



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Friday, December 02, 2011*

## **Sabres' season at crossroads**

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

December 2, 2011

It's funny, sometimes, how the schedule works out. The Sabres entered Thursday night's games in seventh place in the Eastern Conference with back-to-back games this weekend against Detroit and Nashville. The Red Wings and Predators are the only two teams other than Buffalo that haven't changed their head coach or general manager since the lockout.

The Sabres have been out of sorts for the better part of three weeks and haven't offered many, if any, indications they're built for anything but a first-round playoff knockout.

They haven't played well at home. They looked sloppy and disorganized before injuries piled up. Their second and third lines were mostly inconsistent and unproductive. Their defense and goaltending have been suspect and they've lacked competitive toughness and cohesion commonly found in legitimate Stanley Cup contenders.

Based on what's being said in the community, fans are doing what comes naturally in true Buffalo fashion when a team nears a crisis. They're panicking. They want swift and decisive action. They want the goalie traded or key players waived or the coach and general manager fired, as if any or all changes would provide the necessary fix.

In fact, a good, stiff jolt could be in order if the Sabres don't start winning on a consistent basis and playing to the standard they set before the season began. I'm all for showing patience while waiting for the Sabres to come together, but their idea of stability is starting to look more like the same old, same old.

Who should go where, for whom and when? Well, that's the tough part.

There's no telling how players will respond when management makes a drastic move in an effort to get back on course. The ship could be righted, certainly, but it also could sink. It certainly beats floating around in circles, which was not what Terry Pegula had in mind when he bought the team and convinced people to climb aboard.

Pegula is a good man who arrived with noble intentions. More than anything, he wanted to help his favorite team win the whole thing. He backed up his commitment and passion for the Sabres by giving them everything they needed and more. He threw unbridled support behind General Manager Darcy Regier and coach Lindy Ruff.

Four coaches already have been fired this season, and 167 coaching changes have been made since Ruff was hired in 1997. Bruce Boudreau was fired by Washington and hired by Anaheim in less than 72 hours this week.

Rather than change the personnel, the Ducks fired coach Randy Carlyle and plucked Boudreau from the NHL merry-go-round. And to think the Capitals opened the season with seven straight wins under Boudreau.

To be clear, I'm not saying Ruff or Regier should be fired or that Ryan Miller should be traded or some major swap should be made. Not yet, anyway. But nobody should feel comfortable with a continuing pattern of mediocrity or an underachieving team that entered Thursday night equidistant from first place and 13th in the conference.

Ultimately, it comes down to winning and losing.

One drawback of ownership is not always being able to view their team the way a fan would, not if winning comes first. At times, they need to take a cold, objective look and detach themselves from personalities and emotion that comes with having likable people under them. It could be a problem for Pegula, who has said many times he's not going to stand over his team with a sword.

Actually, putting people on notice wouldn't be such a bad idea.

Remember, Pegula could have fired Regier and allowed the next general manager to make a decision about Ruff. He could have sent both packing and created a fresh start, a common strategy for many new owners.

You can't help but wonder if Pegula showering his people with so many gifts spoiled his players and further empowered Regier and Ruff. The last thing anyone in the organization needed was a sense of entitlement and the feeling they're untouchable.

OK, now what? Do they make a change or maintain status quo? Let me know if you have the right answer. Unfortunately, a big move doesn't guarantee success any more than standing pat equates to failure.

For an example, look no further than the schedule for this weekend.

Detroit is a model franchise under GM Ken Holland and coach Mike Babcock, who took the Red Wings to the conference finals in three straight seasons and won the Cup in 2007-08. The Predators have had GM David Poile and coach Barry Trotz in charge since Day One. They have never played past the second round.

Pittsburgh fired coach Michel Therrien less than a year after he guided them to the Stanley Cup finals before losing to Detroit. The Penguins replaced him with rookie coach Dan Bylsma, who led them to the title over the Red Wings the following season. Detroit was a mess early this year before coming around.

Every situation is different. The Sabres look the same, which is to say they don't look good enough.

## **Curiosity surrounds Finley in debut**

### *Defenseman impressed Sabres with toughness*

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 2, 2011

The newest Buffalo Sabre is a big curiosity. A very big one.

So much is known about the Sabres' major prospects, some of whom have been in the organization for three or four years. Very little is known about 6-foot-8, 260-pound defenseman Joe Finley, who will make his NHL debut tonight against the Detroit Red Wings in First Niagara Center.

Finley, 24, is a former No. 1 pick of the Washington Capitals in 2005 who stayed at the University of North Dakota until 2009. His last two pro seasons were marred by injuries, including a serious artery rupture in his hand, and he came to Buffalo's training camp on a tryout.

He impressed coaches with his skating ability and got a ticket to Rochester that turned into an NHL contract on Monday. Eighteen games and a surprising spot on the Amerks' top defensive pairing later, Finley is in the NHL while Jordan Leopold sits out the weekend with an upper body injury.

"I really just took it upon myself to focus on things I can control and that's trying to play a real simple, solid brand of hockey," Finley said after joining his new teammates for practice Thursday. "I've been fortunate to do that so far."

Finley leads the Amerks in penalty minutes (57) and in plus-minus at plus-10. He had just one goal and one assist in 18 games but has been impressive with his defensive play and his toughness. Sabres and Amerks fans are so curious about him that he became the No. 1 Trending Topic in the United States on Twitter for an hour after his callup Wednesday night.

"I haven't met these people yet but if the fans got me to be the No. 1 Trending Topic, that's all positive stuff and I'm all for it," he said."

If you Google Finley, you'll find a couple outlandish stories from his college days at North Dakota that have prompted a lot of the chatter.

He was once arrested for disorderly conduct with an ex-teammate for throwing large objects -- including a lawn mower and a kitchen table -- onto a street at 3 a.m. in Grand Forks. In another incident during a game against archrival Wisconsin, Finley smacked mascot Bucky Badger in the leg with his stick as the two passed each other in a dressing room runway.

