



Buffalo Sabres

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Panthers visits to Buffalo to become more common

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 9, 2011

The Buffalo Sabres host the Florida Panthers tonight in First Niagara Center. Get used to hearing those words. Under the new-look NHL approved this week for next season, they will be as common as visits from Toronto, Boston, Ottawa and Montreal.

NHL governors, who met in Pebble Beach, Calif., approved sweeping changes for the 2012-13 season and beyond Monday to accommodate the move of Winnipeg to a more logical geographic spot in the league after its one-year stopgap in the Southeast Division in place of Atlanta.

Starting next year, the six divisions will be scrapped in favor of four groupings that will be known as conferences. Florida and Tampa Bay will join the Sabres and other teams from the current Northeast Division in one seven-team grouping.

The top four teams in each new conference will make the playoffs, and the first two rounds will be played among those four teams. That's like it was done during much of the 1980s and early 1990s. As for the league's final four teams, general managers will decide in March how to proceed to determine teams in the Stanley Cup final.

There are big changes in the regular season schedule, too. The Sabres will play the other six teams in their conference six times (three home, three away) and meet the other 23 teams twice (one home, one away). So that means the same number of games against longtime foes like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh and the New York Rangers as there will be against clubs like Calgary, Minnesota and Colorado.

Sabres president Ted Black and senior advisers Ken Sawyer and Cliff Benson represented the team at the meetings. The Sabres voted in favor of the proposal, which passed by a 26-4 vote.

"Our instructions from Terry [owner Terry Pegula] were to put the league interest ahead of any that might have been our own," Black said Thursday. "And there wasn't any big disconnect to doing that from our point of view."

Specifically, the Sabres and several other Eastern Conference teams figure to spend a good deal more on travel and will be in the air much more under this plan. That's because trips to current East clubs not in the division will be cut from two per year to one, and because they'll now visit every other current team, both East and West, every year.

"That's the way it was when I first started in the league and I like that," said defenseman Robyn Regehr, who joined the team this season after 11 years in Calgary. "I think it's kind of nice you play each team home and away. Like fashions, sometimes the old is new again I guess."

Current Western Conference teams, of course, have a huge travel burden and clubs like Detroit and Columbus pushed the current plan. Those two teams and others like Dallas and Minnesota should see a solid drop in their travel expenses.

"The West is definitely harder," said Sabres center Ville Leino, who has played with Detroit and Philadelphia. "We'll see how that will be now. It's easy here and Philly. Hour trips everywhere, no time changes. Definitely way easier. They have to deal with a lot in the West."

"I haven't really studied it that closely but it seems it helps out the Western Conference a bit," added center Paul Gaustad. "It's [the Sabres] being unselfish a little bit because we've had some of the easiest travel in the NHL for a long time."

Seeing every team was a huge point of the plan as teams in Western Canada wanted to make sure they got the chance to host clubs like the Penguins, Capitals, Maple Leafs and Canadiens every year. Conversely, fans in Buffalo are now assured of seeing the likes of Chicago and South Buffalo native Patrick Kane every year. Same for Detroit and Vancouver's Sedin twins.

"I think that's great as a hockey fan," Regehr said. "Teams are really going to be excited about that. If they market it properly, they should be able to do a good job and fill up their arenas."

"We were very much in favor of all teams coming," Black said. "That's something very high among fan interest."

The playoff format has raised eyebrows. There's some thought the end of the season will be rendered moot if the top four in a conference are locked up, or that three points for regulation wins are needed so teams don't turtle to ensure at least one point every night. And there's concerns about a fourth-place team in one conference qualifying while a fifth-place team in another with more points gets left home.

"You can always have years where there's a runaway in a conference and years where things are uber-competitive and you need a lot of tiebreakers," Black said. "That's the way it all falls. That wasn't a real issue."

Black said concerns about fan boredom over the 1-4, 2-3 matchups are easily overcome by the heated rivalries that will form.

"That very quickly builds rivalries and that will be one great benefit to it," he said. "And you know very quickly and definitively who you need to be better than in your conference. That's very good for your hockey operations department."

"You're never going to come up with the ideal situation for every single year and to keep everyone happy," Regehr said. "That's just not the way it works. They've tried to do the best they can and it's up to us as teams and players to deal with it the best we can."

The Lightning made it all the way to the Eastern Conference final last year before losing to Boston but are struggling this year.

Florida, meanwhile, hasn't made the playoffs since 2000 or even won a single postseason game since 1997 but that could change this year. The Panthers lead the Southeast with a revamped lineup under new coach Kevin Dineen, who led the Sabres' minor leaguers in Portland, Maine, the last three years.

The teams split two October meetings, each winning in the other's rink.

"They're playing well," Gaustad said. "They're a good team that came in here and beat us. That's a hard-working team. That top line of [Tomas] Fleischmann, [Kris] Versteeg and [Stephen] Weiss is one of the hardest lines to play against in the league."

Buffalo's Leino suspended one game for head shot

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 9, 2011

Sabres center Ville Leino drew a one-game suspension from the NHL Thursday night for an elbow that grazed the head of Philadelphia rookie Matt Read during Wednesday's overtime loss in First Niagara Center.

