



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Saturday, December 10, 2011

Sabres find a pulse in OT triumph over Florida

Pominville nets game-winner

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 10, 2011

As the losses piled up in First Niagara Center this season, a good chunk of the dejected fans had seen enough of Buffalo's high-risk, low-reward efforts. They said they'd be happy with a boring victory instead of a loss in which the Sabres tried to be entertaining and ended up being infuriating.

The Sabres' win Friday was delivered by the Be Careful What You Wish For Department.

The Sabres trudged to a 2-1 overtime victory against Florida, a two-point outing that won't be among anyone's treasured memories. But during a season in which home losses outnumber wins (7-8-2), at least the folks walked to the foot of Washington Street cheering.

"It wasn't one of those where we created as many chances as we did in some of the games, but we beared down on the two really good ones that we had," said Buffalo captain Jason Pominville, who scored on a breakaway with 2:41 left in OT.

Derek Roy also scored on a breakaway, about the only two chances that stood out during Buffalo's 20-shot night.

"Whenever we had the puck they swarmed us, and whenever they had the puck we swarmed them," Roy said. "I was just happy to get out with two points."

The depleted Sabres and fatigued Panthers meandered through 62 minutes of bouncing pucks and missed passes. The 18,690 fans who filled the building moved as often as the shot counters, which gradually ticked past double digits.

There was little reason to expect offensive fireworks. The Sabres had scored just 21 goals in their previous nine games, an average of 2.33. The Panthers were only marginally better during their previous eight, scoring 20 times for a 2.5 average. Of their 20 goals, half came during back-to-back, five-goal outings.

Injuries and weariness added to the slow play. The Sabres had six players out and lost Corey Tropp (head) and Jochen Hecht (lower body, blocked shot). The Panthers were finishing a stretch of four games in seven nights, including a 2-0 victory in Boston on Thursday night.

"It was a very low-chance affair for both teams," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "As soon as we lost a couple bodies there, we had no choice but to try and hunker down and make sure we didn't make any big mistakes."

The teams' inability to generate chances came through clearly midway through the second. Florida turned over the puck on a four-on-two. The Sabres turned the other way for a three-on-one, and they promptly lost control.

"It was a comedy of bad passes," Ruff said.

Any fans who arrived late didn't miss much. The teams combined for a whopping three shots through the opening 10 minutes despite a power play for each of them. With the game tied at 1-1 for the entire third period, the Sabres took just three shots while Florida managed six.

The Sabres saved their moment for overtime. Pominville took a long outlet pass from call-up Paul Szczechura to break in alone and beat goaltender Scott Clemmenson.

"It's probably not the most exciting things for our fans, but I'm glad we stuck to our system," said Sabres goalie Ryan Miller, who faced 23 shots. "It didn't amount to a ton of chances for either team, but sometimes that's how you have to do it."

Florida's Dmitry Kulikov briefly woke up the crowd and nearly put Tropp to sleep with one of the hardest hits of the season. The Buffalo rookie crossed the Panthers' blue line with 12:30 gone and was rudely met by Kulikov. A loud groan comprising sympathy and grimacing echoed through the building. Tropp got up, hastily retreated toward the Sabres' dressing room and did not return.

Roy gave the home fans a positive experience with 2:10 to go in the first, scoring to snap a 10-game drought.

The Panthers capitalized on a five-on-three power play, Jason Garrison tying the game in the second. It was one of the few chances allowed by the Sabres, whose turnovers had cost them in previous outings.

"You can't hand teams opportunities like we have handed them," said Pominville, whose team improved to 2-0-1 in the past three games and hosts the New York Rangers on Saturday night. "Hopefully, we can build off this win and keep this thing rolling."

Farmhands show up, get job done for Sabres

Szczechura, McNabb make their presences felt in triumph over Florida

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 10, 2011

The Rochester Reinforcements keep getting the job done in Buffalo.

Coach Lindy Ruff aptly pointed out that defenseman Brayden McNabb, in his sixth NHL game, might have been the Sabres' best player in Friday's 2-1 overtime win over Florida. And forward Paul Szczechura — who took the morning skate with the Amerks before heading west on the Thruway — fed Jason Pominville with a beauty of a lead pass on the game-winner.

"You just have to be mentally prepared anytime to get the call," said Szczechura, who has three assists in his three games in Buffalo this season. "The way things are going right now, guys are banged up. You never know. So I just kind of take it day by day. When I get the call, I just try to be ready and help this team win."

Jordan Leopold started the decisive play with a neat backhand chip along the boards to Szczechura, who had his head up and quickly delivered to Pominville.

"[Pominville] beat the defenseman and I know he has great speed," Szczechura said. "Our defenseman in our end [Leopold] made a great play as well giving me that little chip. I just led [Pominville] and he did the rest. It was a great finish by him."

McNabb, meanwhile, started the play on Derek Roy's goal in the first period. After breaking his stick on a routine clearing pass in the Buffalo end, McNabb didn't get flustered. He battled two Florida players and kicked the puck ahead to Tyler Ennis. It went to Drew Stafford and then to Roy on a breakaway.