Finley was disciplined by North Dakota for that action and had to write a letter of apology to the student mascot.

Finley knows those bizarre tales will follow him around but he's trying to get past being the big guy who threw a lawn mower and whacked a mascot.

"It's not funny. It's a growing experience but I'm not an 18- or 20-year-old kid anymore," he said. "I'm 24 years old and I'm above and beyond that. A lot of the stuff I dealt with the last two years has got me to mature."

Finley's career has been helped by being paired with former NHL veteran Sheldon Souray with Washington's AHL affiliate in Hershey and with former Capitals and Sabres blueliner Shaone Morrisonn in Rochester.

"He's defended really well down there," said coach Lindy Ruff. "You look at that and if he can continue to progress and stay hungry, you don't find those type of players."

T.J. Brennan (upper body) is injured in Rochester and could not come back to the Sabres so Amerks coaches told Ruff that Finley should be his man. He's likely to play tonight with former Amerk teammate Brayden McNabb.

"He was able to skate and make plays," Ruff said. "For a big man, that's always a challenge. He skates very well. He's able to handle the puck. His first pass has been good and when you have that size and reach you have an automatic advantage over a lot of players."

Finley isn't fretting over his NHL debut.

"I'm not really thinking about it too much, that's the good thing," he said. "You just have to worry about waking up [today], having a pregame skate and worrying about the things you have control."

Finley made sure Thursday to give plenty of credit for his development to his offseason training. He's worked for several years with veterans Capitals strength coach Jack Blatherwick, the strength coach under Herb Brooks for the 1980 U.S. Olympic Team.

"Jack's been huge for me, getting me to where I am now," Finley said. "As far as being a young kid and being too muscular up top and working on explosive leg work, I owe a ton of credit to him."

And his summer workout partners in his native Minnesota? Vancouver's Andrew Alberts and the man he's replacing tonight, Leopold.

"If he has to be my sacrificial lamb, I guess he's OK in doing that," Finley joked of Leopold, who was not in the dressing room Thursday. "These guys need to get healthy here and get back and continue this thing on track. That's the most important thing. I'm here to fill a void and to play good hockey."

## **Ennis prepared to step in, step up**

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 2, 2011

The Buffalo Sabres' offense figures to get a boost tonight with the return of winger Tyler Ennis to the lineup for the game against the Detroit Red Wings.

Ennis suffered a high ankle sprain Oct. 22 at Tampa Bay and has missed 17 games. He hits December pointless in seven games -- after collecting 20 goals and 49 points last year as a rookie.

"I feel ready. I felt good," Ennis said. "I can use my speed. I feel fast, like I can do everything I need to do."

Ennis skated Thursday on left wing with Derek Roy and Drew Stafford. Ville Leino was moved off that line and joined Luke Adam and Zack Kassian.

The hope is that Ennis can boost a sagging group of forwards full of slumps. Paul Gaustad has gone 22 games without a goal while Nathan Gerbe (12 games), Stafford (11), Leino (9) and Roy (7) all have goalless droughts going. Even leading scorer Thomas Vanek is struggling, with just one goal in his last eight games.

"We need production," said coach Lindy Ruff. "I don't need to stand here after [tonight's] game and explain to you how we missed all these opportunities again. We need to take some pride, be harder in those situations, bear down and make sure they go into the back of the net."

\* \* \* \*

Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff played 32 minutes, 48 seconds Tuesday against the New York Islanders, a career-high in regulation, and should again play huge minutes tonight.

Ehrhoff exceeded that total for Vancouver by playing 33:08 in an overtime game against Calgary on Jan. 22. He also played more twice in multiple-overtime playoff games, including a whopping 43:44 in a four-OT win over Dallas on May 4, 2008.

Ehrhoff has a team-high average of 24:04 this season -- and is at 28:02 over the last five games. And he's seemed to thrive on the extra ice time.

"Thirty minutes is a lot to play, not something for a nightly basis," Ehrhoff said. "But if guys are down and I need to play those minutes, I'm all for it."

\* \* \* \*

Former Sabres winger Mike Grier, who was not playing this season, officially announced his retirement Thursday. Grier had been dogged by knee injuries in Buffalo the last couple of years.

Grier played in 1,060 regular season NHL games, recording 162 goals and 221 assists. He also played in 101 playoff games, including stints as a member of the Sabres' 2006 Eastern Conference finalists and 2010 Northeast Division champions.

"Mike was one of the ultimate competitors," said Ruff. "A big man who played the game hard. He was great in the locker room. Was well-respected by his teammates and if there's anybody you'd like to be like as a young guy walking in the locker room, you'd want to follow in Mike's footsteps."

Grier had five goals and 11 assists in 73 games for the Sabres last season. His career high in goals was 20, set in Edmonton in 1998-99 and again in 2000-01. He will live in Boston, where he was raised.

"I was very fortunate to be able to play 14 seasons in the NHL with some great players," Grier said in a statement released through the NHLPA.

"The memories and friendships that I have built during my time in the league will last a lifetime. I would like to thank my former teammates, family and fans for helping make my career so memorable for me."

\* \* \* \*

The Red Wings enter tonight's game having won six straight and coming off a 10-3-1 November that has pushed them into second place in the Western Conference.

The Red Wings, however, have a brutal December schedule. Tonight's game opens a month that features of 10 of 15 games on the road and includes trips to Colorado, Edmonton, Vancouver and Calgary.

## **Kim, Terry Pegula give \$12 million to Houghton**

Jay Rey

The Buffalo News

December 2, 2011

Kim Kerr enjoyed her time at Houghton College.

She was a cheerleader. She played in the wind ensemble. She graduated with a degree in communications.

Now, years later, Kim Kerr is Kim Pegula, the wife of Buffalo Sabres owner Terry Pegula, and she is showing Houghton her gratitude.