Leino had a phone hearing with NHL discipline czar Brendan Shanahan on Thursday afternoon about the play, which occurred just inside the Buffalo blue line with 18:30 left in the third period. The suspension will cost him \$24,324.32.

Explained Shanahan in his video summary on NHL.com: "Even though we view this not as an intentional check but as one player stealing the puck from another player, the fact remains that Leino's elbow recklessly makes Read's head the principal point of contact."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said he understood why the league looked into the Leino play, which was repeated several times on the Versus telecast and was shown repeatedly on TSN studio shows in Canada.

But he was baffled why there was no hearing for Philadelphia defenseman Marc-Andre Bourdon, who drilled Nathan Gerbe from behind into the boards in the second period.

Ruff said Gerbe has a concussion, so he's going to be out a few games.

"I don't think there's any malicious intent [by Leino] on that or any great degree but I'm not surprised [there was a hearing] because it was a blow to the head," Ruff said after practice. "Gerbe's, I am surprised there's no hearing, I really am. That one really surprises me. He's defenseless, he gets hit hard, he's hurt. That one I can't figure out."

Leino wouldn't comment on the play after practice because his hearing had not yet been held. He scored his third goal of the season Wednesday -- and first in 11 games -- on nifty assists from new linemates Luke Adam and Zack Kassian, and seems to be getting comfortable at center with a rookie on each side of him.

"They're both good players. They have good hockey sense," Leino said. "They're young players who are still working on things but the talent is really there. They know how to make plays and how to score and we're getting pretty good chemistry."

* * *

With Gerbe and Leino out tonight, the Sabres will have Cody McCormick (concussion) back in the lineup for the first time since Nov. 14. Patrick Kaleta (groin) skated in a non-contact role and said he's close to being ready. Jordan Leopold (upper body) could also return this weekend.

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Ryan Miller's bizarre home-road splits grew with Wednesday's five-goal outing. Miller is 2-4-1 in FNC with a 4.05 goals-against average and .874 save percentage. On the road, he's 4-2-0, 1.77 and .944.

None of the Flyers' goals was particularly egregious on Miller's part, although he did say he thought he could have made a couple more saves.

On Claude Giroux's overtime goal that went between his legs, Miller said, "It's one I'd like to get back. I got a little stuck on what move he was going to make and he made it count."

The Sabres will partner with Beads of Courage tonight to raise money for children coping with serious illness. Special Sabres-themed beads will be sold throughout the game on the 100 Level concourse for \$5, with all proceeds going to the charity.

Members of Carly's Club and Stone's Buddies, who participate in Beads of Courage, will attend the game as guests of Miller.

Panthers seek conference lead as they face Sabres

Brian Hunter

NHL.com

December 8, 2011

PANTHERS (16-8-4) at SABRES (14-11-2)

TV: FS-Florida, MSG-Buffalo

Last 10: Florida 7-2-1; Buffalo 3-5-2

Season series: Third of four meetings. Each team has already won in its opponent's building.

[Thomas Vanek](#) scored twice and [Ryan Miller](#) stopped all 22 shots he faced as the Sabres took a 3-0 victory in Florida on Oct. 20. Nine days later, the Panthers got revenge in Buffalo by a 3-2 final, as [Jason Garrison](#) scored a power-play goal with 1:43 left in regulation.

Big story: Both teams have gained more points on the road than at home this season, but the disparity is particularly glaring in Buffalo's case because Friday's game will mark its 17th at the First Niagara Center (where its record is 6-8-2 so far) as opposed to just 11 on the road (8-3-0). In other words, to remain a playoff contender the Sabres need to either pick up their play in front of the home fans or maintain something close to the .727 winning percentage they've posted in hostile environments.

Team Scope:

Panthers: Don't look now, but Florida is poised to take over the Eastern Conference lead if it wins Friday. The Panthers kept rolling with an impressive victory on the road against the defending Stanley Cup champions on Thursday, blanking the Bruins 2-0 behind a flawless performance by [Jose Theodore](#). He made a season-high 40 saves and outdueled Tim Thomas thanks to a pair of late third-period goals by [Tomas Kopecky](#) and [Kris Versteeg](#). Florida moved a point ahead of Northeast Division-leading Boston and within a point of Atlantic-leading Philadelphia.

"When it's a tie game on the road after two periods, you know you're sitting pretty good," Theodore said. "It was just about making that next save. The guys came through scoring big goals, came through on the PK. And it's a team effort tonight."

Sabres: Goals near the end of a period are supposed to demoralize the opposition, and it looked like Buffalo had accomplished that Wednesday as [Zack Kassian](#) scored at 18:55 of the first and Vanek followed at 19:37 to extend a 1-0 lead to 3-0 over Philadelphia. But Maxime Talbot of the Flyers did the Sabres one better by scoring with a second left before intermission, and it sparked

a four-goal rally by the visitors. [Drew Stafford](#) scored with 1:35 remaining in the third to earn the Sabres a point, but they fell 5-4 in overtime on a Claude Giroux breakaway goal that came after a no-look pass by [Marc-Andre Gragnani](#) was intercepted.

