



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Wednesday, December 07, 2011

Sabres seeking answers to home woes

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 7, 2011

The creature comforts of home should make you more comfortable, not skittish. So how do you explain the Buffalo Sabres' baffling play this year at First Niagara Center?

The Sabres should be poised to pile up points in a five-game run of home contests that opens tonight against the Philadelphia Flyers. Instead, there's trepidation caused by a schedule of visits that includes Florida (Friday), the New York Rangers (Saturday), Ottawa (Tuesday) and Toronto (Dec. 16).

Technically, the Sabres enter tonight's game with a 6-8-1 record at home but they were the "home" team for their season-opening win over Anaheim in Finland. So they are actually just 5-8-1 downtown and if that seems sub-par to you, it sure is. Consider:

* With 11 points on their home rink, the Sabres entered Tuesday tied with New Jersey, Columbus, Anaheim and Nashville for the NHL's fewest. The only teams with more than Buffalo's eight regulation losses at home were Colorado, Anaheim and Columbus (nine).

* It's the second year in a row the Sabres have started 5-8-1. Their 11 points in the first 14 home games are just one off the franchise low at that mark in the schedule of 10 set in 1971-72 and 1986-87 (4-8-2 both years).

"We all know we have to be better at home," goaltender Ryan Miller said this week. "It's critical to a season."

"There's no explanation for it," added injured defenseman Jordan Leopold. "You look at it and say the usual things like we have to work harder, work smarter, put the puck on the net but it doesn't happen every night. It's kind of an Achilles heel right now and we need to change it."

The Sabres went through similar trouble last year, not winning a home game until Nov. 13 and opening with a 0-6-1 record downtown. But they turned that around in the second half to finish 21-16-4, a burst that fueled their playoff run.

They need to do that again. Coach Lindy Ruff worked the Sabres hard during practice Tuesday in the Northtown Center of Amherst and was plenty loud in making his points.

The points of emphasis were quick puck movement, quick passes, more shots and winning battles for the puck. The Sabres have been deficient in all of those areas in many recent games.

"It's trying to get inside," Ruff said. "Not standing on the perimeter but getting inside for some of those opportunities from 10 feet we haven't been getting."

"I don't think I can pinpoint [the home record] on just one thing. ... There's such a fine line. When we play a complete game from the goaltender out, we'll win at home."

Indeed, things really need to start with Miller. He gave up three goals in the first seven minutes of the Flyers' visit here on Nov. 7, a recent Sabres trend.

Miller, in fact, is one of Buffalo's biggest offenders on home ice with a 2-4 record, 3.90 goals-against average and .879 save percentage. On the road, he's 4-2, 1.77 and .944.

Miller acknowledged key early saves would help his team but so would offense. Thanks largely to big turnovers, the Sabres have given up the first goal in five of the last six games at home and gone 1-4-1 in them.

"Teams are collapsing harder and when they get a lead, they clog the neutral zone more," said winger Drew Stafford. "It's hard to come back. We need to be better right off the bat. We have to focus our energy and attention on how we start the game."

"I think we're just a little uptight right now," Miller said. "It's hard to say what leads into that whole mindset ... We need to clear the air, clear our heads and go out and play."

Miller has been one target of fans ire but he's hardly been alone. At least when the paying customers are making much noise. Visiting writers and broadcasters have openly commented this season on how quiet the building has become.

There are some acoustical issues, like the high domed roof, that will always keep the Sabres' home a tad quieter than other rinks. But it should be noted there was no shortage of noise during the Sabres' four Eastern Conference finals runs.

And on top of the silence has been the crowd's mood, which has been openly surly at times.

"Obviously you hear the fans," said captain Jason Pominville. "I don't know if they realize it, but sometimes they have a huge impact on the way we feel, the way we work and compete. We feed off the energy they bring to us."

"We know we have one of the best fanbases in the league," added Stafford. "They support us every game and we want to put on a good performance for them. At the same time, we need them to have our backs."

"When we're not doing well on the power play or getting outshot bad, they'll start booing us and we deserve some of that. At the same time, it's nice to have them cheering."

Tootoo gets 2 game suspension for running Miller

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 7, 2011

The NHL didn't send a major message to Nashville forward Jordin Tootoo for his bullrush through Ryan Miller's crease Saturday night.

Tootoo got a two-game suspension Tuesday from the league and you can imagine that's not what Sabres coach Lindy Ruff had in mind. Ruff had already spoken to the media following practice at the Northtown Center of Amherst before the decision was announced.

Ruff showed disgust after practice Monday when he learned Tootoo was having a phone hearing with the league, which meant a maximum five-game ban.

The Sabres undoubtedly wanted more for Tootoo, who was given a major penalty for charging and a game misconduct for his actions in the second period. Tootoo drilled Miller in the goalie's first game back after the infamous Milan Lucic play Nov. 12 in Boston that earned only a minor penalty and no suspension.

Ruff called Tootoo's action a "joke" several times after the game Saturday and reiterated his stance that a message needed to be sent to all players about goaltender safety following practice Monday.

In his league-released video explanation of the suspension, NHL Vice President for Player Safety Brendan Shanahan said Tootoo was pushed only slightly by Sabres defenseman Christian Ehrhoff, and that didn't absolve him from the resulting collision with Miller.

