke Adam have shined, building on their brief appearances last year.

"There was a lot of buzz entering the year, and I think we managed that pretty good," Gragnani said of the team as a whole.

The Sabres have also bottomed out so much that the lows have almost overshadowed everything else:

- * They are just 4-6-1 in Buffalo, the most home losses in the Eastern Conference.

- * Miller was lost to a concussion during a collision with Boston's Milan Lucic, and the Sabres' lack of response was an utter disappointment to nearly everyone who watches hockey.

- * Scoring behind Vanek and Pominville has been inconsistent or non-existent, with potent forwards such as Drew Stafford and Ville Leino on pace for just 15 and eight goals, respectively.

"They need help from secondary scoring," Leino said of Vanek and Pominville, who have combined for 49 points while the other 13 forwards have just 80. "We're relying too much on our first line. Hopefully, we'll get some help now from other lines, too."

- * Miller struggled when healthy, with the former Vezina Trophy winner losing starts to the rookie.

The fact they hold a playoff position despite the significant negatives has the Sabres hopeful they can achieve more if things start clicking.

"We've got a decent record for how we've played," Gerbe said. "We haven't played our best, and I guess that's a positive sign. We know we haven't really played up to our capabilities, but we still are near the top of the standings for the Eastern Conference.

"If we can be more consistent, we'll be a very good team. I think we'll get there."

The team has struggled to find chemistry, particularly up front. Now they lack continuity, with forwards Patrick Kaleta, Brad Boyes, Cody McCormick and Ennis joining Miller and defensemen Mike Weber and Myers on the injury list.

"With a couple new players, obviously it takes time to get used to those things," Gagnani said. "Overall, we did pretty good. Now we want to be better. You always want to be better than you were."

Former No. 1 draft pick gets the call

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 25, 2011

The Sabres' top prospect is set to make his NHL debut.

Zack Kassian, Buffalo's first-round pick in the 2009 draft, has been summoned from Rochester by the injury-plagued Sabres to face Columbus tonight.

The 6-foot-3, 228-pound Kassian leads the Amerks with seven goals and 14 points in 18 games. He showed his potential last season with Windsor of the Ontario Hockey League, recording 26 goals and 77 points in 56 games.

The need for a forward was obvious Thursday. The Sabres practiced with only 11 healthy forwards. Left wing Tyler Ennis was well enough to fill out the fourth line, but he ruled himself out for tonight's game in Columbus. Patrick Kaleta missed practice with the lower-body injury that forced him to skip Wednesday's game against Boston, and there is no timetable for the return of right wing Brad Boyes, who suffered an ankle injury against the Bruins.xleg

* * * *

T.J. Brennan felt bad for his sister. Cortney was set to be the talk of the family on Thanksgiving, with the Brennan clan scheduled to come together in Rochester for the holiday.

"I didn't want to steal her thunder," Brennan said Thursday. "She called me and was like, 'I got engaged.' I was like, 'I got better news. I got called up.'"

This week's summoning of the defenseman from Rochester altered the family's plans, with the Philadelphia- and New Jersey-based group gathering in Buffalo instead of the Flower City. Not only did they have Brennan's Sabres debut to discuss, the defenseman upped the ante even more when he scored in his first NHL game during the 4-3 shootout loss to Boston.

"Everyone is here," Brennan said after a short holiday practice in First Niagara Center, "and only my mom, my dad and one of my sisters, Alexis, came [Wednesday] night. It's great to have at least one family member and my sister here, which was awesome. It doesn't happen too often for your first NHL game, so it's really exciting to share it with them."

Long-term injuries to Tyler Myers and Mike Weber have cemented Brennan's spot in the lineup for at least a week or two, but his goal and solid play in 13 minutes of ice time have made the 22-year-old feel like he belongs.

"It was great to score, but I thought I was pretty solid defensively," Brennan said. "I tried to keep it really simple, just keep the puck out of our net. I think we did a good job there. It was a plus to get a plus with the goal."

Unbridled celebration followed Brennan's shot. Thomas Vanek yelled and hugged his new teammate, while Brennan's old minor-league defense partner, Marc-Andre Gagnani, chased down the keepsake puck and then jumped into Brennan's arms.

"I'm probably the guy that knows him the most here," Gagnani said. "I know how hard he's been working to get here. I know how much it means to him playing here. I know exactly what he's going through. I was there not long ago, so yeah, I was absolutely pumped for him."

Brennan became the first Buffalo defenseman to score in his NHL debut since Lindy Ruff did it against Washington on Oct. 11, 1979.

"I should've kept him off the ice, and I would've had that record to myself," Ruff said. "It's a great thrill to get your first NHL goal, and I was happy for him. He's battled hard to get to this point. Your draft picks, you work with them, you develop them, you like to see them play. You like to see them be rewarded."

* * * *

The good news on the injury front came with the return of Jochen Hecht. The center skated in the middle of left wing Thomas Vanek and right wing Jason Pominville in his first game of the season. He had four shots and two hits in 18:15 of ice time.

"Jochen, for the first game back, gave us one heck of a game," Ruff said. "Jochen can skate and defend as good as anybody."

Capitals look for momentum against fragile Sabres

Tal Pinchevsky

NHL.com

November 26, 2011

CAPITALS (10-9-2) at SABRES (12-9-1)

TV: CSN-MA, MSG-Buffalo

LAST 10: Washington 3-6-1; Buffalo 5-4-1

Season Series: This is the first of four meetings this season between the Eastern Conference teams. They will play each other twice more between Christmas and New Year's Eve. Washington went 3-0-1 against Buffalo last season, with two games going past regulation and each team winning one in overtime.

Big Story: Following a great start for both teams, the Capitals have been in freefall for the past few weeks, while the Sabres are playing through some tough injuries to keep pace with the competitive Northeast Division. Buffalo will begin a three-game homestand while the Capitals are leaving DC for a single game after going 2-1-0 at the Verizon Center.

Team Scope:

Capitals: After winning their first seven games of the 2010-11 campaign, the Capitals have had difficulty maintaining that pace. Following consecutive wins to start November, the team absorbed a 1-5-1 stretch that included a dismal 0-3-0 road trip. Washington appeared to turn the tide with consecutive home wins over Phoenix and Winnipeg, but the final game in a three-game homestand saw some troubling tendencies come back to the surface.

Against the Rangers on Friday, New York raced out to a 3-0 lead in the second period before goals from [Troy Brouwer](#) and [John Carlson](#) cut the deficit. But a goal from Brian Boyle late in the second period renewed the Rangers two-goal lead. Outshot 10-4 in the third, the Capitals allowed two more Rangers goals, including Ruslan Fedotenko's second of the game, before ultimately dropping a 6-3 decision.