"It hurts because you get back into it, the boys are ready to go and we pretty much give it to them there with one of the best players in the League in overtime," Stafford said in the Buffalo News. "It's disappointing."

Who's hot: Theodore is 5-1-1 in his last seven starts for the Panthers, allowing two goals or less in all but one of those outings. [Dmitry Kulikov](#) (2-3-5) and [Tomas Fleischmann](#) (1-4-5) have three-game points streaks active. ... Kassian, the Sabres' first-round pick in 2009, has goals in consecutive games. He has 3 goals and 5 points in six games since being called up.

Injury report: Florida forward Mark Cullen is day-to-day with an upper-body injury. Forwards [Scottie Upshall](#) (upper body), [Matt Bradley](#) (upper body) and [Marcel Goc](#) (concussion-like symptoms) are on injured reserve. ... Buffalo forward [Nathan Gerbe](#) left Wednesday's game with what was termed an upper-body injury, and is day-to-day. Forward [Paul Gaustad](#) (upper body) missed his first game of the season, while forwards [Cody McCormick](#) (concussion) and [Patrick Kaleta](#) (groin) and defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) (upper body) were also sidelined. Forward [Brad Boyes](#) (knee) and defensemen [Tyler Myers](#) (wrist) and [Mike Weber](#) (upper body) are on injured reserve.

Stat pack: [Krystofer Barch](#) skated 11 shifts for 5:47 of ice time in his debut with the Panthers, picking up 9 penalty minutes, including a charging minor and fighting major just 2:19 into Thursday's game. ... Sabres forward [Ville Leino](#) opened the scoring Wednesday against the Flyers, giving him 3 goals and 10 points in 27 games this season. Leino had a breakout, 19-goal, 53-point season with Philadelphia in 2010-11 before signing a lucrative six-year contract during the offseason.

Puck drop: Leino has been hot of late, picking up 1 goal and 3 assists over Buffalo's last three games, but he'll have to sit this one out. Leino received a one-game suspension from the League on Thursday due to an elbowing incident Wednesday against Philadelphia.

Sabres' Leino suspended for one game

NHL.com

December 8, 2011

NEW YORK – [Buffalo Sabres](#) forward [Ville Leino](#) has been suspended, without pay, for one game for elbowing [Philadelphia Flyers](#) forward [Matt Read](#) during NHL Game #403 in Buffalo on Wednesday, Dec. 7, the National Hockey League's Department of Player Safety announced today.

Under the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and based on his average annual salary, Leino will forfeit \$24,324.32. The money goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund.

The incident occurred at 1:32 of the third period. No penalty was assessed on the play.

Leino will miss the Dec. 9 game vs. Florida. He will be eligible to return Dec. 10 vs. the [New York Rangers](#).

Florida (16-8-4) at Buffalo (14-11-2)

Nicolino DiBenedetto

STATS

December 8, 2011

The [Florida Panthers](#)' status as one of the top teams in the Eastern Conference may be the biggest surprise in the NHL this season.

The [Buffalo Sabres](#)' struggles were also unexpected, and they're preaching patience to their fan base.

The Panthers go for their longest winning streak in almost four years Friday night when they attempt to win back-to-back road games against the Sabres for the first time.

Florida (16-8-4) hasn't reached the playoffs since 2000, and the club has finished at the bottom of the Southeast Division each of the last two seasons.

That's why it comes as a surprise that the Panthers lead the division by seven points over second-place Washington, the four-time reigning Southeast champion.

The Panthers beat the Capitals 5-4 on Monday before further proving they're not a fluke, extending their winning streak to three with Thursday's 2-0 victory at Northeast Division-leading Boston.

Florida hasn't won four straight since a seven-game run March 2-16, 2008.

"There's always something that gets you going," [Jose Theodore](#) said after making 40 saves against the Bruins. "And when you play against the best, you want to raise your game."

It's unclear if Theodore will be back in net, but he's 5-1-1 with a 1.57 goals-against average in his last seven starts. He's also won his last two visits to Buffalo behind a 1.50 GAA, including a 24-save performance in a 3-2 win there Oct. 29.

The Panthers have 23 losses and three ties in 36 all-time visits.

While Florida is emerging as a contender in the East, the Sabres (14-11-2) are trying to remain calm while a slew of injuries and inconsistent play have them dangerously close to the Northeast cellar.

They've had eight players - including goaltender [Ryan Miller](#) - miss six or more games due to injuries.

Buffalo is in the midst of a 2-4-2 stretch, and it blew an early three-goal lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to Philadelphia on Wednesday to open a five-game homestand.

Team president Ted Black feels patience is preferable to panic.

“The assessment of the team is we’re not where we want to be in terms of our record, because we think there are a couple of games that got away from us,” Black said. “This is no time to abandon hope.”

The Sabres have lost six of their last seven at home, surrendering at least four goals in five of those contests.

“It’s been a problem at home,” defenseman [Marc-Andre Gragnani](#) said. “We need to fix it.”

Miller figures to be in net again. He made 29 saves before [Claude Giroux](#) beat him on a breakaway midway through overtime Wednesday, four days after he stopped 32 shots in a 3-2 victory at Nashville in his return from a concussion.