"The onus therefore is on Tootoo to avoid, or at the very least, minimize his contact with the goaltender," Shanahan said. "While we believe that Tootoo's motivation on this play was to attempt to score and not to hit Miller, the fact remains that it is the attacking player's responsibility to make a better effort not to crash directly into the opposing goaltender."

Tootoo said he went airborne trying to avoid a collision. Shanahan said that point could be argued but added of Tootoo's leap, "it actually had the opposite effect and caused the collision to involve direct contact with Miller's head."

Shanahan said his decision rested in part by the fact Miller was not injured and Tootoo has not been suspended the last four years. Tootoo will forfeit \$13,513.52 to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund. He missed Tuesday's game against Phoenix and will also sit Thursday at Columbus.

He can return Saturday against Anaheim.

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Ruff said he had not digested the NHL's new alignment for the 2012-13 season and had no comment on it. The Sabres will be in a conference with current Northeast Division foes Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa and Boston as well as newcomers Tampa Bay and Florida.

"That will be pretty interesting," said Jason Pominville. "It will be different. I'm excited to see what the schedule will be."

Told it means three trips a year to Tampa Bay and Florida instead of two, Pominville smiled and said, "No problem at all."

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No surprises in the Sabres' injury report as Tyler Myers, Mike Weber, Brad Boyes, Patrick Kaleta, Paul Gaustad and Jordan Leopold will all sit out tonight's game. Jochen Hecht, who missed practice Monday, will play. Cody McCormick passed his neuropsych test and could play. He has missed the last nine games with apparent concussion symptoms.

Leopold continues to practice but 6-foot-8 Joe Finley returned from Rochester and should play tonight.

Flyers forward James Van Riemsdyk, one of the stars of the teams' playoff series last spring, has missed the last four games but should return tonight.

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The Sabres will be hosting a winter clothing drive at four December home games, beginning Friday against Florida. New or gently used hats, gloves, coats, boots, scarves and sweaters will be collected in the arena pavilion and given to the City Mission at that game as well as Saturday's visit by the New York Rangers, next Tuesday's game against Ottawa and the Dec. 16 visit by Toronto.

Mission officials will be on hand to accept clothing and cash donations.

Barnaby: Good guy, wrong path

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

December 7, 2011

Simple solutions include booting him out of the country or tossing him in the clink. An argument could be made for either or both in regards to Matthew Barnaby, the former Sabres winger who spent 14 seasons living the fantasy but now appears intent on throwing away a charmed life.

By now, you know Barnaby was charged with driving while intoxicated after driving his Porsche sport utility vehicle in the wee hours along Transit Road on three wheels with sparks flying off the fourth. Once known for his fearless style and work ethic, he brought new meaning to the term "tireless drive" during his night out on the town.

No, that was not a joke.

If anything, it's a sad truth about someone who had all that he wanted and more. He had been warned legally and professionally and was given second chances to get himself back in order. Friends pleaded with him to clean up his act and take advantage of programs that help people who, like him, appeared headed for trouble.

Barnaby still hadn't overcome problems from last year when he was arrested early Monday. ESPN, which retained him following a domestic dispute with his ex-wife and her boyfriend, quickly fired him. He could wind up being deported, separating him from his children, or thrown in jail.

Forget about Barnaby the hockey player and TV personality. Condemn him if you will, but my concern is for Barnaby the person. I consider him a friend. I'm worried about him. He's a good guy on a reckless path.

Recent studies revealed many players who died young suffered from brain damage related to concussions. Rangers tough Derek Boogaard was added to the list Tuesday. Barnaby had 295 fights in his career starting in juniors and suffered numerous concussions, including one that ultimately ended his career.

Doctors say telltale signs of brain trauma are erratic behavior, depression and substance abuse. You need not be a neurologist to see Barnaby suffered from various symptoms. He acknowledged as much himself last season.

He complained that he was short-tempered and didn't feel right for two years after he retired. He wondered if he had disconnections in his brain and worried about his long-term health. At the same time, last May, he refused to blame concussions for his own behavior.

"It's not the concussions that make me do anything," Barnaby said. "It skews your point of view or can give you a not-care attitude. ... I'm responsible for my actions. Concussions don't make

you do anything. You're always responsible for your own actions. Anyone who says they aren't is absolutely lying."

The latest incident cannot be trivialized or dismissed as a boneheaded mistake, not when it falls in line with a pattern of self-destruction that has become increasingly dangerous. He'll need a good lawyer, yes, but he would be better served getting professional counseling that can steer him off the road to ruin.

Several people around him have advised him to get the assistance he needs. The NHL players' association has a program that allows former and current players to receive treatment while maintaining their anonymity. Others would support him if he took the next step.

So far, Barnaby has become another cautionary tale that has become all too familiar in recent years with professional athletes, particularly ones who played contact sports and shared his pugnacious style. He has been fortunate in the sense that he's still alive. Nobody wants to see him injure himself or someone else or wind up dead.

If it sounds melodramatic under the circumstances, accept my apologies. It's better to be said now than when it's too late or, worse, not at all.

Sabres stand in way as Flyers go for sweep of trip

Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

December 6, 2011

FLYERS (15-7-3) at SABRES (14-11-1)

TV: VERSUS (HD), TSN2

Last 10: Philadelphia 7-3-0; Buffalo 4-5-1

Season series: This is the second of four meetings between the teams this season. On Nov. 2 in Buffalo, the Flyers scored three times in the first 6:23 of the game to chase Sabres goalie [Ryan Miller](#), then held on for a 3-2 victory.