"I was basically desperate there. I had no stick," McNabb said. "I just wanted to get it out and luckily I got a good kick on it and got it out."

No point for McNabb but plenty of acknowledgement about how he made the play and questions from reporters afterward if he played any soccer in his life.

"No, No. Just before the games [in the hallway]," McNabb said with a laugh. "Today I won a couple times so today I was good."

"It was a great play, a heads-up play by him," said goaltender Ryan Miller. "It's the reason the boys play soccer before the game, get the feet going and get the hands going."

McNabb played 16:54, had three hits, two shots and two takeaways. He's averaging 18:19 over the last three games.

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A promotion that was wildly popular during the 1980s and 1990s at Memorial Auditorium will be reborn on New Year's Eve as the Sabres announced Friday they will be hosting a "Tux and Pucks" Night for the Dec. 31 game against the Ottawa Senators.

Special ticket and tuxedo rental packages will be offered for the team's first Dec. 31 home game since 2004. There will be 100 special packages available for \$149.95, featuring two game tickets, two tickets to the Tailgate Tent Party and a tuxedo rental from Tuxedo Junction. The packages are available at the Center box office, at Sabres.com or by calling 1-888-GO-SABRES.

Tuxedo Junction is also offering a special \$20.12 rate on rentals for fans who already have tickets.

Fans can bring their ticket any Tuxedo Junction location to receive their discounted rental.

....

Sabres center Ville Leino sat out a one-game suspension for his elbow to the head of Philadelphia's Matt Read during Wednesday's overtime loss and said he understood the league's decision.

"I'm not trying to hurt anyone there," Leino said. "I was turning and I was off balance, trying to lift the stick on my left leg and take the puck on my right. I kind of hit him off his shoulder for a bit and hit his head slightly."

Leino said he agreed with the league's initiative against head shots and that the one-game ban was "fair for everybody."

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The Sabres will hold their annual autographed holiday ornament surprise giveaway prior to tonight's game against the New York Rangers. For a \$20 donation to the Sabres Foundation, fans will receive a gift-wrapped ornament signed by a Sabres player.

The ornaments will be sold in the 100 level pavilion beginning at 5 p.m. by the Sabres' significant others. The tables will remain open until the end of the second intermission.

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The Sabres improved to 4-2 in overtime this season, 2-1 in OT winners and 2-1 in shootouts. ... Derek Roy led the Sabres in ice time at 26:19. Former Sabre Brian Campbell led the Panthers at 27:57. The Sabres are 9-1-2 this year when Roy gets at least one point ... South Buffalo native Tim Kennedy played 9:28 for the Panthers with no shots on goal and was victimized on Roy's goal. He has no points in his last 13 games.

Sabres beat Panthers 2-1 in overtime

NHL.com

December 9, 2011

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) finally sent their fans home happy.

The Sabres have struggled to win at the First Niagara Center this season, but [Jason Pominville's](#) breakaway goal 2:19 into overtime gave Buffalo a 2-1 victory against Florida on Friday night for just its second win in its last eight home games.

[Jordan Leopold](#) freed up the puck deep in his own zone and fed Paul Szczechura, whose pass found Pominville breaking past the defense at Florida's blue line. Pominville went in alone and beat [Scott Clemmensen](#) through the five-hole for his 10th goal of the season.

"[Szczechura] made a great pass," Pominville said after the Sabres ended a three-game home losing streak. "I was just in alone and I was able to find a hole. It was nice to get a win at home, and to win in overtime was even sweeter.

"It wasn't a pretty one, but we got it done against a team that's been going really well."

The overtime point was the 37th of the season for the Panthers (16-8-5), tying them with Philadelphia for the most in the Eastern Conference. Florida is 3-0-1 in its last four games and off to its best start since 1999.

"It was disappointing we lost, but the disappointment we feel is positive," said Clemmensen, who started for the third time in four games and finished with 18 saves. "We had won three games in a row so it was a good point. You knew it was the type of game that one little thing was going to make a big difference."

The Sabres improved to 15-11-2, but they are just 6-8-2 in their own building.

"We have to do better at home. We know it," Pominville said. "It's nice to get a win for the fans. Obviously, at times they've been on us a little bit. We feel the heat where we've got to be better at home. If you want to be successful, you've got to win games at home. To pull one off against a really good team in our conference is nothing but positive, and hopefully we can build off the effort."

Buffalo grabbed the lead at 17:50 of the first period on a breakaway goal by [Derek Roy](#). [Drew Stafford](#) spring Roy with a pass though the defense, and Roy shifted from backhand to forehand before zipping a quick wrister past Clemmensen on a night when neither team was willing to take many chances.

"I'm glad we stuck with our system," said Buffalo goaltender [Ryan Miller](#), who had to make only 22 saves. "We had a tired team who was going to sit there and trap us up all night and wait for us to make mistakes, I thought we did a great job of eliminating unnecessary turnovers, odd-man rushes. We got the puck deep. It didn't amount to a lot of chances for either team, but sometimes that's how you have to do it."