Miller made 33 saves in the Oct. 29 loss to the Panthers after blanking them with 22 stops in a 3-0 road victory nine days prior.

[Thomas Vanek](#) leads the Sabres with 13 goals, but his tally against the Flyers was only his second in 11 games. The left wing scored three times in the two October meetings with Florida, and has found the net on nine occasions in 12 career home games against the Panthers.

Sabres preaching patience after inconsistent start

John Wawrow

Associated Press

December 8, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—A rash of injuries has made it difficult for Buffalo Sabres management to assess what to make out of—and whether to shake up—a high-priced team off to an inconsistent start.

Rather than overreact, Sabres president Ted Black is asking fans to be patient and the fates to be kinder when it comes to their banged-up lineup.

“The assessment of the team is we’re not where we want to be in terms of our record, because we think there are a couple of games that got away from us,” Black told The Associated Press by phone Thursday. “This is no time to abandon hope.”

Black remains encouraged in noting that the Sabres (14-11-2) still have a winning record and are in seventh place in the Eastern Conference. That’s not bad for a team that has had eight players—including goalie Ryan Miller—miss six or more games due to injuries; was minus seven regulars in blowing a three-goal lead in a 5-4 overtime loss to Philadelphia on Wednesday; and is 3-5-2 in its past 10 games.

Another benefit is the Sabres discovering how much depth they have.

Buffalo’s had nine rookies play this season, five of whom made their NHL debuts. That includes forward Zack Kassian, the team’s 2009 first-round draft pick, who has three goals and two assists in six games.

Black said the Sabres aren’t “done yet” in attempting to improve the team after an offseason in which Buffalo added three high-priced free agents and re-signed both defenseman Tyler Myers and forward Drew Stafford to lucrative contracts.

Black, however, cautioned that no moves are imminent, and first-year owner Terry Pegula is maintaining an even keel.

“Terry does move quickly and decisively, but he does also balance that with patience and a strong aversion to panicking,” Black said. “Even though we’ve lost so many games, and injuries have hit us so early in this season, there just hasn’t been enough time for a fully healthy team to be on the ice to overreact.”

Sabres fans are getting antsy after how Buffalo frittered away a 3-0 first-period lead against the Flyers. Buffalo would have lost the game in regulation if not for Stafford scoring with 1:35 left.

According to STATS LLC, Buffalo joins Carolina and the New York Islanders in having lost three times this season when leading by two or more goals. Anaheim and Winnipeg lead the NHL in that blown-lead category in having done it four times.

The Sabres offense is sputtering, having been held to one goal four times in its past 10, including a 1-0 win over Carolina. Their power-play went 0 of 16 before converting twice against Philadelphia. And they've allowed six power-play goal in their past seven games.

What's more perplexing is how the Sabres continue to struggle at home. They're 5-8-2 at Buffalo, not including a season-opening "home" win over Anaheim in a game played at Helsinki.

This is not what was expected from a team that began raising expectations ever since Pegula purchased the franchise in February. Buffalo went 16-4-4 under the new owner as part of a second-half surge to finish seventh in the East before being eliminated by the Flyers in the first round of the playoffs.

Pegula then went on a major shopping spree by committing nearly \$140 million on new salaries this offseason in a bid to make the Sabres bona fide contenders.

Black said, Pegula's objective to win the Stanley Cup remains the same.

"I think our track record of improving this team—albeit only over nine or 10 months—should be a strong indication to our fans that we're willing to let no rock go unturned in our relentless pursuit to win the Stanley Cup," he said. "It starts at the top, and the one thing that hasn't changed is Terry's commitment and passion.

Then, with a chuckle, Black added: "None of those have suffered any injuries."

Surprising Panthers could be tough conference foe for Sabres

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 9, 2011

BUFFALO — The new-look Florida Panthers, a dreg-turned-contender following their wild offseason makeover, visit the Sabres at the First Niagara Center tonight. For years, the moribund Panthers' arrival here elicited little excitement.

They haven't made the playoffs in an NHL-record 10 seasons, a stunning streak of futility in an era of parity. Their goal scoring was, well, non-existent. They averaged just 2.4 goals a game over the last two seasons. They possessed no marquee talent.

The Panthers might've been the league's most irrelevant team.

But the roster overhaul has worked. Under new coach Kevin Dineen, the Panthers have six more points, two more wins and five more goals than the Sabres. Right now, they boast three players averaging more than a point a game – Stephen Weiss, Tomas Fleischmann and Kris Versteeg – and an elite defenseman in Brian Campbell.

Finally, the Panthers have turned a corner, and the Sabres should be wary.

Thanks to the NHL's new four-conference realignment the board of governors passed Monday, the teams will be conference foes next season and play six times, up from four.

It's a somewhat radical departure from the current two-conference, six-division format in which the Sabres play non-division Eastern Conference opponents four times each and Western Conference teams 18 total times.

Besides the Panthers, the Tampa Bay Lightning is joining the Sabres' traditional Northeast Division rivals in the unnamed conference.

The Sabres will play a home and home with all non-conference opponents, meaning the Edmonton Oilers or Phoenix Coyotes will visit as much as the Philadelphia Flyers or Pittsburgh Penguins.