Big Story: The Flyers try to sweep their three-game road trip, while the Sabres look to open a five-game homestand on the right foot.

Team Scope:

Flyers: While so much attention has been paid recently to the important veteran defenseman Philadelphia is missing, many are overlooking the one still in the lineup.

At age 36, [Kimmo Timonen](#) has played all 25 games, averages nearly 22 minutes a game of ice time, is tied for the team lead with 17 assists and leads the team's blueliners with a plus-8 rating.

"For me, he is quietly one of the best defensemen in the League," coach Peter Laviolette told the Philadelphia Inquirer. "Positionally, he plays against the top players in all situations, but yet he goes about his business and never gets a lot of fanfare."

Laviolette said what stands out the most about Timonen is his durability. Timonen has played 210 straight games, last sitting out March 1, 2009.

"I have told him he's like the mail," Laviolette said. "He shows up every day. It's in your box. You don't think about how it gets there."

Sabres: Some teams get stung by the injury bug. It seems like the Sabres have been enveloped by a swarming hive.

"You'd almost say that it becomes humorous, but it's something that obviously we don't take lightly," coach Lindy Ruff told reporters on Monday. "You go through some of the injuries, and some of them have been in really tough incidents for us."

The latest were upper-body injuries suffered by forwards [Paul Gaustad](#) and [Jochen Hecht](#) in Saturday's

game against Nashville. Gaustad was injured in the scrum that followed Predators forward Jordin Tootoo hitting Sabres goalie [Ryan Miller](#). Hecht was hurt on the last shift of Saturday's game, but Ruff said this latest injury has nothing to do with the concussion that Hecht suffered last season and which sidelined him until Nov. 23.

Defensemen [Mike Weber](#) and [Tyler Myers](#) and forward [Brad Boyes](#) are on injured reserve.

"We've had some incidents that really haven't happened to us before," Ruff said. "I think once we get by that and get healthy, we'll be OK."

Who's Hot: Flyers forward [Jaromir Jagr](#) has 2 goals and 4 points in his last two games. He has 654 career goals, two behind Brendan Shanahan for 11th all-time. ... Hecht had a three-game goal-scoring streak snapped Saturday against Nashville.

Injury Report: The Flyers expect to have forward [James van Riemsdyk](#) back in the lineup. He's missed the last four games with an upper-body injury. Defensemen [Chris Pronger](#) (knee), [Andreas Lilja](#) (ankle) and [Erik Gustafsson](#) (wrist) are out. Defenseman [Andrej Meszaros](#), who has missed the last two days of practice, is questionable with an upper-body injury. ... Besides Gaustad and Hecht, the Sabres will be without defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#), who will miss about a week with an upper-body injury. Forward [Nathan Gerbe](#), who suffered facial lacerations Saturday, is expected to play. Forward [Cody McCormick](#), out since Nov. 14 due to a concussion, also is expected to be cleared to play Wednesday.

Stat Pack: The Flyers are 9-2-1 when [Claude Giroux](#) scores a goal. They're 6-5-2 when he doesn't.

Puck Drop: One of the bigger reasons the Flyers have started December with a pair of victories has been their rejuvenated power play. After going 7-for-54 (12.9 percent) in 12 November games, they're 5-for-12 (41.7 percent) in two December games.

The Flyers missed Pronger and his skill from the point for most of the month due to an eye injury, they also were without Jagr for about two weeks. He returned in time to start December. The Flyers' hot power play is no coincidence.

"There's no question, he is one of the elite players to ever play the game offensively," Laviolette told CSNPhilly.com. "When you bring someone back into the mix 5-on-5 and the power-play mix, you're going to be able to reap the benefits of that. He thinks the game at a different level offensively. Putting him on your power play only makes it better."

Philadelphia (15-7-3) at Buffalo (14-11-1)

Nicolino DiBenedetto

STATS

December 6, 2011

The [Philadelphia Flyers](#) are the best road team in the NHL, and they're proving it during a road-heavy stretch.

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) are well aware of the Flyers' exploits at First Niagara Center.

The Flyers looks for a fifth victory in six games by continuing their road dominance of the Sabres on Wednesday night.

Philadelphia (15-7-3) leads the NHL with 19 points away from home, going 9-3-1, and maintained that impressive play in beating Phoenix 4-2 on Saturday to improve to 2-1-0 on its four-game trip.

The Flyers are in the midst of playing 11 of 14 on the road leading into the Winter Classic against the [New York Rangers](#) at Citizens Bank Park on Jan. 2.

Concluding this trip in Buffalo may keep the Flyers rolling.

They're 8-1-2 in their last 11 visits, which includes winning two of three in the playoffs last season en route to eliminating the Sabres in seven games in the first round.

Philadelphia won in Buffalo again Nov. 2, chasing [Ryan Miller](#) after scoring three times in the opening 6:23 of a 3-2 victory.

Buffalo is 1-4-1 in its last six at home, and the Flyers' red-hot power play may play a role in sustaining those woes for the Sabres (14-11-1). The unit is 5 for 12 in consecutive wins to match its production from the previous seven games.

"We worked a lot of hours on the power play last week and obviously it paid off and got us a couple wins," center [Claude Giroux](#) told the Flyers' official website. "When the power play gets a couple goals it brings momentum to the team."