Sabres: Buffalo also enjoyed a great start to their season, going 5-1-0 in October before a rash of injuries decimated its momentum in November. Despite the depleted roster, the Sabres managed to play well, winning five of six to start the month. But they were losers of three of their previous four when they descended on Columbus Friday night.

Friday night against the Blue Jackets, the Sabres slump continued as the Blue Jackets raced out

to a 4-0 lead before [Jhonas Enroth](#) was pulled in favor of [Drew MacIntyre](#), who made his second appearance of the season. [Jordan Leopold](#) would provide the Sabres' lone goal on the night before Rick Nash sealed the 5-1 victory with 5:53 remaining in the second period.

Who's Hot: For the Caps, [Alex Ovechkin](#) has three points spread over three games, while [Nicklas Backstrom](#) has five points in the same span. [John Carlson](#) also has five points in his current four-game streak. ... For the Sabres, Leopold has three points in his last three games and [Thomas Vanek](#) has nine points in his last nine.

Injury Report: For the Capitals, [Mike Green](#) and [John Erskine](#) are suffering with a strained arm and bruised shoulder, respectively. ... Buffalo's infirmary is a very crowded place. [Tyler Ennis](#) (ankle), [Ryan Miller](#) (concussion), [Mike Weber](#) (upper body), and [Tyler Myers](#) (wrist) are all on IR while [Brad Boyes](#), [Cody McCormick](#), and [Patrick Kaleta](#) were out of the lineup on Friday in Columbus with various injuries.

Stat Pack: There may be more than one reason for the Capitals' recent troubles, but their defense deserves most of the blame. After allowing a miniscule 2.33 goals per game last season – the fourth-best average in the League – the Caps are currently allowing 3.19 this season, the seventh-worst total in the League. That number has only ballooned of late, as Washington has allowed 23 goals in their last five games, for a per-game average of 4.6.

Puck Drop: The multiple walking wounded in Buffalo forced the team to call up their 2009 first-round pick [Zack Kassian](#) from Rochester. Kassian was leading the Americans in scoring when he got the call and collected an assist in his first NHL action Friday night against Columbus.

Nash leads Jackets past Sabres 5-1

NHL.com

November 25, 2011

If the saying doesn't exist yet in Columbus, it will after Friday: As captain [Rick Nash](#) goes, so go the Blue Jackets.

As the Jackets' talisman, Nash entered their game against Buffalo with just five goals on the season, a number matched by his team's total in the win column. Nash skated off the Nationwide Arena ice with two goals, and his team matched season highs for goals and margin of victory by beating the Sabres 5-1.

"Any time you can get a couple goals, it takes the pressure off big-time at home," said Nash, who now has seven on the season. "The guys stuck to the game play right off the start and it seemed to work."

[Curtis Sanford](#) – thought by many to be a retread plugged into the crease to spell a struggling [Steve Mason](#) – had 28 saves. He and the Jackets are 3-0-2 in the last five games. [Mark Letestu](#), Marc Method and [RJ Umberger](#) also scored for Columbus (6-13-3), and [Ryan Johansen](#), [James Wisniewski](#) and [Jeff Carter](#) had two assists.

The Jackets are quietly riding a 4-1-2 wave after a brutal 2-12-1 start. At the same time, Nash seems to be waking up, with three goals and two assists in four games.

Buffalo (12-9-1) pulled starting goalie [Jhonas Enroth](#) after he allowed four goals – including two just 12 seconds apart – on 18 shots in the first 25 minutes. Justin Leopold scored the lone Sabre goal.

"I don't know if I've seen it this bad before," said Buffalo's Lindy Ruff, the NHL's longest-tenured coach. "I think we've got seven regulars out of the lineup. We need to make better plays than we did tonight. Obviously when you're short-handed you've got to be good with the puck."

Nash got his first on a power play at 16:19 of the first period when he deflected a Wisniewski blue-line blast past Enroth. He finished the scoring with his second, a tip-in of a sublime cross-ice feed from [Jeff Carter](#) at 14:07 of the second.

Letestu opened the scoring at 10:50 when he pounced on the rebound of Johansen's wrist, firing low to Enroth's left for his third of the season. Nash's goal made it 2-0, and four minutes into the second period, Columbus doubled the advantage and chased Enroth with the two quick tallies.

Methot, a defenseman, scored his first of the season when his long blast found its way past a screened Enroth at 4:17. Before the goal could be announced, Johansen ripped a shot from the right boards that trickled through Enroth's legs. Umberger was first to the puck, and pushed it over the line for his third of the season.

With the game effectively over, Sanford's only mistake came on a pretty individual move from Leopold, who scored his fifth of the season when he took an outlet pass at the red line from Zach Kassian, skated easily around Wisniewski and whipped it past Sanford's glove and into the far post.

After Leopold's goal, Buffalo mounted attack after attack – including a power play – but was continuously foiled by Sanford.

"That was probably the most important part of the game," Sanford said. "Getting the kill at that time was huge. They could have brought it back to two goals but the guys did a really good job boxing out their guys and letting me see the puck."

Minutes later, Nash finished the game off with his seventh of the season.

The Jackets look nothing like the team that spent the first five weeks of the season finding ways to lose.

"We're getting pucks deep, we're not making it hard on ourselves," Nash said of his team's surge. "We're trying not to have any turnovers at the blue lines. It's just a lot simpler game. It seems to work for the people we have in this room."

Sabres 1, Blue Jackets 5

Associated Press

November 25, 2011

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP)—The [Columbus Blue Jackets](#) are starting to look as if they will live up to the hype.

[Rick Nash](#) scored twice and goalie [Curtis Sanford](#) was again solid in goal as the Blue Jackets chased Buffalo goalie [Jhonas Enroth](#) early in the second period of a 5-1 victory that sent the Sabres to a third straight loss Saturday night.

“Anytime you can get a couple goals, it takes the pressure off big-time at home,” said Nash, who now has seven on the season. “The guys stuck to the game plan right off the start and it seemed to work.”

The Blue Jackets are on a five-game points streak and are 4-1-2 run since a brutal 2-12-1 start.

[Mark Letestu](#), [Marc Methot](#) and [R.J. Umberger](#) also scored for Columbus, who broke out with their highest goal output and largest margin of victory this season.

“We haven’t had many of those games, obviously,” Blue Jackets coach Scott Arniel said. “It was nice just to roll the lines. We’ve been doing a lot of good things the last couple of weeks. We said how our play without the puck was going to lead to offense.”

Rookie [Ryan Johansen](#), [James Wisniewski](#) and [Jeff Carter](#) each added two assists for Columbus, which controlled the game, except for a short stretch in the second period, in front of the most energized crowd of the season.

Sanford finished with 28 saves improving to 3-0-2 as a starter for the Blue Jackets.