"That won't be as nice. It's going to be different, obviously," Sabres center Ville Leino said Thursday about facing the close, traditional rivals less. "I just got used to playing Philly, Boston, last year Buffalo. It's going to be really weird."

Sabres defenseman Robyn Regehr added: "It's kind of nice you're playing each team home and away. Like fashions, sometimes old is new again, I guess. They've made some changes and tweaks to it. I think it's going to work really well."

But imagine if Sidney Crosby and the Penguins come next October, and then don't play here again for 16 months? What about the Flyers, a team detested around here since the 1970s?

Counting seven postseason contests, the Sabres and Flyers played 11 times last year.

The hatred dates back to the Sabres' 1975 Stanley Cup final loss to the Broad Street Bullies edition of the Flyers. The teams have met nine times in the postseason, most recently in April when the Flyers rallied to win a wildly entertaining and tight first-round series.

The Flyers' 5-4 overtime win here Wednesday was arguably the most entertaining Sabres game this season.

"Rivalries are always going to be there," Sabres winger Tyler Ennis said.

With postseason play conference-only during the first two rounds, an early playoff meeting with non-conference rivals is out. It's also possible a club could earn more points than a playoff team in another conference and not make it.

"You're never going to come up with the ideal situation for every single year to keep everyone happy," Regehr said. "That's just the way it works. I think they've tried to do the best they can."

The Atlanta Thrashers' relocation to Winnipeg forced the realignment. The Jets are playing in Eastern Conference this season, something that couldn't last.

Flyers chairman Ed Snider told the Philadelphia Inquirer his team liked the current setup, "but it hurt a lot of other clubs."

He noted the Flyers and others "sacrificed," agreeing to realignment for the betterment of the league.

Most Western Conference teams endure a rough, sometimes ridiculous, travel schedule. For example, the Detroit Red Wings and Columbus Blue Jackets, two eastern cities stuck in the west, play most of their road games in later time zones.

"You can't practice that hard," said Leino, who began his career in Detroit. "You got to save your energy because you're traveling hard. It's definitely different."

Obviously, the Sabres, who have just 10 road trips of two or more games, will start traveling more. They'll visit only seven Western Conference cities this season. They often fly to an eastern city for a single game and come right back. They're gone about 30 hours.

Of course, the tradeoff is they play a whopping 21 sets of back-to-back games.

"The good part for us in the old system is the travel length. The traveling's great here," Ennis said. "We're barely up in the air and we're down again. So I guess that part hurts a little bit."

Leino suspended for one game

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 9, 2011

BUFFALO — The NHL has suspended Sabres center Ville Leino one game for a “reckless, open-ice elbow” to Matt Read’s head during the third period of the Sabres’ 5-4 overtime loss to Philadelphia on Wednesday.

In video posted on NHL.com late Thursday night, NHL discipline czar Brendan Shanahan said although Leino was focused on the puck, he extended his shoulder laterally, “making some contact with Read’s shoulder, but principal contact with Read’s head.”

“Even though we view this not as an intentional check, but as one player stealing the puck from another player, the fact remains that Leino’s elbow recklessly makes Read’s head the point of contact,” Shanahan said.

Shanahan held a phone hearing Thursday afternoon.

The Sabres will likely need to recall a forward from Rochester now.

“I don’t think there’s any malicious intent on that or it was of any great degree,” Ruff said Thursday inside the First Niagara Center prior to the hearing. “But I’m not surprised (there was a hearing) because it was a blow to the head.”

But Ruff couldn’t believe Shanahan passed on reviewing Marc-Andre Bourdon’s hit from behind on Sabres winger Nathan Gerbe, who “might’ve gotten a little bit of a concussion” when the rookie rammed him face-first into the glass from behind earlier in the game.

“That one really surprises me because he’s defenseless,” Ruff said. “He gets hit hard. He’s hurt. That one I can’t figure out.”

With Gerbe out, winger Cody McCormick (concussion, 10 games) will return.

Leino, a major disappointment after signing a six-year, \$27 million free agent deal, has emerged recently, compiling one goal and five points in the last three games.

In other news, forwards Paul Gaustad, Patrick Kaleta and defenseman Jordan Leopold all practiced Thursday. Gaustad and Leopold could return this weekend.

The Sabres are down eight regulars.

Leino Gets a One Game Suspension

Mike Jafari

WGR 550

December 8, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Buffalo Sabres forward Ville Leino has been suspended for one game for his elbow to the head of Philadelphia Flyers' forward Matt Read in Buffalo's 5-4 Overtime loss on Wednesday night.

The incident occurred at 1:32 of the third period with no penalty was assessed on the play. The suspension was handed down by the NHL's Disciplinarian Brendan Shanahan at 9:40 PM on Thursday night.

Under the terms of the Collective Bargaining Agreement, and based on his average annual salary, Leino will forfeit \$24,324.32. The money goes to the Players' Emergency Assistance Fund. Leino will miss Friday's game vs. Florida, but he will be eligible to return Dec. 10 vs the New York Rangers.

Stay tuned to WGR 550 for the latest Sabre news.

Are the Sabres holding each other accountable?

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 8, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Lindy Ruff met with the captains after practice. He didn't even wait for a few of them to get out of their uniforms.