Giroux has four goals in four games, giving him 15 on the season to rank among the league leaders. His scoring has been key to Philadelphia's success since he has 12 goals and 26 of his team-high 32 points in victories.

"He's an extraordinary player," coach Peter Laviolette said. "He really is. It shouldn't surprise anybody that he is where he is right now. I think the skill level that he has is one thing, but the determination in which he plays the game is really special."

Giroux has two goals and 15 assists in 19 meetings with Buffalo. He hasn't scored while assisting on seven goals in nine road matchups.

The Flyers may have [James van Riemsdyk](#) back from an upper-body injury that has sidelined him for four games. The left wing has scored in four consecutive games versus the Sabres, getting two points in last month's visit to First Niagara Center.

Buffalo is opening a five-game homestand after Saturday's 3-2 win at Nashville. Miller was superb in his return from a concussion, making 32 saves while the Sabres were outshot 34-14 - 17-4 in the third period.

"I'm happy to be back," said Miller, who missed nine games. "I'm happy to get a win. It has been a while since I have felt like I have put together a game I could pride myself in.

"It was important for me to go out there and play a solid game. I did the things I wanted to do."

Miller may be back in net looking to redeem himself after he had the second-shortest appearance of his career in the most recent meeting with the Flyers. He's 2-6-1 with a 3.15 goals-against average in his last nine home starts against Philadelphia.

Buffalo center [Luke Adam](#) has three goals and one assist in his past four games. His nine goals and 18 points rank him among the NHL's rookie scoring leaders, and he had a goal and an assist in the last matchup with the Flyers.

Sabres recall D Finley to fill in for Leopold

Associated Press

December 6, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—With defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) set to miss his third straight game with an upper body injury, the [Buffalo Sabres](#) have recalled [Joe Finley](#) from AHL Rochester.

Finley returns to Buffalo after being sent down earlier this week. He had no points in playing his first two NHL games last week. Finley has a goal and assist and a team-leading 57 penalty minutes in 18 games with Rochester this season.

The Sabres open a five-game homestand against Philadelphia on Wednesday.

Leopold has been out since being hurt in the first period of a 2-1 loss to the [New York Islanders](#) last week. The Sabres are also expected to be without forward [Paul Gaustad](#) (upper body), who was hurt in a 3-2 win at Nashville on Saturday.

Sabres owner Pegula buys NFL player agent firm

John Wawrow

Associated Press

December 6, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—Having spent hundreds of millions of dollars on hockey over the past year, [Buffalo Sabres](#) owner Terry Pegula has turned his attention—and deep pockets—to the NFL and the player’s side of the ball.

The Pennsylvania billionaire expanded his sports empire on Tuesday by acquiring the Atlanta-based France AllPro Athlete Management, a high-profile NFL player agent firm headed by Todd France.

“This was an easy decision for us,” Pegula said in a release issued by both the Sabres and the firm. “We did extensive research to find the perfect fit. All of my resources had nothing but praise for Todd. His reputation among the elite NFL executives was phenomenal.”

AllPro represents more than 50 NFL players, including Baltimore running back Ray Rice, Kansas City receiver Dwayne Bowe and [Buffalo Bills](#) rookie first-round draft pick, tackle Marcell Dareus.

It’s estimated the firm has negotiated more than \$1 billion in player contracts since 2005.

France will maintain his role as the agency’s president and CEO.

“It’s a huge honor to have been hand-picked by Terry, his wife Kim and his entire management team as the agent they wanted to partner with,” France said. “Terry gives us unlimited potential for growth and new opportunities for our existing and future clients.”

Pegula made his fortune in the natural gas industry, and is now cashing it in on his passion for sports.

Pegula has previously dabbled in NFL player agent firms. He’s backed the Charlotte, N.C.-based Ayrault Sports Agency headed by Brian Ayrault. As part of the purchase, Ayrault will join AllPro as a contract adviser and attorney.

Pegula enjoys being in the loop in learning about players. When Dareus’ name was mentioned during a casual meeting with The Associated Press in September, Pegula immediately pulled out his cell phone and texted an agent to learn more about the player.

A longtime Sabres season-ticket holder, Pegula purchased the NHL team in February. He then proceeded to buy the Sabres’ American Hockey League affiliate, the Rochester Americans, in June.

In September 2010, Pegula and his wife Kim made the largest private gift in Penn State history, donating \$88 million to Terry's alma mater to fund a new multipurpose arena and help upgrade the men's hockey program. The Nittany Lions will make the move to Division I hockey in the 2012-13 season.

Last week, the Pegulas donated \$12 million to Kim's alma mater, Houghton College, to help build a multiuse sports complex as the western New York college prepares to become a Division III program.

TOOTOO WILL SIT FOR PAIR AFTER HIT ON MILLER

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

December 6, 2011

The NHL has handed down their ruling, and Nashville's Jordin Tootoo has received a two-game slap on the wrist for running over Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller during the second period of Saturday's game in Nashville. Tootoo received a charging major and game misconduct on the play. This was Miller's first game back in goal after suffering a head/neck injury in Boston on November 12 during a collision with Milan Lucic.