The Panthers, limited to five shots on Miller in the opening period, got on the board late in the second by taking advantage of the Sabres' penalty troubles. [Christian Ehrhoff](#) was called for roughing at 15:24 and [Jochen Hecht](#) was sent off for holding just 10 seconds later. Florida needed only 14 seconds of the 5-on-3 advantage to capitalize when [Jason Garrison](#) blasted a slap shot from beyond the left circle past Miller. It was Garrison's ninth of the season, the most among NHL defensemen, and his fifth on the power play.

Neither team scored in the third period, so despite Pominville's goal the Panthers headed for New York and a Sunday date with the Rangers with three points in back-to-back road games -- they won 2-0 in Boston on Thursday thanks to a 40-save effort by [Jose Theodore](#).

"Not everything is going to be perfect," Clemmensen said. "We got a point, so we need to look at the bright side."

The only bad news for the Sabres as they prepare to host the Rangers on Saturday was that the injury bug won't go away. Leopold and forward [Cody McCormick](#) both returned from injuries, but forward [Corey Tropp](#) left in the first period and didn't return after absorbing an open-ice hit by Florida defenseman [Dmitry Kulikov](#). The Sabres said Tropp sustained an upper-body injury. Hecht also left with an undisclosed injury.

"We had to hunker down and make sure we didn't make any big mistakes and give them easy opportunities," Ruff said about playing two men short on a bench that's laden with minor-league call-ups. "We're asking a lot of guys to do a lot of different things."

Pominville lifts Sabres past Panthers in OT

Associated Press

December 9, 2011

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—Patience paid off for the Buffalo Sabres.

Jason Pominville scored at 2:19 of overtime, and Ryan Miller finished with 22 saves to lift the Sabres to a 2-1 win over the Florida Panthers on Friday night.

With both teams waiting for the other to make a mistake, it was the Sabres who eventually broke through to find a way to get a rare win at home.

Pominville's 10th goal of the season enabled Buffalo to earn only its second win in the past eight games on home ice.

"It wasn't a pretty one, but we got it done against a team that was going really well," Pominville said. "We talked about trying not to hand them opportunities by giving pucks away, and we were better with the puck. You want to generate more, but at the same time I thought we stuck with it."

Pominville's winner originated with a nifty pass from winger Paul Szzechura, who sprung Pominville on a breakaway that started right at the Florida blue line along the right boards. Pominville skated into the slot before sending a wrist shot past Scott Clemmensen.

"I had a lot of time to put it away, and was able to find a hole," Pominville said.

In a game that featured plenty of mundane plays with the puck, the Sabres were content on playing the chess match with a Florida team that was coming off a hard-earned win over Boston on Thursday.

"It probably wasn't the most exciting game for the fans, but I'm glad we stuck with our system," Miller said. "We had a tired team that was going to try and trap us, and I thought we did a good job of eliminating odd-man rushes and turnovers. Sometimes that's how you have to do it."

Derek Roy also scored for the Sabres (15-11-2), who won for just the third time in their past nine games (3-4-2).

Jason Garrison scored a power-play goal, and Clemmensen finished with 18 saves for the Panthers (16-8-5), who failed to win their fourth straight for the first time since March 2008.

Florida also missed an opportunity to climb over idle Philadelphia and into the top spot in the Eastern Conference. The Flyers and Panthers both have 37 points, but Philadelphia has played two fewer games.

“It was disappointing we lost, but the disappointment we feel is positive,” said Clemmensen, who was making his third start in the past four games.

“We had won three games in a row so it was a good point. You knew it was the type of game that one little thing was going to make a big difference.”

The Panthers were able to stay in the game in the first period by killing off three penalties, and erased all five of Buffalo’s man-advantage opportunities overall.

“The players are taking a lot of pride on the defensive side of things,” Panthers coach Kevin Dineen said.

Down by a goal after 20 minutes, the Panthers tied it at 1 on Garrison’s ninth of the season. From the top of the left circle, he one-timed Tomas Fleischmann’s pass from behind the goal line.

Roy gave the Sabres a 1-0 lead with his seventh of the season with 2:10 remaining in the first period. After receiving a pass at the blue line from Drew Stafford, Roy went in alone and wristed a shot past Clemmensen, who got a piece of the puck before it trickled in.

“Not everything is going to be perfect,” Clemmensen said. “We got a point, so we need to look at the bright side.”

NOTES: Buffalo LW Ville Leino served his one-game suspension for elbowing Philadelphia’s Matt Read in the head during Wednesday’s game with the Flyers. ... Sabres LW Nathan Gerbe missed his first game after sustaining a concussion against the Flyers, but D Jordan Leopold and C Cody McCormick returned after both missed time with injuries. ... The Sabres recalled Szczechura from Rochester of the AHL prior to the game to replace Gerbe. ... Buffalo RW Corey Tropp left in the first period and didn’t return after absorbing an open-ice hit by Florida D Dmitry Kulikov. The Sabres said Tropp sustained an upper-body injury. ... Buffalo C Jochen Hecht left and didn’t return after getting hit with a shot in the third period.