The Pegulas are giving \$12 million to Houghton, a small, four-year Christian college located about 65 miles southeast of Buffalo in Allegany County.

Houghton President Shirley A. Mullen made the announcement Thursday, calling the \$12 million "a transformational gift in every sense of the word." The money will be used to build a new athletic complex on campus at a time when the college is expanding its number of teams and moving up to NCAA Division III athletics.

"Terry and I are very pleased to be able to give back to Houghton College where I received my education," Kim Pegula said. "We wish the college all the best as it begins its transition to NCAA Division III athletics."

It's a big gift for a little college -- or any institution in Western New York.

As a comparison, Niagara University received \$10 million in 2008 from then-Buffalo Sabres owner B. Thomas Golisano.

The University at Buffalo recently announced a \$40 million gift, but prior to that, UB's largest monetary gift from a single donor was \$10 million.

This isn't the first time Houghton has had such a huge windfall.

Wilson Greatbatch, inventor of the implantable heart pacemaker, donated \$15 million to Houghton in 2000 for the Greatbatch School of Music. That makes the Pegula gift the second largest in the history of Houghton, founded 1883 as a seminary.

"We couldn't be happier," said Bob Van Wicklin, vice president for advancement at Houghton. "We've been talking for about a year back and forth, and it's finally all come to a head."

Van Wicklin also thanked Kim's father, Ralph Kerr. Kim and her two brothers all attended Houghton, which has about 1,100 students.



When Kerr retired as a school superintendent in 2004, he settled down in the hamlet of Houghton. He teaches in the college's evening degree program and is a big booster of the school's sports teams, the Houghton Highlanders.

When the college announced it was jumping to the Division III Empire 8 Conference, Kerr talked to Houghton Athletic Director Harold "Skip" Lord about what the program might need.

Kerr went to his daughter.

"Since [the Pegulas] have been blessed by God in a financial way, I did encourage her not to forget her alma mater," he said Thursday.

Kim was a good student at Houghton, her father said. She was a cheerleader for the basketball team and played in the wind ensemble, he added. She majored in communications and graduated in 1991.

"Houghton was a very good experience for her," Kerr said. "I'm thrilled Kim and Terry would be that generous with the school."

The Pegulas have donated to Houghton in the past, Kerr said, but nothing like the gift announced Thursday.

Terry Pegula has a generous track record with his alma mater, too.

He earned a bachelor's degree in petroleum and natural gas engineering from Penn State in 1973. He donated \$88 million to the school in 2010 -- the largest private gift in Penn State history -- to build an arena and start a Division I hockey program.

Kerr will spearhead the Houghton project for the Pegulas, who live in Boca Raton, Fla.

Houghton is eyeing a campus site off Route 11 for the new sports complex. The scope and design of the project are still to be determined, but it would include turf fields for the baseball and softball teams, as well as the men's and women's lacrosse teams.

All four teams are being phased in at Houghton.

The sports complex would also include a field house, with a running track, for teams to practice during inclement weather.

Houghton hopes to have designs approved by its board of trustees early next year, with the facilities constructed and in use by late 2012 or early 2013, Van Wicklin said.

## Red Wings take hot streak to Buffalo

Davis Harper

NHL.com

December 1, 2011

**RED WINGS (15-7-1) at SABRES (13-10-1)**

**TV: NHLN-US (HD), FS-Detroit (HD), MSG-Buffalo**

**LAST 10:** Detroit 8-2-0; Buffalo 4-5-1

**Season Series:** This is the first of two meetings between the teams, the other is on Jan. 16 on Detroit. In their only meeting last season, [Pavel Datsyuk](#) tallied in regulation and again in the shootout to lift the Red Wings to a 3-2 win on Feb. 26.

**Big Story:** Since 1995-96, Detroit has won 17 of 21 matchups against Buffalo, and they come to First Niagara Center on a roll. The Red Wings kick off December winners of six in a row and sit near the top of the Western Conference. Meanwhile, the injury-depleted Sabres are coming off a home loss to the New York Islanders - a team currently ranked 15<sup>th</sup> in the Eastern Conference - and have lost four of five.

### Team Scope:

**Red Wings:** On their most recent upswing, Detroit has regained its status as the cream of the Western crop. Only one win on its streak has come by a one-goal margin, and that was the Discover Thanksgiving Showdown in which they beat Boston at TD Garden 3-2 in a shootout to end the Bruins' 10-game winning streak.

"I think we've done a lot of good things," coach Mike Babcock said. "We're playing with more tempo."

However, compared to their sparkling home record, Detroit has been just average away from Joe Louis Arena -- they are just 5-5-0 despite having won their last three away from home.

**Sabres:** While Detroit was burning through the month of November, Buffalo was hobbling. The Sabres sustained the most November injuries in the League, which resulted in a lackluster 7-6-1 record. Their most recent casualty was defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#), who left during the first period against New York with an upper-body injury.

Add Leopold to the long list of key Sabres who will miss the showdown with Detroit, a list so well-spread around the ice as to be especially crippling. There is the usual starter in net, [Ryan Miller](#), who is still going through his battery of concussion tests. Then there are the defenders: Leopold, [Mike Weber](#) (upper body) and [Tyler Myers](#) (broken wrist). Rounding it out are four forwards, [Brad Boyes](#) (right leg), [Patrick Kaleta](#) (groin), [Tyler Ennis](#) (ankle) and [Cody McCormick](#) (upper body).

**Who's Hot:** Datsyuk has five goals and five assists during Detroit's win streak. ... Buffalo's Jordan Hecht has goals in his last two games. Hecht has only been in the lineup for four games since returning from a preseason concussion.

**Injury Report:** Aside from [Patrick Eaves](#) - who suffered a broken jaw when he was hit by a slap shot Saturday against Nashville - the Red Wings are healthy. ... Leopold is expected to miss a week with his upper-body injury, while Ennis and Kaleta are both game-time decisions.