I asked Ruff if he needed help from within from his leaders in the room and his answer was. "I have to figure out what you're trying to talk about." So I asked again, trying to get the team straightened out, playing the way you want to at home, getting back on the winning track, coaches can do so much, but does the leadership in the room also have to help out to get guys thinking the right way? I then got a review on how the Philadelphia goals were scored Wednesday so obviously Ruff does not want to talk about his leaders or if players are being held accountable.

Paul Gaustad couldn't play Wednesday, but I asked him as one of the core team leaders, how can he help his teammates be together and be more consistent to be who you think and know you can be? Gaustad said, "Consistency is one of the biggest things. It was a great first period, we played well and tried to be consistent off that. There are going to be bad things that happen during a game and you're going to go through tough times in a season. Even when we're winning games, we're having some tough periods that we shouldn't have. It's working hard but also working smart in situations. Game management, risk management and just taking baby steps towards being a good team. It isn't just one game, it's a long season and we have to stick with it."

I think Jason Pominville is a very hard working, well liked player. I think he very much leads by example, but is he holding his teammates accountable? We aren't behind closed doors so we don't know, but they play like they don't. The captain has told me more than once he doesn't think the in your face type of leadership works. He believes in many from the core group having an equal voice. Once again, there's nothing wrong with that if voices are being heard. Mike Grier made sure that players in that room held each other accountable. Remember two years ago when Ruff said more than once that he didn't even go into the room. He wanted the players to figure it out. Is this group left to figure things out?

I know injuries happen. I know injuries are part of this bad patch for the team, but injuries or not you can never, ever, ever blow a three goal lead at home. You can not win just five of 15 games in your home. If the players are trying to hold each other accountable, they're doing a rather poor job. Coaches can only do so much, I am a firm believer in peer pressure and Darcy Regier is too. We will never know what happens behind closed doors, but to get out of this slump, I think it has to be a little more livelier in that room.

Sabres Gerbe concussed. Leino has NHL hearing

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 8, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Lindy Ruff confirmed that the hit by the Flyers Marc-Andre Bourdon caused a concussion to Nathan Gerbe. Ruff said, "Things are looking darker for him. He most likely got a little bit of a concussion."

That seemed like it should've been a major penalty to me, but Brendan Shanahan of NHL decided not even to have a hearing.

Ville Leino wasn't so lucky. He threw an elbow at Philadelphia's Matt Read as he passed him at the blue line. It was a scummy play even though Leino was trying to steal the puck back. No penalty was called, but Leino did have a hearing. Leino refused comment Thursday.

I thought both plays should be suspended.

As far as other injuries Ruff said, "Cody's back and he's ready to play."

Jordan Leopold: "Jordan's close. For him it's getting through a pain tolerance thing where he can be effective playing, so I would not rule him out for the weekend."

Andrej Sekera missed practice, "It was just maintenance today. He was a little banged up from the game, but should be fine for tomorrow."

Paul Gaustad practiced on a limited basis. Ruff said, "Paul's doing better and he's a possibility for the weekend." Gaustad liked his first day back with his teammates, "Pretty good, just good to be back on the ice. It was an accumulation of a couple of games, but in the scrum just kind of injured, upper body." The center said, "Today went well, I want to shoot for a little bit quicker than the training staff does, but they're always being precautionary and that's a good thing. I'm going to come back when I'm ready."

Over the years Gaustad has been able to come back from injury quicker than anticipated, "I've been fortunate that way and that's a credit to the training staff and anybody around here that's helped me get back quicker than scheduled.

Pat Kaleta with a bad groin was also limited. Ruff said, "He's better, again it's the first real test for him so things are looking a little bit brighter that way."

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that they will partner with Beads of Courage during Friday night's game against the Florida Panthers at First Niagara Center to help raise money and awareness for children with serious illnesses.

Beads of Courage is a national organization dedicated to providing innovative, arts-in-medicine supportive care programs for children coping with serious illness, their families and the health care providers who care for them.

Special Sabres-themed beads will be sold throughout the game on the 100 Level concourse. Beads are \$5 and all proceeds will go directly to Beads of Courage.

Members of Carly's Club and Stone's Buddies – all of whom also participate in Beads of Courage – will be attending the game as guests of Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller.

For more information about Beads of Courage, including a special Beads in Space exhibit at the Buffalo Museum of Science, which is open to the public this weekend, please visit www.beadsofcourage.org.

Beads of Courage, Inc. is a Tucson, AZ-based international charity that has established arts-in-medicine Programs to provide psychosocial support for children coping with serious illness in more than 100 children's hospitals in the United States, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, United Kingdom and Ireland. Their mission is to provide innovative, arts-in-medicine supportive care programs for children coping with serious illness, their families and the health care providers who care for them.

Florida Panthers' Jose Theodore shines in victory against Bruins

Jose Theodore made 40 saves, Tomas Kopecky scored with 2:32 left and the Panthers beat the defending Stanley Cup champions for their third victory in a row.

George Richards
Miami Herald
December 9, 2011

BOSTON -- Not that the Bruins wish him any real harm, but they wouldn't have minded if the bug that kept Jose Theodore out of Monday's game lingered a couple days longer.