WELCOME TO POMINVILLE!

Buffalo gets back in the win column at home with 2-1 OT victory

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

December 9, 2011

Brayden McNabb wasn't in Buffalo when the season started, and Paul Szczechura wasn't anywhere near the First Niagara Center when the day began. But the pair of relative unknowns played a huge role in Buffalo's 2-1 overtime win over the surging Florida Panthers at the First Niagara Center on Friday night.

Szczechura, playing in his third game of the season after being recalled from Rochester this afternoon, set up Jason Pominville for the overtime winner at 2:19 of the extra period. After Jordan Leopold reversed the flow of play with nifty back pass along the boards inside the Buffalo zone, Szzczechura hit Pominville for the breakaway pass that the captain made no mistake with.

"It was actually a really good play by Jordan to Pauly, and he just fired it to me," explained Pominville. "I had a lot of time to put it away, and was able to find the hole."

It was another strong performance by the 26-year-old Szzczechura, who has spent most of the season in Rochester after being signed by Buffalo as a free agent in the summer. He now has three assists in three games with the Sabres this season.

"He's not put in easy situations, but he brings that NHL experience," says Pominville. "It's unfortunate that we didn't have a chance to see him in training camp because he was injured. He stepped in and played well in Rochester, and when he's got the call here he's played really well. He's a small guy who's good with puck, patient with the puck, and he's reliable in both ends of the ice."

The rookie McNabb made a savvy veteran play on Buffalo's first goal. When his stick snapped in half while defending in the Sabres zone, he was forced to kick the puck across the blueline to Tyler Ennis. He slid it up to Drew Stafford who then spotted Derek Roy streaking up the middle. Roy eluded two Panthers defenders and beat Scott Clemmensen stick side for his seventh goal of the season.

Buffalo head coach Lindy Ruff praised the work of the 20-year-old McNabb.

"(McNabb)'s getting better every game," said Ruff. "I thought he might have been our best player. Great play on the first goal, then the slide to break up the two-on-one. I thought he played sound defensively. And in the absence of some of our key players, we need these guys to make players for us."

Ryan Miller made his second consecutive start and stopped 22 Panthers shots in a very low chance game to pick up his seventh victory of the season. Buffalo only managed 20 shots on Florida's Scott Clemmensen.

Already down five regulars, Buffalo's injury-ravaged lineup took two more hits tonight. Jochen Hecht left the game in the third period after he appeared to block a shot with his ankle, and Corey Tropp was injured in the first period when he was hit by Dmitry Kulikov as he skated into the Florida zone. Tropp skated to Sabres bench immediately and was later ruled out for the night with an upper body injury.

Buffalo gets right back at it on Saturday when they host the New York Rangers in a 7 p.m. start at First Niagara Center.

NOTE: Ville Leino sat out tonight's game to serve his one-game suspension for a hit to the head of Philadelphia's Matt Read on Wednesday.

7:15 - Good evening from the First Niagara Center in beautiful downtown Buffalo, NY!

7:16 - BUF scratches tonight: Leino, Gaustad, Gerbe FLA scratches: Samuelsson, Cullen

7:18 - Ryan Miller gets the start in net for Buffalo. Scott Clemmensen gets the call for Florida.

7:28 - Add Ellerby to Florida's scratches

7:28 - BUF starters: Vanek/Pominville/Hecht, Regehr/Sekera, Miller

7:29 - FLA starters: Fleischmann/Weiss/Versteeg, Weaver/Kulikov, Clemmensen

7:32 - Once again: for those about to blog ... I salute you.

7:33 - Sabres and Panthers hit the ice. Anthems to follow by Mr Doug Allen.

7:38 - Game on!

7:40 - Florida gets a bench minor for Too Many Men on the ice. Sabres on to an early PP

7:41 - Panthers coach Kevin Dineen was hot about that call. You could hear him yelling up here. Reminded me of when I come late and the wife catches me.

7:42 - Weiss grabs the loose puck and rings a shot off the far post.

7:44 - Szczechura skating on a line with Kassian and Adam tonight

7:47 - Brayden McNabb dives for the puck in the Panthers zone, and takes Scott Clemmensen into the net with him. Somehow McNabb picks up a goaltender interference call on the play.

7:52 - 10:01 left in the 1st. Dadonov to the box for hooking. Each team with just 2 shots each right now.

7:54 - Buffalo doubles their shot total in a hurry as Vanek and Roy pepper the Panthers net with a pair of scoring chances

7:56 - Tropp gets rocked by Kulikov just as he steps over the Panthers blueline ... and then heads right to the Sabres locker room.

7:58 - Sabres get another PP as old friend Tim Kennedy goes off for high sticking.