“We’re getting pucks deep, we’re not making it hard on ourselves,” Nash said of the team’s recent surge. “We’re trying not to have any turnovers at the blue lines. It’s just a lot simpler game. It seems to work for the people we have in this room.”

[Jordan Leopold](#) scored for the injury-riddled Sabres, who played with energy but were out-of-sync coming off an emotional overtime loss to Boston on Wednesday in which they twice squandered two-goal leads.

Enroth has been a surprising success with the Sabres this season—and will have to play a larger role now with star [Ryan Miller](#) sidelined with a concussion — coming into play with an 7-2-1 record. But he was yanked after allowing four goals on 18 shots in just 24:29 of action Friday.

“I don’t know if I’ve seen it this bad before,” said Buffalo’s Lindy Ruff, the league’s longest-tenured coach. “I think we’ve got seven regulars out of the lineup. We need to make better plays than we did tonight. Obviously when you’re short-handed you’ve got to be good with the puck.”

To make matters worse, tough defenseman [Robyn Regehr](#) was injured during the game and didn't return.

Letestu was the first to beat Enroth. He got position on rookie defenseman [Marc-Andre Gragnani](#) in the slot to snap home a rebound from the right circle midway through the opening period. The goal was Letestu's third in eight games since being acquired from Pittsburgh earlier in the month.

Nash scored six minutes later with Gragnani in the box for interference, redirecting Wisniewski's point shot for the power-play goal.

The Blue Jackets doubled their lead in a span of 12 seconds early in the second period to chase Enroth.

Methot, a defenseman, sent a wrist shot through traffic to make it 3-0 at 4:17 and snap a 101-game goal-drought.

Then Umberger out-muscled [Drew Stafford](#) to stuff home a loose puck that was sliding along the goal line for just his third. Johansen tossed a hard-angle shot from the half boards that sneaked between Enroth's pads.

Leopold gave the Sabres some hope with a goal at 8:01, slicing into the Columbus zone and around Wisniewski before scoring his fifth from the left circle over Sanford.

A few minutes later with Buffalo on the power play and gaining momentum, Sanford robbed [Luke Adam](#) twice. Once at the doorstep and sliding across the crease to make a spectacular toe save.

"That was probably the most important part of the game," Sanford said. "Getting the kill at that time was huge. They could have brought it back to two goals but the guys did a really good job boxing out their guys and letting me see the puck."

Three minutes after Sanford's stand, Carter feathered a cross-zone pass to a streaking Nash, who one-timed his seventh into an open net to make it 5-1.

"We already got ourselves in a huge hole so it had to start coming to salvage the season," Umberger said. "We still have a long way to go."

NOTES: Columbus LW [Vinny Prospal](#) became the 268th player to play 1,000 career games in the NHL and is the sixth Czech with that distinction. He leads the Blue Jackets in scoring with 19 points in 22 games. He was Philadelphia's second pick, 71st overall, in the 1993 Entry Draft. ... [Drew MacIntyre](#) finished with 15 stops in relief of Enroth, who had won all four of his previous road starts this year. ... Zach Kassian, Buffalo's first-round pick in the 2009 draft, made his NHL debut and picked up the primary assist on Leopold's goal. ... Blue Jackets coach Scott Arniel served as an assistant to Sabres coach Lindy Ruff from 2002-06. ... The Sabres entered tied with San Jose for the best road record at 7-2-0.

BLACK FRIDAY

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

November 25, 2011

COLUMBUS, OH --- The story coming into tonight's game was the NHL debut of Zack Kassian. But when it was all over, a 5-1 road loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets turned into one of the most disappointing losses of the young season for the Buffalo Sabres.

Columbus scored two goals in the first, then lit the lamp twice in a 12 second span in the second period to build an insurmountable 4-0 lead.

Even with the big lead, Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff said the game was more about Buffalo's inability to get off to a good start on the road than it was about being outplayed by Columbus.

"We started the game with an icing and a penalty. That's just execution," said Ruff. "It has more to do with what we did with the puck. That's a tough start to the game. You want to get momentum, you want to get it in behind their defense, you want to track some people down. You create momentum in the first five or six minutes, or you give the opposition some momentum. I thought we gave them some momentum."

Buffalo came into the game among the league leaders with a 7-2-0 road record, having won three of their last four away from home. But they once again struggled at Nationwide Arena, a building they've now won at just once in six tries (1-4-1).

Captain Jason Pominville echoed Ruff's sentiments, saying that an effort like that against a team that now has just six wins in 22 games isn't good enough for anyone in the Buffalo locker room.

"We didn't deserve it. We weren't good enough with the puck. We didn't compete hard enough," said Pominville. "We play one of the top teams, and play hard. Then we come here against a team that might have been going better, but isn't where they want to be in the standings - and they took it to us. It wasn't good enough on our part. From top to bottom the effort just wasn't good enough. You're not gonna win when you play that way."

The injury bug continues to pick away at the Sabres lineup. Already missing seven regulars, defenseman Robyn Regehr went down with an upper body injury tonight, and didn't play at all in the third period. He will be evaluated further on Saturday.

Kassian picked up his first NHL point when he assisted on Jordan Leopold's second period tally. Rick Nash scored twice for Columbus, with Marc Methot, Mark Letestu and R.J. Umberger adding singles.

Jhonas Enroth started for Buffalo, but was pulled in the second period after giving up four goals on 18 shots in 24:29 of action. Drew MacIntyre finished the game and allowed one goal on 16

shots. Curtis Sanford and his distinctive baby blue goalie pads went the distance for Columbus, stopping all but one of the 29 Buffalo shots he faced.

The Sabres get right back it on Saturday night when they host the struggling Washington Capitals at First Niagara Center. Game time is 7 p.m.

NOTES: Brad Boyes missed tonight's game with an injury, ending his consecutive games played streak at 513. Boyes left Wednesday's game with a leg injury in the second period. This is the first time in his NHL career that he was forced to miss a game due to injury ... Patrick Kaleta (lower body) missed his second straight game, and Cody McCormick (upper body) was out for his fifth... Columbus forward Vinny Prospal played in his 1,000th career NHL game tonight. He becomes the 268th player to reach this milestone.

6:45- Good evening from Nationwide Arena in Columbus, OH.

6:55- BUF scratches - McCormick, Boyes, Kaleta

6:56- BUF starters: Ehrhoff/Sekera, Vanek/Hecht/Pominville, Enroth

6:57- Kevin Sylvester & Danny Gare will be calling tonight's game; Brian Duff is your host.

7:05- Brad Boyes will miss tonight's game with an injury, ending his consecutive games played streak at 513. Boyes left Wednesday's game with a leg injury in the second period. This is the first time in his NHL career that he's been forced to miss a game due to injury

7:07- Sabres in the road whites as usual tonight - while the Jackets are wearing their snazzy dark blue third jersey.

7:08- Game on!