Here's the video explanation of Tootoo's suspension from NHL disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan:

In explaining the suspension, Shanahan said "it is the attacking player's responsibility to make a better effort not to crash into the opposing goaltender ... the goaltender must feel protected in his crease." He agreed with the charging major and misconduct called on the play, but applied the supplemental discipline "because of the force of the collision and the lack of any significant interference steering Tootoo into the goaltender."

This is not the first time Tootoo has been suspended by the NHL. In March 2007, he received five games for a reckless punch to the face that left Stephane Robidas of the Dallas Stars laying unconscious and concussed on the ice. However in this case, Shanahan said the league took into account that Tootoo had not been assessed any supplemental discipline in the past four years.

Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff had already completed his media availability prior to the suspension being announced this afternoon. We'll have his reaction following Wednesday's morning skate at First Niagara Center. Ruff said yesterday he hoped to see a "strong message" from the league in regards to the suspension. "It's just time; I hope they do the right thing with it," he said.

Wednesday's game against Philadelphia is the start of five consecutive games at home for the Sabres. They have won just once in their past six on home ice, and have compiled a 6-8-1 record at First Niagara Center so far this season.

Captain Jason Pominville says part of the team's success will be derived from their tenacity in the one-on-one battles during a game, something that Ruff focused heavily on during today's practice at the Northtown Center in Amherst.

"It's kind of like what Detroit did to us when they came into our barn," Pominville explained. "They were hard on pucks, and turned their backs and made some good plays. That's kind of what we want to do. We want to be better at home in this little stretch that we have here."

Cody McCormick passed his baseline test, and could be available for tomorrow's game ... Joe Finley has been recalled from Rochester and will take the place of Jordan Leopold (upper body) in the lineup.

Jochen Hecht was back on the ice today centering a line with Pominville and Thomas Vanek. The other lines today were: Drew Stafford-Derek Roy-Tyler Ennis; Ville Leino-Luke Adam-Zack Kassian. The fourth line featured Matt Ellis between Nathan Gerbe and a combination of McCormick and Corey Tropp.

The defense pairings were: Christian Ehrhoff-Marc-Andre Gagnani; Robyn Regehr-Andrej Sekera; Brayden McNabb-Finley. Leopold and Mike Weber participated in practice in non-contact roles.

Sabres still getting comfortable at home

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 7, 2011

BUFFALO — Just think, well before Christmas, the Sabres' home woes could already be an afterthought. Tonight's game against the Philadelphia Flyers kicks off a five-game homestand. The schedule can sometimes be as helpful as it's unforgiving.

The Sabres have a splendid chance over the next 10 days to begin forging an identity at the First Niagara Center, where they're a brutal 5-8-1. So far, they've mostly been a mess before their frustrated fans, showcasing some wildly erratic play and getting booed.

They blew leads in their first three losses. Recently, they've been imploding early in games, often falling behind two or three goals. It happened again Friday, when they trailed Detroit 3-0 just 15 minutes into their 4-1 loss. Even when they finish strongly, the slow starts doom them.

"I don't think it has been the same pattern," coach Lindy Ruff said about the home struggles Tuesday after the Sabres practiced at the Northtown Center in Amherst. "I think we've had a little bit of where we got leads, came out well, played well. I think we've had a little bit of where our goaltending hasn't been good at home. It's been great on the road. ...

"I wouldn't pinpoint it on just one thing. ... There's such a fine line. I think when we play a complete game from the goaltender out, we'll win at home."

The Sabres have played complete road games, however, earning their shiny 8-3 record.

To illustrate how differently they've perform away, consider: Sabres goalie Ryan Miller is 4-2 with a 1.77 goals-against average and .944 save percentage on the road. At home, though, his numbers – 2-4, 3.90, .879 – are wretched. Overall, the Sabres are allowing only 2.3 goals a game on the road and 2.9 at home. The figures include two season-opening European games.

The Sabres also endured a dreadful home start last season, dropping their first seven contests (0-5-2) before finally winning Nov. 13. But they finished a terrific 21-11-2.

Right now, the Sabres are clearly tight, even downright uncomfortable, at the FNC.

"We're just a little uptight right now," Miller said. "It's hard to say what leads into that whole mindset where if it's uptight, or we get uptight because we get down, or if we get down because we start trying to do too much. You start thinking too much.

"I guess we needed to clear the air a little bit, clear our heads and just go out and play hockey. The fans just want to see an honest effort and they want to see us play hard."

It probably doesn't help when the fans start getting on them, either.

"I don't know if sometimes they realize, but they have an impact on the way we feel and the way we work and the way we compete," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "We feed off the energy they bring us. Sometimes it's tough to hear. But when they're going well and they're cheering, we got some of the best fans.

"At the same time, we know we can be better at home, and we want to be better for them and we expect them to be as loud as possible to support us in the way we know they're capable of."

During the Sabres' session Tuesday, Ruff forced his players to battle, something they've done well on the road. At one point he even yelled, "More battle! We'll stay here until 2 if we have to!"

The clock hadn't even hit 1 p.m. yet.

A ferocious, simpler style could buoy the Sabres. They've tried to put on a show at home for years, getting too fancy.

"Sometimes there's a little bit longer pass. Sometimes there's more of a delay looking for a nice pass," Miller said. "I think maybe early in the game we got to just establish a little bit of a boring kind of chess match, and then later in the game we can make those open plays as we've earned the ice.

"It's something we've talked about and something that we hope we can turn the tide. We all know we have to be better at home. It's critical to our season."