7:59 - 6:23 left in the 1st. Not the most offensive period you'll ever see.

8:03 - Sabres survive as the Panthers send a flurry of action towards the net.

8:03 - GOAL!

8:04 - BUF 1-0: Derek Roy finishes the play that a stickless Brayden McNabb started at the other end.

8:05 - McNabb's stick broke in the Sabres zone, then he kicked the puck over the blueline and eventually Roy got to it. Heady play by the rookie.

8:06 - Stafford and Ennis with the assists at 17:50.

8:14 - Sabres lead 1-0 after a very dull period of hockey. The two teams combine for 12 shots: BUF 7 - FLA 5

8:26 - Game on for period 2!

8:34 - Corey Tropp hasn't returned to the Sabres bench since he was hit by Kulikov in the 1st period. Tropp played just 1:38

8:37 - Hecht steals the puck at the blueline and feeds Ellis in front but his shot is stopped easily by Clemmensen

8:38 - Tropp will not return - upper body injury

8:41 - The well traveled Marco Sturm gets whistled for hooking Derek Roy behind the Sabres net. He'll now enjoy the view from the penalty box for 2 mins.

8:44 - Swing and a miss by Fleischmann in front of the Buffalo net. Looked like he slipped on a patch of ice on my driveway.

8:53 - 4:36 remaining in the 2nd period. We're still stuck at 1-0 BUF, but Panthers hold an 8-6 edge in shots this period.

8:55 - Hecht and Ehrhoff called for penalties just 10 second apart giving FLA a 5-on-3

8:56 - 1-1: That didn't take long. Florida's drops a bomb past Miller to even the score.

8:59 - Feels like I'm watching the Panthers of the past few years. They lull you to sleep, then score late in the period.

9:01 - End of 2: All even at 1-1. FLA outshoots BUF 10-6, now hold a 15-13 advantage.

9:18 - Game on!

9:25 - For those of you playing at home, they are now doing the wave. I encourage you to do the same.

9:25 - 14:10 left in the 3rd. Shots are even at 1-1. Seriously.

9:26 - Vanek goes off for high sticking. Panthers to the PP

9:39 - Sabres on the PP - Kopecky off for hooking

9:39 - Hecht just blocked a shot and limped to the Sabres locker room.

9:40 - Adam feeds Kassian with a nice back pass but he buries his shot into Clemmensen's left pad.

9:43 - 4:14 left. Deadlocked at 1-1. Florida holds a 5-3 edge in shots. I'd love to give you more, but it's been a quiet night

9:50 - Last minute of play in the 3rd

9:52 - We're headed to OOOOO-vertime!

9:53 - Florida leads 21-16 in shots after regulation

9:54 - Sabres start with 21/44/24/63

9:55 - Miller stops Versteeg in close

9:55 - McNabb steps into a shot from the point that Clemmensen hauls in with his glove

9:57 - GOAL!

9:57 - 2-1: Pominville goes in all alone and brings an end to the game!

9:58 - FINAL: Buffalo 2 -- Florida 1

Substance beats style for Sabres in OT win over Florida

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 10, 2011

BUFFALO — The NHL doesn't award style points, you know. The Sabres' 2-1 overtime triumph Friday against the scorching Florida Panthers was a dull, low-chance affair in which the teams combined for 43 shots.

Yawn.

Never mind that, though. The Sabres, just 6-8-2 inside the First Niagara Center this season, sorely needed a sturdy defensive effort at home after blowing a three-goal lead Wednesday. They'll take a win before their supporters any way they can generate one.

Besides, their two scores – Jason Pominville's overtime breakaway goal and another one-on-one tally from Derek Roy – electrified the capacity crowd of 18,690 fans.

That should suffice, right? A win is a win, and the Sabres only had one in their previous seven home tries entering Friday.

"We (bore) down on the two really good ones we had, and it ends up winning us the game," Pominville said about the scoring chances. "It's kind of weird how it goes sometimes. You create a ton of opportunities for yourself and you don't win a game, and tonight you don't create as much and we find a way to win.

"I don't know which one we'd rather have. We'll take the win."

Pominville won it 2:18 into overtime, grabbing Paul Szzechura's long pass near the Florida blue line, zooming in and beating goalie Scott Clemmensen between the pads.

Jordan Leopold's backhand chip to Szzechura created the play.

"It was a great play by out defenseman there, just a little chip," said Szzechura, who was recalled at noon following Rochester's morning skate. "Pommer did a great job beating the D-man. I just led him with a pass. Great finish. It was a great play."

Roy added: "Those are goals that we need – those two-on-ones, those breakaways, those three-on-twos."

Incredibly, the Sabres, down six regulars after getting two back Friday, lost two more players. With about 7:30 remaining in the first period, Florida defenseman Dmitry Kulikov hit rookie winger Corey Tropp, breaking his stick. Tropp, apparently bleeding from the mouth, went to straight to the dressing room and never returned. Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said he suffered a head injury.

Then, in the third period, center Jochen Hecht hobbled off after blocking a shot. More recalls could be coming.