7:09- Nikita Nikitin fires a bomb at Enroth for the game's first shot.

7:11- The Zack Kassian era officially got underway at 7:11 p.m. tonight

7:12- Kassian took to the ice for his first shift at 2:31 of the 1st

7:14- Enroth gets a piece of Nash's shot from the slot

7:15- Enroth comes across the crease to stop Tyutin on the 2-on-1 -- Tyutin then crashes heavily into the end boards

7:16- Columbus goalie Curtis Sanford is rocking some serious baby blue pads, blocker and catcher

7:17- 13:34 left in the 1st. Jackets holding a 5-2 edge in shots

7:21- There are pockets of empty seats in the lower bowl. I fully expected a sell out with all the Sabres fans making the trip down for the game.

7:22- Hecht and Pominville nearly connect in the Jackets zone, but Hecht's pass just missed 29's stick.

7:24- Enroth turns away Nash again. Sabres escape a hooking call too

7:27- CBJ 1-0: Letestu splits 2 Sabres defenders and bangs home the Johansen rebound (10:50)

7:29- In-game host makes lame attempt at humor with a Ryan Fitzpatrick joke. Does that mean I can start making jokes about Ohio State and tattoo parlors?

7:30- Sanford makes two saves in close, even stopping one while getting handcuffed by Roy's shot.

7:34- 5 minutes left in the 1st

7:35- With Ehrhoff charging hard to the net, Leino fires a shot that Sanford handles easily.

7:38- Jackets on the PP - Gagnani off for interference

7:39- CBJ 2-0: Nash cruises through the slot and tips Wisniewski's point shot past Enroth. (16:19, PP)

7:43- Vanek called for hooking - Jackets on the PP with 1:04 left in the 1st

7:46- End of 1: Blue Jackets up 2-0; also hold 15-6 edge in shots.

7:52- Sabres are 1-2-0 when trailing after 1st; Columbus is 3-1-0 when leading after 1

7:53- Sabres are 4-5-0 when opponent scores first; Jackets are 4-3-1 when scoring the game's first goal.

7:55- Zack Kassian skated 5:14 during the 1st - not credited with any hits or shots.

8:03- Game on!

8:11- Time to catch up. Jackets go up 4-0 on goals by Methot (4:17) and Umberger (4:29)

8:12- Jackets on the PP -- Ellis off for hooking.

8:15- GOAL!

8:16- 4-1: Leopold takes a pass from Kassian at the blueline, cuts to the net and fires a laser past Sanford. (8:01)

8:17- Kassian and Regehr officially credited with the assists on Leopold's 5th of the year.

8:20- Sabres go on the PP- McKenzie called for tripping

8:21- Sanford robs Adam, and follows that up with another huge save

8:23- 5-1: Nash pots his 2nd of the night with the easy tap in on the cross ice feed from Carter (14:07)

8:25- The 5 goals are a single-game high for Columbus this season

8:31- Good news: Papa's in the house! Papa John that is.

8:34- End of 2: Jackets now up 5-1.

8:36- Sabres outshoot the Jackets 13-10 in the 2nd

8:40- Jordan Leopold and Rick Nash each with a game-high 5 shots so far tonight.

8:41- Sabres outhitting Columbus 13-12: Sekera, Brennan and Gaustad with 3 each.

8:53- Game on!

8:55- Brennan off for high sticking at 1:46

8:56- MacIntyre with a nice point blank save on Carter after some nice puck movement by the Jackets on the PP

8:57- Ehrhoff's stick explodes on the shot attempt, sending debris into the far corner

8:58- Now Adam goes down a twig blocking a shot. They sure don't make 'em like they used to.

9:04- MacIntyre stops Umberger cutting in from the left side, then denies his wraparound attempt.

9:09- 8:00 remaining in a fast moving 3rd period.

9:09- INJURY UPDATE: Regehr (upper body injury) will not return.

9:18- Macintyre foils Umberger's breakaway attempt.

9:24- FINAL: Columbus 5-1

GAMENIGHT: Sabres Lose to Jackets 5-1

WGR 550

November 25, 2011

Zack Kassian made his NHL debut as the Sabres are took on the Blue Jackets in Columbus. It wasn't a game to remember, though. Buffalo lost 5-1.

Things were very quiet for the first half of the first period until Mark Letestu put the Jackets on the board at the 10:50 mark. Ryan Johansen and Fedor Tyutin picked up the assists. Columbus increased their lead to two on the power play at the 16:19. Rick Nash potter a tip goal from James Wisniewski and Jeff Carter.

Fans hoping for a better Buffalo performance to start the second were out of luck. Columbus netted two quick goals from Methot at 4:117 and R.J. Umberger at 4:29. The two quick goals marked the end of the night for Jhonas Enroth as Drew MacIntyre came off the bench.

Buffalo finally got on the board at the 8:01 mark as Jordan Leopold tallied his fifth of the season. Robyn Regehr and Zack Kassian were credited with the assists. That's Kassian's first NHL goal. Columbus would nip the comeback effort in the bud with a pretty goal by Nash from Carter to get the four goal lead back at 14:07.

The only major development of the third was Regehr leaving the game with an upperbody injury. Stay tuned to WGR and WGR550.com for the latest. Buffalo is right back at it tomorrow night. They host the Washington Capitals at 7pm.

HAMILTON: Thoughts from Sabres/Columbus

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 25, 2011

Columbus, OH (WGR 550) -- For the first 10 minutes it was a reasonably even period, but Columbus hit for two goals in five minutes and Buffalo looked really bad.

Jhonas Enroth made a few real nice saves on Rick Nash and Mark Letestu in the slot, but he couldn't handle a long flip shot from the RW wall by Ryan Johansen. He kicked the rebound into the slot where Letestu had an easy goal as Marc Gragnani failed to cover him at all.

Gragnani then took a penalty and pretty quick it was 2-0. Once again no coverage in front of the net on Nash and he tipped a James Wisniewski.

The Sabres picked up right where they left off against Boston with a parade to the penalty box. It really allowed the Blue Jackets to take momentum.

SECOND PERIOD:

It went from bad to worse in that period.

The defensive zone coverages got worse instead of better and Enroth was finally pulled after four goals in 24:29 and 14 saves.

After T.J. Brennan played a 2-on-1 perfectly which is a change for this team, Marc Methot got his 1st goal of the season through. Enroth was totally screened by Robyn Regehr. The team must have been thinking about that goal because it only took :12 for another. Ryan Johansen's shot from the RW wall went right under Enroth and through the crease. With the puck resting against the post, R.J. Umberger out muscled Drew Stafford for position and tapped in his 3rd into the empty cage. That made two long shots that Enroth couldn't handle by Johansen.

Buffalo got a little life when Jordan Leopold had a real nice rush up ice and ripped a wrist shot past Curtis Sanford. Both Zack Kassian and Regehr got their first points as Sabres on the goal.