**Stat Pack:** These teams don't play often, but certain Wings use the rare affair to pad their offensive stats. [Nicklas Lidstrom](#) has two goals and 20 assists in his last 23 games against Buffalo, and [Henrik Zetterberg](#) has five assists in as many meetings with the Sabres. Datsyuk scored goals in each of the last two, as well as the shootout winner last season. ... Detroit has scored power-play goal in five straight visits to the First Niagara Center.

**Puck Drop:** "I haven't even sat down and talked to the coaches about (a return date) because I haven't finalized anything with the doctors. They want to know how I feel after some really intense days of practice." - Miller on the timetable for his return from concussion. His backup, [Jhonas Enroth](#) is 8-4-1 but has never faced the Red Wings.

## Detroit (15-7-1) at Buffalo (13-10-1)

Alan Ferguson

STATS

December 1, 2011

The [Detroit Red Wings](#) have dominated much of the recent series with the [Buffalo Sabres](#). They appear to have a good chance of continuing that trend Friday night.

The Red Wings will seek a seventh straight victory when they visit the struggling and injury-plagued Sabres.

Detroit (15-7-1) has won 17 of 21 matchups with Buffalo dating back to the 1995-96 season and enter this one on a season-high six-game winning streak after beating Tampa Bay 4-2 on Wednesday.

[Tomas Holmstrom](#) and [Darren Helm](#) each scored in the third period for the Red Wings, who have outscored opponents 23-11 during their streak. Detroit's only win by fewer than two goals over the last six games was a 3-2 shootout victory in Boston - the Bruins' only loss in November - last Friday.

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“I think we’ve done a lot of good things,” coach Mike Babcock said. “We’re playing with more tempo.”

The Red Wings are seeking their first seven-game win streak since March 20-April 1, 2010, and will try to accomplish that against a Sabres team that’s 1-3-1 in its last five.

Buffalo (13-10-1) is missing forwards [Brad Boyes](#) (right leg), [Patrick Kaleta](#) (groin), [Tyler Ennis](#) (ankle) and [Cody McCormick](#) (upper body). Defensemen [Jordan Leopold](#) (upper body), [Mike Weber](#) (upper body) and [Tyler Myers](#) (wrist) are also out.

There's a chance, though, the Sabres might get goaltender [Ryan Miller](#) back from a concussion as early as this weekend, coach Lindy Ruff said. The former Michigan State star hasn't played since he was run over by Boston's [Milan Lucic](#) during a 6-2 loss Nov. 12, but returned to practice Wednesday.

Miller was a little more cautious when asked about a potential timetable for returning. After hosting Detroit, Buffalo travels to Nashville on Saturday.

"I haven't even sat down and talked to the coaches about (a return date) because I haven't finalized anything with the doctors. They want to know how I feel after some really intense days of practice," said Miller, who is 5-6-0 with a 2.86 goals-against average in 11 games this season.

[Jhonas Enroth](#) is 3-4-1 with a 2.71 GAA while starting every game in Miller's absence and has never faced the Red Wings, who have won their last three on the road after losing five straight.

[Pavel Datsyuk](#), who has a team-best five goals and five assists during Detroit's six-game run, has scored in each of his last two games against the Sabres. He started Detroit's comeback from a two-goal deficit Feb. 26 in Buffalo with a power-play tally in the second period and got the puck past Miller again during the shootout in a 3-2 win.

Red Wings captain [Nicklas Lidstrom](#) has registered two goals and 20 assists in his last 23 games against the Sabres. [Henrik Zetterberg](#), who had a four-game point streak snapped Wednesday, has an assist each of the past five times he's seen Buffalo.

[Jimmy Howard](#), who has started 16 consecutive games, made his only one against the Sabres during a 3-2 overtime win March 13, 2010. Detroit's backup netminder is [Ty Conklin](#), who is 7-1-0 with a 1.49 GAA in eight meetings against the team he played for briefly in 2006-07.

The Red Wings have won four of five in Buffalo, scoring on the power play once in each visit.

## "BIG JOE" OVERCOMES ADVERSITY

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

December 1, 2011

If Zack Kassian's recall last week would be considered "eagerly anticipated," you can file Joe Finley's in the "completely unexpected" category. Because that's normally what happens when you start the season as a healthy scratch in the AHL after being a Sabres training camp invitee.

But Finley isn't your run of the mill minor league recall. The 6-foot-8, 260-pound defenseman was a first-round pick of the Washington Capitals in 2005, and played four years at the University of North Dakota. In his first professional season with the ECHL's South Carolina Stingrays in 2009, Finley suffered a ruptured artery in his hand on an innocent play in the defensive zone when he was checking an opposition player.

"I didn't know it right away, but when I took my glove off at the end of the shift, my fingers were completely white," he told John Walton of theahl.com last season. "It was scary. I'd never seen anything like it before."

The injury has limited Finley to just 69 professional games since then, including 26 at the AHL level with Hershey and now Rochester. In 18 games with the Amerks this season, Finley leads the team with 57 PIMs and a plus-10 rating, while adding one goal and one assist.

Finley, 24, started the season on an AHL deal, but was signed to an NHL contract by the Sabres on Monday. Three days later he finds himself preparing for his first NHL game on Friday night when Detroit comes to town. Finley knows what has worked for him in Rochester, and wants to play the same way in Buffalo.

"I really just took it upon myself to focus on the things I can control, and that's trying to play a real simple, solid brand of hockey. I've been fortunate to do that so far. Things are moving in the right direction but there's a long way to go to be here full time, that's for sure."

With Jordan Leopold out of the lineup recovering from an upper body injury, many would have assumed TJ Brennan and his offensive skills would've been a better fit as his replacement on the blueline. But Brennan also has an upper body injury, and Finley was the best man for the job in the eyes of Amerks coach Ron Rolston.