It's the fifth straight game the Sabres have lost a player to injury.

"It was a very low-chance affair, both teams," Ruff said. "As soon as we lost a couple more bodies there we had no choice but to make sure we hunkered down and make sure we didn't make any big mistakes and give them easy opportunities."

Still, for the Sabres, a sloppy, mistake-prone home team this season, gutting out a close contest could go a long way. Now, with the New York Rangers in town tonight, the memory of Wednesday's awful 5-4 overtime loss to Philadelphia is gone.

"It was nice for the team to at least stay away from the stuff we did the other night," Ruff said. "It's been our biggest nemesis at home. You go back to game one at home – short-handed breakaway, short-handed breakaway, odd-numbered rush. ..."

"When we turned the corner last year at home, we played real good in our own end, took care of the puck, and I thought we took a step in the right direction tonight."

Sabres goalie Ryan Miller added: "It's probably not the most exciting thing for our fans, but I'm glad we stuck to our system. We had a tired team that was going to sit there and try to trap us up all night."

Indeed, the underrated Panthers, arguably the NHL's best story through two months, showcased little energy after winning their third straight game Thursday, a 2-0 victory in Boston.

Roy opened the scoring 17:50 into the game, his first goal since Nov. 14, an 11-game stretch.

Jason Garrison, quietly one of the game's best young defenseman, tied it on a two-man advantage 15:48 into the second period, blasting a one-timer from the left circle. Garrison's nine goals lead all NHL defenders.

Miller, who had a 4.05 home goals-against average, won his first game inside the FNC since Nov. 8.

"For my part, it's been a couple tough games here," said Miller, who made 22 saves. "... I'm just trying to shake it off, build some positive stuff."

Sabres rookie McNabb quickly becoming steady NHL regular

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 10, 2011

BUFFALO — When the Sabres started training camp almost three months ago, eight NHL defensemen and two or three with AHL experience ranked ahead of Brayden McNabb on the depth chart.

Realistically, McNabb, an elite prospect fresh off a dynamic junior season, hoped he could earn a small taste of the NHL in his first professional season.

“In camp, you look at the situation with all of the D-men they have signed,” McNabb said Friday inside the First Niagara Center prior to playing his sixth straight game, a 2-1 overtime win against the Florida Panthers. “It was little bit of a surprise how early it was.”

Just 25 games into his professional career, McNabb never expected he would see so much big league action so quickly. But the Sabres’ depth has been whittled away.

They waived and then buried Shaone Morrisonn in the minors. Tyler Myers, Mike Weber, Robyn Regehr and Jordan Leopold, who returned Friday at less than 100 percent, all got hurt.

The Sabres summoned T.J. Brennan from Rochester ahead of McNabb, but the 20-year-old stuck when Regehr returned. Brennan went back.

McNabb, 6-foot-4 and 204 pounds, has steadily seen his ice time increase. It reached 20:19 last week in Nashville.

“The first couple games everything was happening real quick,” McNabb said. “The more games I’m getting in, the slower it is getting for me in the way of moving the puck.”

Moving the puck is just one part of the large skill set McNabb possesses. With his huge frame, he’s physical and sometimes a lethal hitter. He flattened the Islanders’ Frans Nielsen at center ice last week.

He had 22 goals and 72 points in the Western Hockey League last season, and then 10 points in 19 contests with Rochester this year.

So far, McNabb has zero NHL points. He actually created Derek Roy’s first-period goal, though, kicking the puck away twice in his own zone after losing his stick. He also broke up a two-on-one.

“He’s getting better every game,” Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. “I thought he might’ve been our best player.”

The offense, McNabb believes, will eventually materialize.

“That comes with experience, I think – more games, the more comfortable I’ll get in the offensive zone,” McNabb said. “Maybe I’m a little timid right now jumping up.”

McNabb endured his worst game Wednesday in the Sabres’ 5-4 overtime loss, compiling a minus-3 against Philadelphia, arguably the league’s slickest club. His turnover also led to a Jaromir Jagr breakaway.

Still, Ruff has liked the rookie’s play.

“For a young defenseman, he’s handled it pretty well,” Ruff said. “Obviously, a couple mistakes (Wednesday), a puck that got blocked that turned into a breakaway. Defensively, I think he’s done a great job. The Flyers have great speed. . . . Their forwards are maybe not getting enough credit. That was probably as fast a group as Brayden as faced. I thought he handled it OK.”

McNabb skated with Leopold on Friday. He’s also played with Brennan, Regehr, Joe Finley and Andrej Sekera. Finley has been returned to Rochester.

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Sabres center Ville Leino, suspended one game for elbowing Philadelphia’s Matt Read in the head during the third period Wednesday, sat out.

With winger Nathan Gerbe (concussion) out and center Paul Gaustad (upper body) still sidelined, the Sabres recalled Paul Szczechura from Rochester on Friday afternoon. Winger Cody McCormick (10 games, concussion) played for first time since No. 14.