The Sabres went on a power play where Luke Adam got stopped three consecutive times in front and a few seconds later on a cross ice one timer.

That was the end of the life Buffalo showed as Jeff Carter came in on the RW side and found a streaking Nash who tapped in his 7th past Drew MacIntyre. I had a big problem with this one as Corey Tropp stopped skating and was gliding on his back check for Nash.

Sanford has 17 saves, MacIntyre has six in his 15:31 of work.

Join Brian Koziol for the postgame where I'll join him with my final thoughts. If you miss it, Dave Buchanan will be posting in the Audio Vault.

Scoring in NHL debut just part of special week for Sabres' Brennan

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

November 24, 2011

BUFFALO — T.J. Brennan's older sister, Courtney, called him earlier this week. When the Sabres rookie picked up the phone, she told her brother some special news.

"She was like, 'I got engaged,'" the defenseman recalled Thursday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt in Columbus against the Blue Jackets.

Brennan, being the nice brother, didn't want to steal her thunder. He couldn't quite help himself, though.

"I was like, 'I think I have better news. I got called up,'" said Brennan, who scored in his NHL debut Wednesday, a 4-3 shootout loss to Boston. "So it was kind of funny. But I was really happy for her."

It's been a whirlwind week for the Brennan clan. The family – his father, mother, younger brother and three older sisters – had planned to join him in Rochester for Thanksgiving. Instead, when the Sabres summoned the 22-year-old Monday after Tyler Myers broke his wrist, they moved the meal to Buffalo.

"It's been a pretty high week, I guess I would say," Brennan said. "It's exciting."

His parents and one sister made it to the FNC, and they watched one of the best debuts by a Sabres defender in a long time. Brennan scored 11:02 into the second period, converting a deflected Derek Roy pass in the right circle.

Who was the last Sabres defenseman to score in his first NHL game? Sabres coach Lindy Ruff, who tallied into an empty net against Washington on Oct. 11, 1979.

"I should've kept him off the ice so I had that record for myself, I guess," Ruff joked.

Ruff said Brennan also scored into an empty cage.

"The goalie (Tim Thomas) wasn't in when he shot it," Ruff joked again. "It just tells you how important it was when I was out there as a rookie with an empty net."

When the puck went in, Brennan said he thought it "was too good to be true."

“It was crazy. It was exciting,” he said. “I think the part I started remembering was I just kind of turned around and (Thomas) Vanek was coming at me skating. I saw (Marc-Andre Gagnani) sprinting to get the puck.”

Naturally, scoring gave Brennan that “extra confidence.”

“It helps me believe in myself a little more, that I can stick around here,” said Brennan, who should stay around with Myers and Mike Weber (upper body) out.

Brennan, who wore No. 33, played 13:07 against the Bruins, mostly beside Gagnani, his AHL partner last season in Portland.

“Gags is awesome. I can’t say enough about that guy,” Brennan said. “He really helped me last year. ... He just helped me a lot (Wednesday), made it a lot easier.”

With a lot of penalties early, it was hard for Brennan to get in the flow.

“Anytime you play your first few games there’s a little bit of nerves,” Ruff said. “With most players, it was a tough game the way it started. He didn’t get a lot of ice. But when he did play, I thought he made a lot of good decisions.”

Brennan added: “I thought I was pretty solid defensively. I tried to keep it really simple, just keep the puck out of my net. I think we did a good job there. It was a plus to get a plus (rating) and a goal.”

The American hasn’t had an easy road to the NHL. Growing up on the New Jersey side of suburban Philadelphia, he was offered lacrosse scholarships and almost went undiscovered in hockey.

Eventually, though, he made it to the QMJHL. Then, the Sabres selected Brennan 31st in 2007, the pick the Flyers traded them for goalie Martin Biron. Brennan steadily improved in the AHL. Last season, he had 15 goals and 39 points.

“He’s come a long ways as a young defenseman,” Ruff said. “It’s a great thrill to get your first NHL goal. He’s battled hard to get to this point. You like to see your draft picks – you work with them, you develop them – you like to see them play. You like to see them rewarded for all the hard work they put in.

“It’s not an easy road. It hasn’t been an easy road for him, and it won’t be an easy road for the next guy.”

...

With only 11 healthy forwards, the Sabres recalled rookie winger Zack Kassian from Rochester on Thursday night. The 20-year-old should make his NHL debut tonight.

Kassian, the 13th pick in 2009, has a team-leading seven goals and 14 points in 18 games.

Ruff had no update on forward Brad Boyes, whose ironman streak ended at 513 consecutive games when he suffered an apparent ankle injury in the first period Wednesday. The coach said Boyes will be out “a period of time.”

“It’ll take a little time to figure out exactly how long it’s going to be,” Ruff said.

Meanwhile, winger Patrick Kaleta (lower body) didn’t skate Thursday and will likely miss his second straight game.

Winger Tyler Ennis (ankle sprain, 14 games) practiced on a line but is likely out tonight. Some recent rest helped him.

“Still got a little work to do with it,” Ennis said. “You got to be patient.”

Also, Weber (three games) has been practicing in a limited fashion. Ruff said Weber’s timeline, which he pegged at weeks, hasn’t become “days yet.”

...

A slew of things — the Sabres’ tepid response to Milan Lucic’s hit on goalie Ryan Miller, their 4-6-1 home record, Miller and Myers’ poor play, little impact from their free agents and some other struggles — have overshadowed a pretty nice 12-8-1 record a quarter into the season.

With 25 points, they’re just a point off the Northeast Division lead. Four NHL teams have one more win than the Sabres.

“We’re under the microscope just a little bit more with all the changes – all the new facilities here, the new ownership,” Sabres winger Drew Stafford. “People expect greatness right away. We expect that, too. We believe in here that we can have a championship. We’re going to be heavily scrutinized every game, every decision we make.”

Imagine if the Sabres get healthy and more players start performing like they’re expected.

“For us to have the kind of success we’ve had so far, you look at some of the bodies that are out right now, we haven’t played our best hockey, at least consistently,” Stafford said. “We’re still managing to get wins. Once we get playing on all cylinders it should be pretty good.”

•••

Sabres center Jochen Hecht, out since suffering a concussion early in training camp, made his season debut Wednesday, skating 18:15 on the No. 1 line between Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville.

Why such a plum assignment so soon?

“I knew I’d have to play him against the top line, and I knew Jochen could skate with them and defend with anybody,” Ruff said. “I thought he had a hell of a game for us. It was a big reason we were able to play with the (Patrice) Bergeron line and play with the (David) Krejci line.

“He can hang onto the puck, which makes a difference, and there’s always been a great relationship between him and Pommer. They like playing together. (It’s) a little bit of they know where each other’s going to be.”