A native of Edina, Minn., Finley may not have the offensive numbers that Brennan does, but Lindy Ruff was very impressed with his skating during training camp.

"He was able to skate and make plays, and for a big man that's always the challenge," explains Ruff. "He skates very well, he's able to handle the puck, and his first pass has been good. When you have that size and that reach, you've got an automatic advantage over a lot of players."

INJURY UPDATES: Ryan Miller was going to undergo concussion testing today, and it looks like he will start one of the games this weekend ... Drew MacIntyre has been returned to Rochester ... Tyler Ennis (ankle sprain) skated on a line with Derek Roy and Drew Stafford today. He is expected to be back in the lineup tomorrow against Detroit after missing the last 17 games ... Patrick Kaleta (groin) got through practice without any problems, and his playing status for Friday will be determined after the morning skate. He has missed the last four games.

## **Sabres' Finley defies odds to reach NHL**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 2, 2011

BUFFALO — Finally, Sabres rookie Joe Finley has started catching some breaks. In less than three professional seasons, the hulking 6-foot-8, 260-pound defenseman went from an intriguing first-round prospect to an injury-prone bust stuck in the low-level ECHL.

Somehow, though, Finley's in the NHL, ready to make his debut tonight when the Sabres host the Detroit Red Wings at the First Niagara Center.

It's been a whirlwind few months, for sure. Finley was playing for the South Carolina Stingrays in April.

The 24-year-old impressed during a training camp tryout, getting an AHL deal. Still, he was a healthy scratch for Rochester's opener. He began turning heads once he played, earning a three-year NHL contract Monday.

Then, Jordan Leopold, Finley's offseason workout partner in Minnesota, went down Tuesday, the fourth defenseman injured in two weeks.

"Hey, you know what? If he has to be my sacrificial lamb, I guess he's OK in doing that," Finley joked to a throng of reporters and cameras Thursday inside the First Niagara Center. "These guys need to get healthy and continue this thing on track. That's the most important thing. I'm here to fill a void and obviously to play good hockey."

But had T.J. Brennan been healthy, the Sabres would've recalled him again. Brennan's hurt, so the Sabres summoned Finley instead.

"We have to go to the next-best option," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "I think (the Rochester staff) felt Joe had been playing well. You got to trust in what they say. I think the obvious person would've been T.J."

But Finley deserves this break, right?

"I'm not going to say I did or I didn't," Finley said. "What's gone on in the past is definitely behind me."

Despite being the second option, Ruff said Finley's recall was warranted.

"He's played very well," Ruff said. "We've got another man that's 6-foot-8 that can skate almost as well as Tyler Myers can. He's defended really well down there. You look at that and if he can continue to progress and stay hungry, you don't find those type of players. You don't find them in the draft anymore. It takes a long time to develop them."



Finley will become the 30th player to dress for the Sabres this season. He might play with Brayden McNabb tonight, an all-rookie tandem.

“Obviously, we’re putting them in against a hornet’s nest, a team that’s really gone well. Not an easy situation to go into,” Ruff said about the neophytes. “But I’m pretty sure he’s welcoming it.”

Sabres fans are certainly welcoming Finley, the 27th overall pick by Washington in 2005.

With his draft status and size, he’s one of the most interesting youngsters in recent memory, having played only 69 pro games. Eighteen of his 26 AHL appearances have come this season.

Shortly after his recall early Wednesday night, Finley became the top trending name on Twitter in the entire United States.

“If the fans got me the No. 1 trending topic, that’s all positive stuff,” Finley said. “I’m all for it.”

Finley’s arduous road to the NHL has been dotted with some odd incidents and injuries, all of which he believes have made him more mature.

In 2007, while at the University of North Dakota, Finley slashed the leg of the University of Wisconsin’s mascot, Bucky Badger. In 2009, shortly after turning pro, he was arrested and charged with disorderly conduct for throwing a lawnmower and kitchen table in the middle of the street. He was also charged with giving false information to officers afterward.

Years later, Finley sees no humor in the incidents.

“It’s not funny,” he said.

Severe hand and knee injuries stymied his development once he joined the Capitals’ organization.

During the offseason, Finley picked the Sabres, who had eight NHL defenseman and several legitimate prospects in Rochester. Why?

“(General manager) Darcy (Regier) wanted to give me an opportunity and take a look at (me),” Finley said. “An opportunity’s worth its weight in gold as far as I’m concerned because when you look at it, they genuinely did give me an opportunity. Just being afforded that has been tremendous. I can’t complain.

“Maybe I’m not sitting in this position today and I’m here three months down the road or a year or two years, I’m still very grateful for that opportunity.”

Ruff has likened Finley’s tryout to test-driving a used car.

“He was able to skate and make plays,” Ruff said. “For a big man, that’s always a challenge. He

skates very well. He's able to handle the puck. His first pass has been good. I think when you have that size and that reach you have an automatic advantage over a lot of players."

Finley seized his opportunity in Rochester, forming a strong duo with NHL veteran Shaone Morrison, someone he knew from Washington. So far, Finley has one goal, two points a plus-10 rating and 57 penalty minutes with the Americans.

"I've really just taken it upon myself to focus on the things I can control," Finley said. "I'm trying to play a real simple, solid brand of hockey. I've been fortunate to do that so far. Things are moving in the right direction. But there's a long way to go to be here full time, that's for sure."

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The Sabres, down eight regulars, could get three – wingers Tyler Ennis (ankle sprain, 17 games) and Patrick Kaleta (groin) and goalie Ryan Miller (concussion, eight games) – back tonight.

All three practiced fully Thursday.

What about Miller, who still had to pass his baseline concussion test later Thursday?

"If we don't feel Friday looks good, then we'll make this decision Saturday," Ruff said about Miller playing.

The Sabres have returned goalie Drew MacIntyre to Rochester.