Leino, who had never been suspended or fined before, found out after the game he had accidentally elbowed Read.

“After I saw the replay myself, it looked a lot worse than it probably was on the ice,” Leino said. “It happened so quickly. I didn’t really hit him that hard with my elbow. I barely felt the guy. Nothing happened.”

Leino said he was off balance as he turned and tried to steal the puck.

“It just came up so quick I didn’t have time to react,” Leino said.

Leino was apologetic, insisting he’s “not going to hurt anyone.”

“I’m not trying to throw elbows,” he said. “I’ve never done anything like that. I was fired up playing against my old team and trying to work as hard as I can, win battles. Definitely that wasn’t my intention.”

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Ruff hinted backup goalie Jhonas Enroth, who’s sat three straight since Ryan Miller returned, will start tonight when the Sabres host the Rangers.

“We’ve got a tentative (goalie) schedule,” Ruff said. “For the most part, back-to-back situations he’s going to step in.”

Sabres Edge Panthers in OT 2-1

Dan Cave

WGR 550

December 9, 2011

It wasn't pretty, but the Sabres earned two points on home ice Friday night beating the Florida Panthers 2-1 in overtime. Jason Pominville was the recipient of a nice pass courtesy of Paul Szczechura, and provided the game-winner on a breakaway chance 2:19 into the extra frame.

The Sabres opened the scoring at 17:50 of the first period when Derek Roy cashed in with his 7th of the year. Brayden McNabb got the play started by kicking the puck to Tyler Ennis, who then battled along the boards to free up a pass to Drew Stafford, who hit a streaking Roy who converted the clean-cut breakaway opportunity.

It stayed 1-0 Buffalo until 15:48 of the second. With both Christian Ehrhoff and Jochen Hecht in the penalty box, Jason Garrison took advantage of the 5-on-3 chance and ripped a one-timer past Ryan Miller to the game 1-1. Both teams were short on offensive chances as the game wore on before Pominville won it in overtime.

With the win, Buffalo (32 pts.) draws to within three of division leader Boston (35 pts.). The Sabres finish off a pair of back-to-back home games on Saturday night when they welcome in the New York Rangers. Pregame with Brian Koziol will get underway at 6:00 pm. on WGR SportsRadio 550 and Rick Jeanneret, Harry Neale, and Rob Ray will have the call at 7:00 p.m.

Sabres Leopold returns, Gaustad not ready

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 9, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jordan Leopold returns from an upper body injury after missing three games. That sends Joe Finley back to Rochester. Lindy Ruff had been saying that pain tolerance is the key to him returning. Leopold said, "Yes, that's the case. Last game I wanted to play, but I don't think I was where I needed to be to go out there and battle, but tonight is a different story, I feel good and I should be able to go out there and do what I need to do." Ruff is glad to have him back, "I think Joe was progressing, make some strides with us, but obviously getting Jordan back is going to be a plus for us. We've got to get him up and running, I don't think he's 100%, but he's good enough to play."

Paul Gaustad took the suspended Ville Leino's spot on the line with Zack Kassian and Luke Adam, but he's not ready. Paul Szczechura has been called up from Rochester. Many have wondered why he and Darcy Regier have been so secretive about call ups. Buffalo is so close to the salary cap, if it waits until a certain time in the day, that day doesn't go against the cap. Ruff said, "Yes, a lot of that goes into it now. it's just not call up, call down."

Nathan Gerbe is out with a concussion so Cody McCormick takes his spot on the LW with Matt Ellis and Corey Tropp.

The other two lines remain the same.

Andrej Sekera missed practice Thursday, but was back on the ice and will play.

Lindy Ruff said Jhonas Enroth will go back to playing in back to back situations. With Ryan Miller in goal tonight, that means Enroth likely plays vs the Rangers tomorrow.

The Sabres have won just five of 15 games here at home. In this building Miller is 1-5-1. On the other hand vs Florida, Miller is 12-8-0 with a 2.37 goals against. He shut them out in Sunrise this year.

The Sabres are still in 3rd place in the Northeast Division, three in back of Toronto and five behind Boston. Buffalo has one game in hand on the Leafs. Despite all the losing lately, they're still 7th in the East, but are two points out of 12th.

Florida has won three in a row and four out of five. That includes a 2-0 shutout of the Bruins in Boston last night. Jose Theodore got the shutout, but has a cold and isn't feeling well. Kevin Dineen mentioned earlier this week that Scott Clemmensen would play this game. He's 3-0-0

with a 2.33 goals against and .916 save percentage. His wins have come in Dallas, in San Jose and home vs Washington.

I don't think many figured Florida for 1st place in the Southeast, seven points in front of Washington. The Panthers are one point behind the top spot in the East which is Pittsburgh.

The line of Stephen Weiss, Kris Versteeg and Tomas Fleischmann has been stellar for the Panthers. All have 29 points which ties them for 11th in league scoring. For the Sabres, Jason Pominville is tied with them also with 29 points, Tomas Vanek is 18th in league scoring with 28. Just about ten days ago, Vanek was 2nd in league scoring.