Defenseman Robyn Regehr said the Sabres should copy Detroit's early style.

"I think it was the first shift, the guy won the draw, had the puck and just threw it in and got their forecheck going. Away they went," Regehr said. "That kind of stuff, it gets everyone going into the game, it gets you skating, gets you attacking and puts the other team on their heels a little bit."

Pominville added: "It starts with being north-south and getting pucks deep and getting their defenseman to turn around and go get it. It's kind of cliché, but it's simple hockey. You don't want to do too much at home, and sometimes we get away from it, try to do a little bit too much."

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Sabres winger Cody McCormick (possible concussion, nine games) has been cleared to play and could dress tonight. Meanwhile, center Jochen Hecht (undisclosed) practiced Tuesday.

Defenseman Jordan Leopold (upper body, two games) will sit again tonight, so the Sabres have recalled Joe Finley again from Rochester. The rookie played twice last week.

Center Paul Gaustad (upper body) will miss his first game.

Sabres' McCormick Returns to Practice

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

December 6, 2011

Amherst, NY -- It was a full rink at the Northtowns Center in Amherst as the Buffalo Sabres get ready for their next battle Wednesday night against Philadelphia.

The group on the ice included forward Cody McCormick, who passed his concussion-test and practiced for the first time Tuesday. He rotated in to a line that consisted of Nathan Gerbe, Matt Ellis and Corey Tropp. Head coach Lindy Ruff wouldn't reveal if McCormick would be in the lineup against the Flyers.

The other three forward lines consisted of Jochen Hecht centering Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek, Derek Roy in between Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford, and Luke Adam centering Zack Kassian and Ville Leino.

Buffalo had a total of eight defensemen on the ice Wednesday, including the recently called up Joe Finley. He was paired with rookie Brayden McNabb during the session. The other two pairs saw Robyn Regehr with Andrej Sekera and Christian Ehrhoff matched up with Marc-Andre Gagnani.

Injured defensemen Jordan Leopold and Mike Weber both skated with the team in their rehab process.

The Sabres take on the Flyers at First Niagara Center Wednesday night at 7.

Barry Trotz insists Jordin Tootoo wasn't trying to hurt Sabres goalie

Josh Cooper and Mike Organ

The Tennessean

December 7, 2011

After Nashville's 3-2 loss to the Phoenix Coyotes on Tuesday, Nashville Coach Barry Trotz asserted that he did not believe Jordin Tootoo deserved a two-game suspension.

Earlier in the day, Tootoo received the suspension without pay from the NHL for running into Buffalo goaltender Ryan Miller in a [game](#) last Saturday.

"My biggest disappointment in the whole thing is I really thought that a guy like Jordin Tootoo was trying to do the right thing, and not run into Miller," Trotz said. "What he was trying to do was make a hockey [play](#) and not run into Miller."

Tootoo, who said he tried to avoid the collision, received a 5-minute misconduct penalty for charging and then faced a disciplinary hearing Monday by phone. with NHL Senior Vice President of Player [Safety](#) Brendan Shanahan.

Tootoo missed Tuesday's game against Phoenix at Bridgestone Arena and will miss Thursday's game at Columbus.

The suspension will cost Tootoo \$13,513.52 in salary. He was unaware of his suspension during Tuesday's morning skate.

"It's two [games](#) we're going to play without him, and when he gets back he'll be a big part of our team," Trotz said.

Kids skate with Buffalo Sabres

Kevin Rhoney

WIVB

December 6, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - It was a dream skate for some young hockey players at the First Niagara Center, Monday night.

Sabres Luke Adam, Jhonas Enroth, Nathan Gerbe, and Sabretooth took part in the annual Tim Hortons Timbits Skate, talking, posing and skating with the kids.

The Sabres take on the Philadelphia Flyers Wednesday night at the First Niagara Center.

Flyers not looking past Sabres to Pens

Tim Panaccio

CSNPhilly.com

December 6, 2011

Seven points.

That's all that separates the No. 1 seed in the Eastern Conference – the Pittsburgh Penguins – from the No. 8 seed, the Ottawa Senators.

The fifth-seeded Flyers, with 33 points, are three behind Pittsburgh and just four ahead of Wednesday's opponent, the seventh-seeded Buffalo Sabres.

You don't take any team lightly right now. The thing of it is, the Flyers have won four of their last five games and instead of gaining ground and getting some separation between themselves and others, they have actually lost ground.

They've fallen to fifth from fourth.

Now, with Sidney Crosby and the Penguins coming to town on Thursday, you have to wonder if there is any chance the Flyers overlook the Sabres Wednesday night in Buffalo.

"No," said Flyers center Max Talbot, an ex-Penguin.

"This team has a history with Buffalo, as well, so I don't think we'll look past them. Last year, watching the playoffs they battled pretty hard against Buffalo. Buffalo is always an interesting team.

"We haven't talked about [overlooking them] because we know it's a big game on Wednesday. Every game is big right now. You look at the standings and it's so tight. Just look at the last two games.

"It's a big game and we need to play well and stay on the ball. Then I will think about Thursday."

Two wins out west against Anaheim and Phoenix there was nothing gained in the standings.

"Exactly," Talbot replied.

Any frustration knowing you can't get separation?

"There's no frustration," Talbot said. "We won some games and [got] some points. No

frustration unless we lost games and lost points.”