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Mike Grier, the popular former winger who enjoyed two successful stints with the Sabres, retired Thursday after 1,060 games over 14 NHL seasons. The 36-year-old hadn't played this year.

"Just good memories," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said about Grier. "Mike was one of the ultimate competitors, a big man that played the game hard, was great in the locker room, was well respected by his teammates, and I think that if there's anybody you'd like to be like as a young guy walking in the locker room, you'd want to follow in Mike's footsteps."

Grier, who entered the league with Edmonton in 1996, compiled 162 goals and 383 points. He quickly became known as a strong checker forward and penalty killer. He played 241 games with the Sabres, first from 2004-06, and then from 2009-11 after a three-year stint in San Jose.

"I was very fortunate to be able to play 14 seasons in the NHL with some great players," Grier said in a statement. "The memories and friendships that I have built during my time in the league will last a lifetime. I would like to thank my former teammates, family and fans for helping make my career so memorable for me. It was a great ride, and I am now excited and looking forward to my post-playing future."

## Sabres Give Finley Big Opportunity

Ben Hayes

WGRZ

December 1, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Joe Finley is hard to miss. The Sabres defensive prospect stands 6-foot-8 and weighs in at 260 pounds.

The big defenseman earned a tryout with the Sabres this summer and played well enough to earn an AHL contract with Rochester.

On Monday, the Sabres signed Finley to a multi-year NHL contract.

Just three days later we was called-up to Buffalo to fill in for the injured Jordan Leopold.

"Obviously excited, been waiting for the moment for a long time," Finley told reporters after his first skate with the Sabres on Thursday.

"You know it's deserved, he's played very well. You can imagine, you got another man that's 6-foot-8, that can skate almost as well as Tyler Myers," said Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff. "If he can continue to progress and stay hungry, you don't find those type of players."

The 24-year-old Finley was a first round draft pick by the Washington Capitals back in 2005, but a serious hand injury suffered in junior hockey limited his experience.

"I really just took it upon myself to focus on the things I can control and that's trying to [play](#) a real simple, solid brand of hockey," said Finley. "Things are moving in the right direction but there is a long way to go to be here full time."

In 18 [games](#) this season with Rochester Finley has one goal, one assist and leads the team with 57 penalty minutes.

Ruff expects to pair Finley with Brayden McNabb, the Sabres other defensive prospect. McNabb has played in the Sabres last two games since getting called up from Rochester.

Defenseman T.J. Brennan who played in three games with the Sabres was hurt down in Rochester this week, opening the door for Finley to get called up to Buffalo.

Sabres forward Tyler Ennis is expected to be back in the lineup for Friday's nights game against Detroit. Ennis has been out since October 22nd with a high ankle sprain, but says he's ready to play. "Feel right where I need to feel so I can hit my edges pretty good, use my [speed](#), I feel like I'm fast right now and I'm happy with it."

Lindy Ruff said goalie Ryan Miller was going to undergo more tests for his concussion on Thursday. Miller has practiced for the past two days and could play one of the two games this weekend. The Sabres have sent goalie Drew MacIntyre back to Rochester.

## **Rochester Amerks' roster continues to shift**

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

December 2, 2011

As of Thursday, the Rochester Americans still had not petitioned the American [Hockey](#) League for an amendment to the standings.

No one could blame them if they do, though.

After all, shouldn't the Amerks get credit for at least one of those two points earned by the parent Buffalo Sabres in Saturday's 5-1 victory over the [Washington Capitals](#)?

The Sabres lineup included right wingers Corey Tropp and Zack Kassian, center Paul Szczechura, and defensemen T.J. Brennan and Brayden McNabb. Even the backup goalie, Drew MacIntyre, was up from the Amerks.

A never-ending string of injuries to players in Buffalo prompted emergency recalls, and provided a little unexpected toll money for the New York state Thruway Authority.

"In talking to Buffalo (people in the hockey department), this is probably the worst they've seen it since they've been there," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said.

That's 14 seasons of history, since general manager Darcy Regier's tenure goes back to the summer of 1997 (the 2004-05 season was lost to the [NHL](#) lockout).

"It's obviously a challenge," Rolston said. "They're fighting for points at that level and for us, it's challenging sometimes to put a lineup together. At times it can be pretty hairy."

On Saturday the Amerks played one man short, using 17 skaters instead of 18. They still defeated the Hamilton Bulldogs 5-3, thanks in large part to Derek Whitmore's four goals. The night before, in a 4-2 victory over Albany, the Amerks added two players from the ECHL that day: Winger Riley Boychuk was brought back up from Gwinnett and Evan Rankin was signed to a tryout contract out of Toledo. Then on Saturday they recalled defenseman Corey Fienhage from Gwinnett.

"We're just really happy our guys are going up there (to Buffalo) and being successful," Rolston said. "We've got some talented young players down here."

Tonight's 7:35 game at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial will be a matchup of that youth vs. the much more experienced Houston Aeros.

Calder Cup finalists a year ago, the Aeros have five players who are at least 28 and three that are at least 30 (including former Amerk Jeff Taffe).

Some normalcy has returned to the Amerks, though. Tropp, Szczechura, Brennan and MacIntyre have been returned by the Sabres. However, defenseman Joe Finley was recalled Wednesday, two days after signing an NHL contract.

But defenseman Dennis Persson (ankle sprain, is practicing without contact), left winger Michael Ryan (upper body, not even skating again) and center Travis Turnbull (concussion, not skating again) remain out with injuries.

## **RED WINGS NOTEBOOK: Buffalo Wings on the menu**

Chuck Pleiness

The Macomb Daily

December 2, 2011

**DETROIT** – The last time Drew and Ryan Miller were supposed to square off on the ice, Drew was a healthy scratch.

This time it looks like Ryan won't be able to go tonight in Buffalo after the Sabres' goalie suffered a concussion a few weeks back on an open-ice hit by Boston's Milan Lucic.