Matt MacKenzie stars as Rochester Amerks defeat Albany Devils

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

November 26, 2011

The line from the John Fogerty song "Centerfield" may not pertain to hockey, but it's pretty much Matt MacKenzie's mantra:

"Put me in, coach/I'm ready to play, today."

Unable to crack the [Rochester Americans](#) lineup on defense, his real position, MacKenzie has been more than willing to turn into a forward.

He's becoming a pretty decent one, too.

The rookie assisted on two goals on Friday night, the all-important tying goal by Jacob Lagace late in the second [period](#) and the game-breaker by Derek Whitmore late in the third, as the Amerks defeated the Albany Devils 4-2.

Before Friday he didn't have a point in 11 [games](#).

"I played forward in minor hockey when I was like 7 or 8 but I've been a defenseman ever since," MacKenzie said. "Whatever way I can get into the lineup, though, it's OK with me."

If he can duplicate his play from Friday night, he'll earn a permanent spot in the lineup.

The 6-foot-1, 194-pound native of New Westminster, British Columbia, played big, he hustled, he hit and he was conscientious with regard to defensive responsibilities.

"Matt is the kind of guy, whatever situation you put him in, he'll eventually figure it out to the point he will help us be successful," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said. "He's got a great attitude, he wants to learn, he wants to get better and he's very competitive."

The entire Amerks team played with an edge on Friday night in front of 6,313 fans at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

The Devils initiated the checking but the Amerks were the more physical team down the stretch, winning many more battles for position and pucks.

Like on the winning goal by Colin Stuart, which came at 10:26 of the third period. Defenseman Joe Finley bowled Vladimir Zharkov off the puck in the corner and the Amerks took off out of their zone on the fast-break rush.

Three passes later, Stuart was lifting a shot over goalie Jeff Frazee to give the Amerks their first lead of the night. The moment his shot hit the twine, his momentum carried him right over the goalie.

"I got two for one," Stuart joked. "I got to score and run the goalie over."

The Amerks continued to apply pressure, and another fast-break rush led to Whitmore's goal with 3:42 to play. The initial pass hit a skate but MacKenzie alertly swatted down toward the goal mouth and Whitmore slammed it in.

"It feels really good to contribute," MacKenzie said.

Rochester Amerks' Paul Szczechura back in the groove

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

November 25, 2011

There was the initial [adrenaline](#) rush, followed by a brief back-to-reality plateau.

Now, however, Paul Szczechura is up to [speed](#) and anxious to do what he does best: create offense.

Off-season knee surgery prevented Szczechura from making his season debut until Nov. 4; he made an immediate impact when he finally wore the Rochester Americans sweater for the first time.

And while the rest of the league had a month-long head start, Amerks coach Ron Rolston believes his most offensively talented centerman has caught up.

"He brings experience and poise with the puck," Rolston said after a short Thanksgiving morning practice, when his team fine-tuned for tonight's 7:35 [game](#) against the Albany Devils at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

"He helps your [power](#) play because of his vision and poise. He makes your five-on-five game better because he is able to spread the ice."

Szczechura wasn't sure just how effective he'd be when he finally played his first game of the season. But there were no real issues.

"Right from Game 1 I felt really good," he said. "I worked really hard to get in the best shape I could."

There was still the initial test-drive [period](#), though. When a doctor needs to put your knee back together, there is always initial doubt or anxiety in a contact sport.

"Maybe for a week or two, the first couple [games](#), I kind of favored the other leg," he said. "But I feel fine now. I don't shy away from checks, I don't even think about the knee."

"I feel strong, I have full confidence."

The same is true when he has the puck. That's something that doesn't change.

"There's things he does out there that have you wondering, 'How the heck did he do that?'" his right winger, Zack Kassian, said.

The points have been coming; not in bunches, as the Amerks probably hoped they would, but there has been production (1 goal, 5 assists, 6 points in 8 games, and a plus-6 in plus/minus rating).

Who scores doesn't matter when the team wins. But when the team loses, then there is more pressure to produce. The Amerks lost 2-1 and 3-2 to the Toronto Marlies last weekend.

"Our line, we feel we have to score goals," Kassian said.

Capitals vs. Rangers: Mistakes costly for Washington as Ruslan Fedotenko scores twice to lead New York

Katie Carrera

The Washington Post

November 26, 2011

There wouldn't be any bailout plan for the [Washington Capitals](#) on Friday afternoon as they became a product of their own mistakes.

The [New York Rangers](#) took advantage of bad turnovers [to capture a 6-3 win against a Capitals squad](#) that tried to make overly complicated plays once it fell behind.

Ruslan Fedotenko scored a pair of goals and Rangers captain Ryan Callahan recorded three assists to boost an 18-save performance by goaltender Henrik Lundqvist and overwhelm the home team. Goals by Troy Brouwer, John Carlson and Alex Ovechkin — his first tally of the season at Verizon Center — weren't nearly enough in a game plagued by defensive miscues.

After playing a scoreless, even-keeled first period the Capitals fell into what has become a characteristic rut. A five-minute lull at the start of the second period yielded three New York goals and set the Capitals on their heels.

“We got scored on in bunches again,” Brouwer said. “We've got to find a way to make sure that we're composed, we're playing sound hockey when we get scored on. We had a couple shifts where we came out and had some good shifts, then they score a goal and they're back in our zone, we lose our momentum.”

The Rangers' first goal, by Marian Gaborik 3 minutes 37 seconds into the second, was the result of a turnover by Carlson inside the offensive blue line. The puck hopped over the Washington defenseman's stick, giving Derek Stepan a chance to pick it up and set off on a two-on-one with Gaborik, who ripped a one-timer into the right corner of the cage.

When rookie forward Cody Eakin took an untimely holding penalty, New York needed only nine seconds of power-play time before a shot by Artem Anisimov found its way through traffic in front and eluded Michal Neuvirth (27 saves) to make it 2-0 before seven minutes elapsed in the period.

The Rangers weren't finished. Less than two minutes later, Marcus Johansson tried to skate the puck through the middle of his own zone but turned it over when pressured by Callahan, making way for an easy shot by Fedotenko, who made it 3-0 with his first goal of the contest.

In a span of 4:18, New York claimed firm control.

“I think we try and we work hard but not hard enough. Every time we made a mistake it ended up in a goal,” Johansson said. “Just lost control of the puck. I wanted to give it to my winger, I fanned on it and it's a very bad play and it can't happen.”

Washington finally responded 58 seconds after Fedotenko's goal. The play started with a big hit by Ovechkin on Gaborik that drew Brian Boyle to the star Ranger's defense. With two New York forwards distracted along the left-side boards, Nicklas Backstrom picked up the puck and fed Carlson for a shot from the slot. Brouwer shoveled in the rebound.