If Theodore was ill on Monday, he was flat out sick on Thursday.

Theodore carried the Panthers in a meeting of division leaders for much of the night, his 40 saves and a Tomas Kopecky goal in the closing minutes being the difference in Florida's 2-0 victory over the defending Stanley Cup champions at the Garden.

"We have to keep this going. We're playing confident right now," Kopecky said after Florida's third consecutive win that gave it a seven-point cushion over second place Washington in the Southeast Division. "We're trying to prove those people who never believed in us [wrong]. I think we're doing a pretty good job of it."

Kopecky's goal came when he and Shawn Matthias crashed the net with Tim Thomas (28 saves) going down after stopping Matthias' shot. Kopecky pounced on the loose puck and shot high, tumbling over the 2011 postseason MVP in the process. Thomas wasn't around when Kris Versteeg got Florida's second goal by depositing the puck into an empty net with 42 seconds left.

"Our goaltending was stellar. It was impressive," coach Kevin Dineen said. "We had to find a way to get some offensive pressure, it was so sporadic. ... For the most part, the ice leaned toward our end. When you find a way to win a game like that, it shows the confidence of your team. I think a little of that is built on what we've done so far."

Theodore was felled by a bout of the stomach flu after the team came back from California. Theodore had the sweaty chills and estimated he might have lost 10 pounds off his lithe frame. You wouldn't have known that Thursday as Theodore was terrific in Boston once more, his game reminiscent of those classic battles against the Bruins when he played for rival Montreal.

The Bruins controlled play for the opening half of the first and third periods, but Theodore allowed the Panthers to hang in there. Boston clanging the iron on a pair of first-period shots definitely helped. But Theodore knew it was a fight between two goalies on Thursday, a battle he won.

“Actually I didn’t feel too fresh, my energy level was a little low,” Theodore said as he sat on a bench in the locker room draped in a white towel. “It was a game where I saw the puck well and knew it would be tough for them to score. When I am at the top of my game, I’m tough to beat.”

It has been some time since the Bruins and Panthers played in a game of consequence, one that those around the league had an eye on.

One might have to go back to the 1999-2000 season. That’s when the Panthers last made the playoffs and current goalie coach Robb Tallas played 27 games for the Bruins that year. Or 1996, when winger-turned-TV analyst Billy Lindsay’s goal in Game 5 beat Boston in the opening round of the postseason.

It’s been a while since this matchup mattered. Thursday’s game definitely fit the bill. A large media contingent awaited the Panthers after the morning skate as news is spreading about one of the league’s biggest surprises this season. The Panthers are tied with Philadelphia with a league-best 10 road wins as they go for their first four-game winning streak since 2007 at Buffalo on Friday night.

“We ground out a game and found a way to win. That’s huge,” Sean Bergenheim said. “... We don’t care what people write or think about us. It’s OK for us to fly under the radar right now. We’re just doing our job quietly and see where it takes us.”

- Krys Barch, acquired Wednesday in a trade with Dallas, made his presence known early as he knocked Boston’s Daniel Paille out of the game on his first shift (and was called for charging) of the night and then brawled with Shawn Thornton.

- Florida also welcomed Mikael Samuelsson to the lineup for the first time this season. Samuelsson hadn’t played since Florida reacquired him in the David Booth deal on Oct. 22. Samuelsson played 17 shifts on Thursday.

Florida Panthers: Theodore and Panthers stymie Stanley Cup champs 2-0

Theodore has 40 saves and Kopecky scores game winner to lift Panthers into second place in the Eastern Conference

Harvey Fialkov

Sun Sentinel

December 9, 2011

BOSTON— The revamped, resurgent [Panthers](#) continue to prove they are nobody's pushovers, and won't be pushed around either.

And goalie [Jose Theodore](#) certainly made his 600th [NHL](#) game a memorable one.

Two days after taking it to the perennial [Southeast Division](#) powerhouse [Capitals](#), the Panthers literally went toe-to-toe with the big, bad Stanley Cup defending champion [Bruins](#) in a gritty 2-0 victory Thursday night at TD Garden that wasn't decided until the final 2 1/2 minutes.

The combination of Florida's uncharacteristic physical play (19-16 edge in hits) sparked by newcomer [Krys Barch](#)'s first-period fight, its smothering penalty kill (4 of 4) and a still under-the-weather Theodore's acrobatics against the second-best offense in the league kept the game scoreless headed into the third period.

On the other end, Bruins goalie [Tim Thomas](#), the reigning Vezina Trophy winner, was just as stingy until 2:32 left in the third period when [Shawn Matthias](#) ripped a slap shot of his pads. [Tomas Kopecky](#) stormed the net and the somehow got the puck past a prone Thomas.

"He kind of tripped me, I fell over him and it went in," said Kopecky, who ended a 12-game goal drought. "It's a big confidence booster for us. We try to prove to those people who never believed in us and so far I think we're doing a good job."

[Kris Versteeg](#) sealed the Panthers' 10th road victory with an empty-netter with 42 seconds left for his team-leading 13th.

The Panthers, 7-2-1 in their last 10, handed the Bruins their second straight loss after a 14-0-1 stretch, to leapfrog over them into second place of the [Eastern Conference](#), one point behind Philadelphia.