"I know he's been skating, but I don't know any timeline on his return," Drew said.

The brothers have met three times on the ice in the NHL with Drew winning two of the meetings. Two of those came when Drew was playing for Anaheim.

"I really haven't gotten any good scoring chances on him," Drew said. "It's great for both of us being brothers and as close as we are. There's not a lot of that happening in the NHL. It's fun to be a part of that. And it's always fun for our parents and family and friends come and watch."

Drew has played his way into being a constant fixture in the Wings' lineup this season after spending all of last year going in-and-out of the game-day roster.

"Every time I'm a healthy scratch I'm not too happy, but especially in that game," Drew said. "I wanted to play against him especially with the whole family there. It was tough but it's one of those things where it is what it is. I just hope we have a few more games against each other in our careers."

"It's not an easy thing to be a part of and I worked hard over the summer to put myself in a position where I wouldn't work my way out of that," Drew said. "That's something I believe that I can continue to grow as a player and be someone they can count on to be a regular night guy."

He has been a healthy scratch just twice this season.

"I try to be consistent and bring something to the team that I feel I can contribute and help the team every night," Drew said. "They rely on (the fourth line) for energy, be responsible and be one of the guys they can rely on to kill penalties. That's the role we play."

"If we can keep our big guys like Z and Pav rested and not have to worry about the penalty kill as much, we're doing our jobs," Drew added. "It gives them more opportunity to play 5-on-5 and on the power play. It takes a little bit of the burden off them to kill off the penalties for them."

Drew didn't spend any time searching for another team to play for this offseason, signing a two-year deal worth \$837,500 a season just as the free agency period began.

"I could have left and gone to another team and maybe had more of a chance to play and not

have to worry about a rotation, but I wanted to stay in Detroit,” Drew said. “I think it's a good fit for me with the system and the guys in the locker room.

“We always have a chance to win the Cup and that's what it's all about,” Drew continued. “You want to push yourself to get better every day and if I'm in a competition to play that's just going to make me a better player.”

Drew took some ribbing from his brother earlier this year when he collided with Minnesota goalie Josh Harding behind the Wild net.

Ryan called Drew and told him he thought his younger brother had more respect for goalies.

It was also a play that may have gotten Drew extended time as a healthy scratch last season.

“I wasn't worried about that,” Drew said. “It was a bad penalty to take. You don't want to take a penalty when you're on the penalty kill especially when you're in the offensive zone.”

### **Winter Classic coming to Detroit?**

The annual Winter Classic could be coming to Detroit next season of the season after according to a source within the organization.

“It's a short list and we're on it,” the person said. “We'll have the game in the not too distant future.”

Possible venues to host would be Comerica Park or Michigan Stadium, which hosted the “Big Chill at the Big House” in 2010 that had an announced crowd of nearly 114,000.

The New York Rangers are also on the short list to host a Winter Classic. The Rangers play in this year's event against the Flyers at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia.

The Wings played in the 2009 Winter Classic at Wrigley Field, beating Chicago, 6-4.

### **Conner called up from Grand Rapids**

The Grand Rapids Griffins' leading point getting is going to get a chance with the big club.

After Wednesday's 4-2 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Wings recalled forward Chris Conner.

Conner, who will join Detroit on its three-game road trip to Buffalo, Colorado and St. Louis, leads the Griffins with 23 points (seven goals, 16 assists) in 20 games.

In 139 NHL games, Conner, 27, has 16 goals and 24 assists with Dallas and Pittsburgh. The Wings placed Patrick Eaves (broken jaw) on short-term injured reserve. He's expected to be out six-to-eight weeks.

## Red Wings' Valtteri Filppula thriving next to Henrik Zetterberg

Helene St. James

Detroit Free Press

December 2, 2011

Niklas Kronwall called it just another game from Valtteri Filppula. Doesn't sound like high praise, but it is.

A strong performance from Filppula helped the Red Wings extend their winning streak to six entering Buffalo tonight, starting a three-game trip in a month packed with getaways.

Filppula earned his 13th assist in Wednesday's 4-2 win over Tampa Bay when he swung out the puck from behind the net to set up the second goal. He has six points in his past four games, including four goals, and 20 points in 23 games.

"I think Fil is really coming into his own," coach Mike Babcock said. "This last while, he's been, if not our best, right up there with our best. He's [playing](#) with enormous confidence. You've got to give him credit. I don't know if it's just he's come of age or playing the wing with Z, but they're playing well."

Filppula has played wing on a line with Henrik Zetterberg most of the season, freeing Filppula from some of the [hard work](#) down low that centers are responsible for in Detroit's system.

"Z plays great at both ends and does most of the defense off the line, so that way it gives a little more opportunity on the offensive side," Filppula said. "Now it seems like pucks are going in, and that's good as long as it lasts. But I am trying to play and work the same way every game. I'm glad I can produce a little bit more."

At 27, Filppula is becoming the player the Wings long have thought him capable of being. He always has been very [reliable](#) defensively, but this season he's finally on pace to break 40 points; he's headed for 70 at the moment.

"He's not just showing up here and there, he's playing great for 60 minutes every game," Kronwall said. "It's nice. He's definitely taken a step in the right direction. He's going to have a huge year."

**READY FOR ANOTHER CLASSIC:** The Wings remain interested in hosting a Winter Classic outdoor game, something they've pursued since playing in the 2009 edition at Wrigley Field in Chicago.

"We've put our name in the hat," general manager **Ken Holland** said. "Now we wait."

The Wings would like to hold the event at Comerica Park but also would consider Michigan Stadium.



**NOTEBOOK:** The Wings called up **Chris Conner** (Michigan Tech) to have him available for the three-game trip that begins tonight. **Patrick Eaves** (broken jaw) was put on seven-day IR, but plans also were to ship **Fabian Brunnstrom** back to Grand Rapids, pending his wife giving birth. Conner, 27, a Westland native, leads the Griffins with 23 points in 20 games. He'll give the Wings 13 forwards.