Carlson redeemed himself further for the costly mistake that led to the game's first goal when he ripped a shot from the high slot past Lundqvist while on a power play 12:52 into the period. The goal made it 3-2 and snapped the Capitals' 0-for-32 drought on five-on-four power plays dating from Nov. 8 against Dallas.

But Washington couldn't parlay those goals into more steady defensive play. Dennis Wideman and Brouwer lost a battle in the corner to New York's duo of John Mitchell and Carl Hagelin, who dug the puck out and sent it to Boyle in the left faceoff circle. Neuvirth made the initial save but the rebound ricocheted off Roman Hamrlik's stick back to Boyle, who scored to make it 4-2 with just more than three minutes remaining in the period.

"Us just having the small lapses, I think, is just a little hurtful at times," Capitals forward Joel Ward said. "The fact that we've been giving up those opportunities at crucial times . . . has hurt us mentally a little bit and on the scoreboard."

At the start of the third, Wideman carried the puck into the offensive zone and tried to deke his way through the Rangers' top defensive pairing of Dan Girardi and Ryan McDonagh. They stripped him of the puck and sent the rush the other way where Callahan threaded a pass through Hamrlik that Brad Richards finished to make it 5-2.

That would be the final shift for Hamrlik and Wideman, who were benched for the remainder of the game. Each finished with a minus-3 rating.

Ovechkin and Fedotenko would later add goals, but as Washington heads to Buffalo for the second half of a back-to-back on Saturday night, the lesson that lingers is one of trying to keep things simple.

"We've got to get it through to them that the risk isn't worth the reward," Capitals Coach Bruce Boudreau said. "When we get into these spells — the Toronto game, this game, the Winnipeg game — that it's not worth it. You live to fight another day. You get it deep, you win the battle and eventually something good will happen."

Capitals notes: Mike Green missed a seventh consecutive game with a strained right groin muscle. The defenseman hasn't skated since Nov. 11. . . .

John Erskine didn't play for a third straight contest after falling on his surgically repaired left shoulder.

Time for Ovechkin's comeback

Stu Cowan

Montreal Gazette

November 26, 2011

While most of the focus in the National Hockey League this week has been on the return of Sidney Crosby with the Pittsburgh Penguins, there's another interesting storyline in Washington: What's wrong with Alex Ovechkin?

Entering Friday afternoon's game against the New York Rangers, Ovechkin ranked 43rd in the NHL in goals with seven and 57th in points with 16, to go along with a minus-4. Ovechkin scored his eighth goal (and his first at home) during the 6-3 loss.

This isn't the same player who could once spark debates over whether Ovechkin or Crosby was the best player in the world.

So, what's wrong with Alexander the Great, who had a career-low 32 goals and 85 points last season?

I think there might be 124 million things wrong.

In January 2008, the Capitals signed Ovechkin to a 13-year, \$124-million contract extension - the first \$100million deal in NHL history.

One thing recent history has taught hockey fans is that long-term, multimilliondollar deals can cause big problems. Ask Vancouver Canucks fans how they feel about Roberto Luongo's 12-year, \$64-million contract. Ask Tampa Bay Lightning fans about Vincent Lecavalier's 11-year, \$85-million contract. Ask New Jersey Devils fans about Ilya Kovalchuk's 15-year, \$100-million contract. And, if you dare, ask Canadiens fans about Scott Gomez's seven-year, \$51.5-million contract.

(Crosby, who is earning \$9 million this season on a five-year, \$43.5-million deal that takes him through 2012-13, had two goals and two assists in 15: 54 of ice time in his long-awaited return Monday night. That tied him with Gomez in the NHL scoring race with four points. Gomez, who is earning \$7.5 million, has four assists in 197: 46 of ice time.)

Why do so many NHL players seem to struggle under the weight of hefty contracts? Is it the pressure, the complacency that might come with longtime security, or simply a case of getting old?

Ovechkin's case highlights yet another problem. What happens when a player who is under contract until 2021 decides he doesn't like the coach?

"It's not going very well for the Washington Capitals, and it looks like the tension is starting to mount," Hockey Night in Canada's Mike Milbury said last Saturday on the Hotstove segment. "I mean, what are you going to do with a Bruce Boudreau-Alex Ovechkin conflict? It's clearly there

... he's not playing with any kind of inspiration, he seems to be not into it at all, body language says frustration, body language says, geez, I don't know where to go or how to set this up. This is a mess.

"This guy is having trouble, and I'm not sure exactly what the answer is, but I know whatever they're trying right now isn't working."

Boudreau benched Ovechkin for the final minute of a game on Nov. 1 against Anaheim and didn't put him on the ice in overtime, with the Capitals winning 5-4. During a timeout late in the game, TV cameras caught Ovechkin muttering about Boudreau on the bench, which upset former NHL coach Mike Keenan, who was working on the Versus broadcast of the game.

"When is a teacher a great teacher? When the student is ready to learn," Keenan said. "In this case, Alex Ovechkin has to show a lot more respect to his coaching staff and to his team. There's a response here that's not a positive response. I give Bruce Boudreau a lot of credit for this decision. He's delivering a message to a star player and his team. That kind of behaviour on the ice is not acceptable."

But Hockey Night in Canada's Glenn Healy believes Boudreau is picking a fight he can't win.

"\$51,000 a day for Ovechkin till the year 2021," Healy said last Saturday. "So, Bruce, stop trying to be what you are right now. Stop trying to be the tough guy with him. Stop playing the games ... I would play this guy till his legs fall off."

Added Healy, who was a goalie with the New York Rangers when they won the Stanley Cup in 1994: "If they really want to make it better, get a guy in that locker room like I had with (Alex) Kovalev ... (Sergei) Nemchinov, an older Russian player to mentor Ovechkin. But don't fight with him ... you're going to lose that battle."

Are the other Capitals players behind Ovechkin or Boudreau?

"In 2021, none of them will be there," Healy said. "Ovechkin will."

And Ovechkin will be 35 years old in the final year of his contract, earning \$10 million. When Daniel Sedin won the Art Ross Trophy last season at age 30, he became the first 30-something to take the NHL scoring title since Mario Lemieux did in 1996-97 at age 31. Wayne Gretzky won his last Art Ross at age 33 in 1993-94.

After Crosby's four-point performance Monday, former teammate Sergei Gonchar told Ken Warren of the Ottawa Citizen what makes No. 87 so special.

"The most important thing is, probably, that ability to work," said Gonchar, now with the Senators. "I've never seen a superstar work as hard as he does. He's probably the most prepared player that I've ever played with."

And here's what former NHL coach Barry Melrose, now with ESPN, told the Washington Post:
"When Alex was fighting with Crosby as the best player in the world, I thought Alex was one of the hardest-working players in the world. I don't know if Alex is one of the hardest-working players in the world right now."

He's definitely not one of the best.