All that said ... Talbot admitted he had the Penguins date circled on his calendar.

“I’m obviously excited,” he said. “I’ve been looking at this game since the summer. But at the same time, we’re in it right now and I’m focusing on Wednesday.

“[The Penguins] are first in the conference. You look at how they’re playing, but at the same time, you know they are a good team and you are playing them soon.”

Talbot says he hasn’t gotten to the point where he hates Pittsburgh. He hasn’t been in a Flyer uniform against them, for one. A good hatred, like a good rivalry, takes time.

“It’s something that I’m going to battle as hard as I can because I am a proud guy,” he said. “I want to win and beat them. Every game with them is going to be really intense.”

Flyers have a special player in Claude Giroux

Sam Carchidi

Philadelphia Inquirer

December 7, 2011

"This year, he's really spread his wings."

— *Flyers coach Peter Laviolette, on Claude Giroux*

Flyers center Claude Giroux has spread his wings, all right. Spread them from Anaheim to South Florida and all stops in between.

One year after a breakout season in which he earned his first all-star spot, the 23-year-old Giroux is a legitimate MVP candidate. The award has been won by just two Flyers - Bobby Clarke (three times) and Eric Lindros in 1994-95.

And with the Pittsburgh Penguins coming into the Wells Fargo Center on Thursday night, it's not a stretch to wonder if the game will match two of the NHL's best players: the incomparable Sidney Crosby and the fast-rising Giroux.

Flyers forward Max Talbot has played with Crosby, the 2006-07 winner of the Hart Trophy as the league's MVP, and Giroux. Is it too early put Giroux at Crosby's level?

"No, he's been the best in the league since the beginning of the year," Talbot said the other day.

Like Crosby, who is generally regarded as being to the NHL what George Clooney is to the movie industry, Giroux excels at both ends of the ice.

"The way they battle and play with passion is something I can see in their eyes," Talbot said. "They definitely have the [same] intensity. Defensively, they *battle*."

"There are similarities" between Crosby and Giroux, said former Flyer Bill Barber, a Hall of Famer who is now a scouting consultant with the club. "Sid is a phenomenal player. I know for a fact that he works harder than all of the other players in practice - and he has a [Stanley Cup] ring to prove it."

Barber said Crosby, 24, and Giroux "both have great vision" and can see things on the ice that most players can't. "And you can see how much they both just enjoy playing the game."

Barber, a left winger who scored 420 goals in his career and later coached the Flyers for 11/2 seasons, said Giroux is uncanny with the accuracy of his shot and the way he sets up a teammate.

"He sees openings that other players don't," he said. "If there's any winger that doesn't want to play with Claude, there's something wrong with him."

On pace for 105 points

Heading into Tuesday, Giroux had 15 goals and 17 assists in 25 games and was tied for second in the NHL with 32 points. He is on pace for 49 goals and 105 points. That's a lot of "*Giroux*"; chants at the Wells Fargo Center.

"He's a very rare player in that he scores a lot of goals as a centerman," Barber said. "Usually, the scorers are on the wings, and the centers feed them. But he's a very unique player. Give the Flyers credit for seeing that and drafting him when they did."

Giroux's projected scoring totals would be eye-popping when you consider that in the Flyers' history, just five players have reached 100 points in a season: Bobby Clarke (three times), Rick MacLeish, Barber, Mark Recchi (twice), and Eric Lindros. Six Flyers have reached 50 goals: MacLeish, Reggie Leach (twice), Barber, Tim Kerr (four times), Recchi, and John LeClair (three times).

The six Flyers who reached 50 goals did it a combined 12 times. Eleven of the times it was done by wingers. MacLeish was the only center.

Giroux, whose shot release appears much quicker this season, is among the league leaders with a 20 percent shooting percentage, connecting on 15 of his 75 shots. He is a threat to become the first Flyer to ever win the Art Ross Trophy as the league's top point scorer.

"It's a great honor to be up there, but it's not just me out there; it's Jags and Hartsy," he said, referring to linemates Jaromir Jagr and Scott Hartnell. "When you play with two good players, obviously you're going to get the puck a lot in the slot, and I think it's important that you're ready for it. Jags talks to me a lot about that."

Now in his fourth NHL season, Giroux plays in all situations - even-strength, power play, penalty kill - and he leads Flyers forwards in average time on ice at nearly 22 minutes per game.

Twenty-two *hard* minutes.

"What really impresses me about Claude is that he fights for everything out there," Laviolette said. "I don't know if it's mean or not, but it has been consistent all year. Right now he is fighting for every piece of ice he can get, every puck battle."

'G' as in 'goal'

A year ago, Giroux had a coming-of-age season. He finished with 25 goals - but just nine in his last 39 games - and a team-high 76 points. His point and goal totals rose in each of his first three seasons.

And to think that when the Flyers selected him in the first round (22d overall) in the 2006 draft, then-general manager Bobby Clarke momentarily forgot his name as he stood at the podium.

"It didn't bother me," said Giroux, who had three straight seasons of 100-plus points when he played in the Quebec Major Junior Hockey League. "I actually thought it was pretty funny.

Most of his teammates call him, simply, "G." As in *goal*. Jagr, one of his linemates, calls him "Little Mario Lemieux" and says he never thought he would get to play with a player of Giroux's caliber at this stage of his career.

But some still get stumped by his name.