## **Wings don't want status quo with realignment**

The Windsor Star

December 1, 2011

The Detroit Red Wings are prepared to accept a number of different scenarios when the NHL's Board of Governors meet Monday to debate realigning the league, but they're not prepared to settle for the status quo.

As one of two eastern time zone teams playing in the Western Conference (Columbus is the other team), the Wings either want to move to the east or play eastern clubs more frequently by reducing the number of trips out west.

"There's not just one thing the Detroit Red Wings want," said Detroit general manager Ken Holland, who will attend the meetings in California.

"We feel if we go out there with one thing and we don't get the one thing, we could be left on the outside looking in.

"We're going there open-minded with two or three different scenarios that may satisfy us.

"Anything I've been suggesting is better for the Detroit Red Wings and their fans than what we have today. We want something better.

"We're not OK with the status quo."

Among the acceptable solutions to the Wings is a straight move to the Eastern Conference.

They would stay in the current setup, but change the schedule matrix to give the Wings fewer western swings and more games against the east or adopting a proposed major realignment based on regional conferences.

In every scenario, the Wings are looking to limit themselves to one visit to each of the California and western-based Canadian clubs.

"It's very, very simple from the Red Wings' standpoint," Detroit's senior vice-president and alternate governor Jimmy Devellano said. "What we would like to avoid is going far west twice. We understand we need to go there once.

"To go twice is terrible for TV ratings, extra travel expenses that many teams don't share in. That's really our only concern."

Holland said the challenge is a daunting one for the league.

To pass any realignment motion is going to require 20 of the 30 teams to vote in favour of it.

Many clubs in the east don't want any change.

The last time the NHL realigned was in 1998-99 when Toronto was shifted east as the NHL expanded and went from four to six divisions.

“We understand that it’s a 30-team league,” Holland said. “Everyone wants to feel a little bit good about what the final solution is going to be.”

“There are bigger issues in the west than there are in the east because of the travel and all the time zones. Different teams have different things that are important to them.”

The most radical proposed change on the agenda would see a shuffling of the teams into four regional conferences. Two of those would contain eight teams and two with seven.

The playoff format would also change to see the first two rounds played within each region. The champions of the four regions would then be re-seeded on a higher versus lower basis.

In the regional concept, the Wings would be placed in the Midwest likely with Dallas, St. Louis, Minnesota, Chicago, Nashville and Winnipeg.

“The four-division format is good because you play teams in your own time zone (or close to it) and the first two rounds are in the division.” Devellano said.

“But the problem is there would be two divisions of eight teams and two with seven. A lot of people have problems with that (because clubs in an eight-team division are competing with an extra team for a playoff spot).”

Holland said some eastern teams also don’t like the regional alignment based on what teams they’ve been put with. However, their position changes if the teams change in the region.

“I’ve seen the proposals on the agenda,” Holland said. “You either have three divisions in the west and three in the east or you have four regions. I don’t think we can have anything else.”

“You can debate who goes in what division or region. I don’t know if there is another solution.”

The complicating factor in all this is the status of the Phoenix Coyotes. The league has already stated unless a new owner steps forward to keep the Coyotes in Arizona, the NHL will shift the franchise somewhere else for next season.

From a players’ perspective, it’s a no-brainer on what the Wings would prefer.

“If we end up in the east, there’ll be a lot of people very happy,” forward Dan Cleary said. “There’s a lot of different factors rolled up into that.”

“A lot easier travel. You’ll see your family more. The fans get to see you more (on TV earlier in the evening).”

“The biggest thing for players will be the travel. Getting home at a decent hour.”

“We always lose the hour coming home except from Columbus. It’s hard that way.”

Defenceman Mike Commodore is one of the few Wings to have played in both conferences. He admits the players in the east have it much easier than their western peers.

“The travel on the east coast is easy,” said Commodore, who played for Carolina.

“You were always home early. The longest flight is Miami to Montreal, but that’s three hours and you rarely do that.

“You’re at home by midnight most times.”

Commodore said it isn’t so much the miles travelled as the time zone changes that are tough to take.

“The jets are nice, the flights are great and the food on the plane is awesome, but when you play three or four out west and come back here you get in at six in the morning,” Commodore said.

“I don’t know how these guys do it who have kids. Their wives must be unbelievable.

“I just go straight to bed and try to sleep, but if you have kids and actual responsibilities the next day . . . it’s tough. You’re dragging all day and the next day and trying to get ready for a game.

“I’d say Detroit and Columbus, being in the eastern time zone playing in the Western Conference, would have the toughest schedules.

“I can see why they want in the east.”

## **Red Wings' Jimmy Howard has never looked better as team hits the road**

Ansar Khan

MLive.com

December 1, 2011

DETROIT -- Detroit Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard has been consistently strong all season.

-- He has allowed two goals or less in 15 of his 20 starts.

-- He leads the NHL in wins (14-5-1).

-- He is second in goals-against average (1.87).

-- He is tied for second in shutouts (three).

-- He is 11th in save percentage (.929).

He has made 16 consecutive starts. That streak likely will continue Friday in Buffalo (7:30 p.m., Fox Sports Net Detroit), when the Red Wings try to stretch their winning streak to seven games (but it's not confirmed, since they didn't practice today).

"He's earned the right over time to be a good goaltender in the league," coach Mike Babcock said on Wednesday. "He's spent a lot of time in the minors, he's worked on his fitness, the mental side of his game seems to have really come.

"I think we're getting excellent goaltending right now, as good as we've had since I've been here, for sure."

The Red Wings face their biggest test of the season over the next 5-6 weeks. They play 10-of- 15 games on the road in December, and 14 of their next 19 games are away from home.