This was the same Bruins who swept the four-game series last season while outscoring Florida 12-4, and had won six of the previous seven encounters.

The win couldn't have been possible without Theodore, who despite not playing for a week (rest and [flu](#)), notched 40 saves for his second shutout of the season and 32nd overall.

"I was seeing the puck well. I knew it would be tough for them to score," said Theodore, who's 9-

0-1 in his last 10 starts against Boston. "It's easy to get pumped up. They're always one of the best teams in the league. ... When you play against the best you want to raise your game."

It took newly acquired toughie Krys Barch just 2:17 to make an impact when he flattened [Daniel Paille](#) into the boards before slugging it out with nemesis [Shawn Thornton](#).

In the second period, Panthers forward [Jack Skille](#) took umbrage to [Johnny Boychuk](#)'s shot at his linemate [Mike Santorelli](#), and those two duked it out.

It's no secret that the Panthers obtained Barch and his 87 NHL fights to protect the backs of their smaller players, such as their top line of Versteeg, [Stephen Weiss](#) and [Tomas Fleischmann](#).

With GM Dale Tallon dealing with a minor medical issue, assistant GM Mike Santos could not have been prouder of his charges.

"You could see our team believed more and more that we can win this game and that we do belong where we are because we're working hard, playing smart and as a team," Santos said. "Barch came out on his first shift ... and set the tone for our team." ...

Finally, after missing his first 20 games since being acquired from Vancouver, veteran forward [Mikael Samuelsson](#) (groin) made his Panthers' debut.

Florida Panthers build success by staying outside the box

Craig Davis

Sun Sentinel

December 7, 2011

Improvement in the power play is an obvious factor in the rise of the first-place Panthers.

Just as significant is how few power-play goals they have allowed. That has been achieved in large part by simply staying out of the penalty box.

The Panthers are the choir boys of the [NHL](#) as far as avoiding trouble. They have played short-handed 75 times, one more than league leader San Jose, which has played three fewer games.

While they rank in the middle of the pack in killing penalties at 82.7 percent, the Panthers are tied for fifth in fewest power-play goals allowed with 13. That is easier to achieve when you rarely have to kill penalties.

"If you win the special-teams battle there's a good chance you're going to win the game," defenseman [Brian Campbell](#) said. "You're not in the box, you're not giving them opportunities to score."

That was evident in Monday's 5-4 victory over Washington. The Panthers scored three times on six power-play opportunities totaling 9:47. Meanwhile they successfully killed a pair of two-minute penalties.

It has become a trend that is part coaching philosophy and part style.

"I think it's moving your feet and staying away from what I call the H's, which is hooking, high sticking, tripping, those kind of penalties," coach [Kevin Dineen](#) said.

Veteran [Ed Jovanovski](#) said those sort of careless penalties have a tendency to turn into goals and lose games.

"We try to do our best to be disciplined and have our sticks on the ice and try to limit opportunities on taking penalties," he said. "Some guys are offensive guys. Some of them don't kill penalties, so you're taking them out of the game. It disrupts the rhythm of the game when you're killing [penalties] constantly."

The emphasis on speed and pressing the action that has become a hallmark of the Panthers' success so far is a factor in drawing more penalties than they commit. Consider that half the teams have played short-handed 100 or more times, with Winnipeg a league-high 126.

Meanwhile, the Panthers are tied for third with 23 power-play goals off 113 chances.

"Puck possession is something that's huge, too," said Kris Versee, who skates on the high-flying first line. "I think when you have the puck a lot of the game, generally it's going to have to be the other team taking penalties.

"When playing against teams like Pittsburgh with so many deadly players that can make so much happen, you need to stay out of the box or you're just going to shoot yourself in the foot."

Samuelsson at last

Forward [Mikael Samuelsson](#) appears set to make his long-awaited Panthers debut Thursday night in Boston. Samuelsson, who averaged 45 points over the past four years while playing 73 or more games, was acquired in the October trade with Vancouver for [David Booth](#) but hasn't played due to a [groin](#) injury four days before the trade.

Dineen said after seeing Samuelsson practice Wednesday he is excited to get the veteran on the ice as the Panthers seek more production beyond the first line. **Matt Bradley** (upper body) practiced and is close to returning, but won't play in Boston, Dineen said. Goalie [Jose Theodore](#), who missed Monday's game with the [flu](#), was back and could be in the net Thursday.

Enforcer Barch acquired

The Panthers addressed a shortcoming by acquiring rugged forward **Kyle Barch** from Dallas for [AHL](#) forward **Jake Hauswirth**. If the Panthers have shown a weakness it's lack of physical strength especially with Bradley and [Scottie Upshall](#) out.

The Panthers also received a 2012 sixth-round draft pick. To make room for Barch, [Bracken Kearns](#) was sent back to San Antonio. Kearns appeared overmatched in a fight with Washington's [John Erskine](#).

Barch will give opponents second thoughts about taking shots at [Tomas Fleischmann](#), [Stephen Weiss](#) and Versteeg The 6-foot-1, 209-pound Barch has 578 penalty minutes in 263 games.