On Saturday night in Glendale, Ariz., after Giroux scored another breathtaking goal, a Phoenix reporter was asking Flyers center Danny Briere about his shifty teammate, wanting to know his opinion of "Ger-rucks," rhyming it with *shucks*.

Giroux shrugs it off and smiles. He is quiet and soft-spoken - he despises public speaking - but has a sharp wit ("I guess 39 is the new 20," he said about Jagr) and a playful personality. Witness when he dyed his mustache black last month, which didn't exactly match his strawberry-blonde hair - and made him look like he belonged in a *Saturday Night Live* skit.

On the ice, however, he is all business.

"It shouldn't surprise anybody that he is where he is," Laviolette said. "He's skilled and talented, but I really think his success comes from the fact he is a tremendous competitor. . . . The way he competes makes him special."

Special enough to be mentioned with a hockey icon like Crosby. Special enough that the Philadelphia Sportswriters Association will honor him as Philly's pro athlete of the year at its 108th annual banquet on Jan. 30 in Cherry Hill.

Special enough that most hockey followers not only know his name, but say it with deep admiration.

Flyers' Simmonds aims to keep shooting

Frank Seravalli

Philadelphia Daily News

December 7, 2011

BUFFALO - Walking out of the Honda Center last Friday night in Anaheim, coach Peter Laviolette pulled aside Wayne Simmonds before they made it to the team bus.

That night, back on the West Coast for the first time since last June's trade from Los Angeles to the Flyers, Simmonds had just completed his seventh straight game without a point.

The message from Laviolette was simple: Don't sweat it.

"I really liked his game," Laviolette explained. "He was working hard, he was skating hard, he was physical and he had some chances to score. I told him, 'Don't get frustrated,' because when you play like that, the results will come.

"Don't get frustrated because you feel like you aren't playing well and you're not contributing."

Less than 24 hours later in Phoenix, Simmonds followed up with his first goal in nearly 3 weeks.

Danny Briere's snap shot from the high slot bounced off the heavily taped knob of Coyotes goaltender Mike Smith's stick, off Simmonds' chest, and he was able to whack it out of midair and into the net.

Nearly a quarter of a season's worth of pent-up frustration went into that baseball-style swat.

"It obviously felt good, I hadn't scored in a while," Simmonds said. "The chances had been there but I hadn't been able to put them in.

"A lot of times, it's been a half-inch here or a half-inch there that has been the difference. Unfortunately, I haven't been able to take advantage of my opportunities."

This past weekend marked a mini coming-out party for Simmonds, who probably could be regarded as the Flyers' biggest early-season disappointment. With five goals and four assists through 25 games, Simmonds has been outscored by three defensemen (Chris Pronger, Kimmo Timonen and Matt Carle), a rookie (Matt Read), and a career fourth line center (Max Talbot).

The bad news is that Simmonds, 23, is on pace to match last year's point total with the Kings. He went through the month of November collecting just three points in 12 games. It would be the second straight season he has not shown an improvement in points.

The good news is that his stat likely will change in a hurry, especially if Simmonds continues to play as he did last weekend, when he strung together his two best games since early October.

Lavolette acknowledged that Simmonds is at his best when he is physical. On the quick, two-game trip to Anaheim and Phoenix, Simmonds plugged together his second-highest ice-time total of the season in one game and his highest shot total of the season in the other.

Overall, Simmonds posted six shots, two hits, three takeaways and one blocked shot in the two games.

The reason for hope is Simmonds continues to be paired with top players, proof that Lavolette's belief in him has not wavered despite his lack of production. He has spent much of the season on the second line with Briere and Read, who have combined for 37 points.

Many of Simmonds' chances will come on the power play, where he ranks sixth on the team in average power-play time per game, with 3 minutes, 31 seconds. That means Simmonds, acting as the agitator in front of the opposition's goaltender, spends more time on the power play than James van Riemsdyk and Scott Hartnell.

"I've got to start converting on my opportunities," Simmonds said. "The coaches have told me to shoot more, so I'm focusing on that. I've had the chances. I know the success will come."

The 'Jagr play'?

In the first two games of December, the Flyers' power play (5-for-12, 41 percent) nearly matched its entire goal total from November's 12 games (7-for-56, 12.5 percent). While some believe the power play slumped because it didn't have Pronger quarterbacking the umbrella setup for seven games last month, Jaromir Jagr's absence might have had a bigger impact.

Jagr scored two of the Flyers' power-play goals last Friday in Anaheim and helped set up a third in his first game back after missing parts of six with a groin injury.

"He thinks the game at a different level offensively," Lavolette said. "Putting him on your power play only makes it better."

With the weekend success, the Flyers catapulted from 15th all the way to sixth in the NHL's power-play rankings. But, as Jagr reminded, that could be short-lived.

"It's a hot and cold game," Jagr said. "With a bad weekend, you could be back where you were."

James van Riemsdyk (muscular tear in midsection) appears likely to return to the lineup tonight after missing the last four games . . . Andrej Meszaros returned to practice yesterday . . . Sabres forward Nathan Gerbe is expected back tonight after being stitched below his nose, through his nostrils and back above his upper lip, when he was inadvertently sliced by teammate Paul Gaustad's skate last Friday . . . The Flyers have collected at least one point in each of their last eight games in Buffalo . . . Jaromir Jagr has 97 points in 74 career games against the Sabres.