Beninati: Risky business

Joe Beninati

CSNWashington.com

November 26, 2011

There are some days when the Caps insist on making the high-risk play instead of taking the simpler, safer route. Today was one of those games where the Caps courted disaster one too many times and the Rangers jumped all over their mistakes on the way to a 6-3 win.

Over the first 20 minutes you could say that the Caps played a solid period of defensive-minded hockey. They did not give New York very many good looks on Michal Neuvirth, while at the same time had two outstanding chances to score on Henrik Lundquist.

Washington has had some success against the Rangers' "king" in the crease, but he stoned them in the opening period. Joel Ward had the first chance to tuck one in on a 2-on-1 break. His scoring chance was so good that the red-goal light actually came on as Ward's shot was being smothered by Lundquist. It looked like a sure goal; instead it would go down as an extraordinary save for Lundquist, whose save percentage is over .940 in his last seven games.

Jason Chimera used his blinding speed to sneak through the Rangers defense on a clear breakaway, only to be foiled by Lundquist. Chimera tried to keep the puck low and between the leg-pads of the Rangers keeper, but he closed it down in a hurry.

Throughout the day, I was more and more impressed by Ranger defenseman Dan Girardi. He played over 29 minutes in the game, had four blocked shots, five hits, two assists, and one big shot of praise from Head Coach John Tortorella, who told me after the game how much Girardi means to his Ranger club.

After a scoreless first period, the two teams went on a post-Thanksgiving feeding frenzy in the second frame. Six goals would go on the board, four of them in favor of New York.

An odd-man rush for a top shelf put-away by Marian Gaborik started the spree. Artem Anisimov scored from the left wing circle on a wrist shot that Neuvirth did not track very well. Marcus Johansson then tried to swing through the middle in his own zone which led to a bad turnover and a Ruslan Fedotenko marker. Three New York goals in a tad more than four minutes put DC in a hole.

But they would start digging out. Troy Brouwer was parked at the post to steer in a loose puck at 8:53 of the middle period. While on a power-play, John Carlson whipped a slapshot that beat a partially screened Lundquist to make it 3-2.

The Rangers would improve their lead before the break when Brian Boyle found himself and the puck free in front of Neuvirth for a backhand finish.

For a team that had been struggling to score the Rangers were awfully opportunistic. The Caps kept giving them odd-man breaks, and after a couple of brilliant saves by Neuvirth, New York newcomer Brad Richards re-directed a pretty feed from Ryan Callahan for a 5-2 cushion early in the third period.

Alex Ovechkin would strike for his first goal at home this season, a rising wrist shot that almost singed the ear of Lundquist . From my vantage point, Ovechkin was skating very well today and that goal was another version of his patented move from the off-wing shooting through a defender.

When the Caps needed to put a force-field up in front of Neuvirth, they allowed Fedotenko to stand in the slot and bang home a centering pass from Callahan, who finished with three “helpers”.

Looking quickly at the post-game stat sheet, it was a minus-3 performance for Marcus Johansson, Dennis Wideman and Roman Hamrlik. Thankfully those don't happen very often and cannot happen in Buffalo Saturday if the Caps are to finish this holiday weekend with a win.

Careless play re-emerges as Capitals get blasted by Rangers

Jack Anderson

The Washington Times

November 26, 2011

[Alex Ovechkin](#) flashed down the left wing and fired a scorching shot right over [Henrik Lundqvist](#)'s shoulder. Vintage [Ovechkin](#) to be sure, but with the [Washington Capitals](#) trailing by two goals to the [New York Rangers](#) in the third period, it came too little too late.

It certainly wasn't how [Ovechkin](#) or anyone else envisioned it. The [Capitals](#) superstar winger scored his first goal at [Verizon Center](#) this season, but it was overshadowed by a series of bad turnovers and undisciplined play that helped a struggling [Rangers](#)' offense snap out of its slump with a 6-3 win.

Washington's brief two-game winning streak is now a thing of the past and coach [Bruce Boudreau](#) hinted at a "lack of confidence" among several of his players following the game.

"It seems like we start to feel sorry for ourselves," [Boudreau](#) said. "This is a league where you can't feel sorry for yourself. We just got to go out and suck it up and do what you have to do."

[John Carlson](#), who was responsible for the [Rangers](#)' first goal, wasn't thrilled with the numerous breakdowns that killed any momentum generated by wins over Phoenix and Winnipeg earlier in the week.

"We won the last two games, but I don't think too many things are going our way," he said.

They sure weren't on Friday as the [Rangers](#) jumped on every one of Washington's second-period mistakes to build a 3-0 lead in a 4:18 span.

It started when [Carlson](#) turned the puck over at the offensive blueline and [Marian Gaborik](#) one-timed a shot past [Michal Neuvirth](#) to make it 1-0. Then a careless giveaway in the slot from the usually sure-handed [Marcus Johansson](#) resulted in New York's third goal.

"[Marcus](#) tried to force a puck up the middle rather than make the simple play," [Boudreau](#) said. "We talk about keeping it out of the middle all night long and win the battles on the boards, but it was a young mistake."

However, [Johansson](#) wasn't the only one making poor decisions. As a team the Caps committed 17 turnovers, three of which resulted in Ranger goals.

"You got to take care of the puck especially when you play a team like this," said Nicklas Backstrom. "I mean they were forechecking good and we got to make sure to [make] good passes and stuff like that."

[Ovechkin](#)'s goal had the desired effect, energizing the crowd, but on the ice New York reversed the Caps' all-out pressure to their benefit. As Washington ran themselves ragged in the third period to try and create chances against a world-class goalie, the [Rangers](#) counter-attacked with a grinding shift to seal the game.

Ryan Callahan carried the puck behind [Neuvirth](#) before dishing it to a wide-open Ruslan Fedotenko who scored his second goal to put the game away. The forward was camped out in front of Washington's net without a defender anywhere near him.

"We were too slow. We were soft," said Karl Alzner. "We weren't making the smart plays, helping each other get open. If you're not working hard for each other, you're not going to be successful."

Against Winnipeg, the Caps were able to put forth a controlled effort in which they wore the Jets down by taking the body. While there was more of the same physical play against the [Rangers](#), it spilled over into the realm of undisciplined — something [Boudreau](#) knows can't continue.

"We've got to get through to them that the risk isn't worth the reward," the coach said. "It's not worth it. You get it deep and then you win the battle and eventually something good will happen."

[Boudreau](#) has done all he can this season to get the [Capitals](#) to practice what he preaches. Instead of listening, the team has struggled to overcome its mistakes, dwelling on them rather than moving on.

"We're getting too down," Alzner said. "As soon as we get a goal scored against us, it kind of feels like it's the end of the world."

That's a problem that can't persist if the [Capitals](#) want to rediscover their winning ways.