Versteeg has slumped a little lately with one goal in six games, Fleischmann has five points in three games while Weiss has six points in three games.

Join the Bulldog for the pregame at 6:30 when he'll be joined by Lindy Ruff, Jordan Leopold, Thomas Vanek and Ville Leino.

Sabres Leino accepts his suspension

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 9, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Ville Leino won't play for the Sabres tonight as he's been suspended one game for elbowing the Flyers Matt Read in the head. The Sabres forward didn't seem surprised, "I didn't try to hurt anyone there, so I got one game, I'll sit down today and get ready for tomorrow."

Leino was trying to take the puck from Read and was successful, but the elbow came up too. Leino said, "I was off balance and I was trying to lift the stick with my left leg and get the puck on the right. My elbow then hit his shoulder and then hit his head slightly, but it came up so quick, I didn't realize it.

Leino still seemed like he was sorry, "I'm not trying to hurt anyone and I'm not going to throw elbows at anyone. I've never done anything like that. I was fired up playing against my old team and to work as hard as I can and win battles and the elbow wasn't my intention."

This doesn't come at a good time. Leino has points in four of five games scoring a goal and four assists. He said, "I feel really good out there, I feel comfortable with my linemates and my skating, but it's just one game and luckily we have a game on Saturday so I'll just take a rest and get ready for tomorrow and pick up where I left off."

Sabres take 'Tux and Pucks' out of closet

James Fink

Buffalo Business First

December 9, 2011

“Tux and Pucks” is returning to ring in the new year.

The Buffalo Sabres announced they are bringing back the New Year’s Eve “Tux and Pucks” promotion for the Dec. 31 game against the Ottawa Senators at First Niagara Center. “Tux and Pucks,” once a popular promotion during the late 1970s and 1980s, was dropped more than a decade ago.

Under the terms of the promotion, Sabres fans purchase a \$149.95 package that includes a tuxedo rental from Tuxedo Junction, two game tickets and a pair of tickets to the pre-game tailgate party. Only 100 “Tux and Pucks” packages are available.

In addition, Tuxedo Junction is also offering a special rate on tuxedo rentals for Sabres fans that have already purchased tickets to the game and all season ticket holders. Any fan who is already attending the game can bring their ticket to a Tuxedo Junction location to receive a complete tuxedo rental for \$20.12.

Ticket packages are available at the First Niagara Center box office, online at www.sabres.com, or by calling 1-888-GO-SABRES.

Marcus Foligno leads Rochester Amerks in shutout win

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

December 10, 2011

The house where Marcus Foligno lives is much quieter these days.

A little boring too.

Such is life when his two roommates — Zack Kassian and Brayden McNabb — get called up to the NHL and Foligno remains with the [Rochester Americans](#).

"There are a lot of creaks and cracks at night now," he said. "I locked all the doors, I locked my bedroom door. Very creepy.

"But I'm glad for Zack and McNabb; they deserved it. We've become pretty good friends the last three years since being drafted (in 2009)."

At some point — maybe this season, maybe next — Foligno will be enjoying the [NHL](#) life too. When the Buffalo Sabres call him up depends very much on their needs and his progression in the American Hockey League.

He showed more signs of solid progress on Friday night in helping the Amerks defeat the Albany Devils 3-0 at Blue Cross Arena at the Rochester Community War Memorial.

The 6-foot-3, 227-pound rookie left winger scored the game's first goal, helped create offensive-zone chaos before the second goal by Alex Biega, and was good away from the puck, too.

Doing it over and over, shift after shift and game after game, is the trick.

"He's learning that now," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said of the consistency aspect of Foligno's game. "He's growing game to game, practice to practice.

"When you're the elite player in junior, you can stay out for two minutes and actually be productive for 30 seconds of it. At this level, your shifts have to be much shorter and you're going hard the whole time."

In 22 games, Foligno has 9 goals, 2 assists and 11 points. His plus/minus rating is plus-3.

His goal on Friday was hardly a thing of beauty. Rolston and his coaching staff liked it though. Rather than try to be fancy, he simply took off out of the left corner with the puck, barged his way toward the goal mouth and got lucky.

The puck hit a defenseman's stick, kicked up in the air, parachuted over the left shoulder of goalie Jeff Frazee and dropped into the net, without the goaltender ever knowing where it had gone.

Amerks 1-0, at 14:47 of the first [period](#).

"Earlier in the period I tried to do a move around a guy and it didn't work," Foligno said. "Believe me, that's not my game. I just have to keep my feet moving and get to the net.

"For me, it's getting in tight and in goalies' faces."

The early goals gave the Amerks a comfort zone. Then they did something unusual: They played an even better second period and, instead of squandering the lead, built on it when Derek Whitmore scored a power-play goal at 9:01.

"That was a good surprise," Rolston said.

Rangers' Anisimov apologizes about celebration

Andrew Gross

Bergen Record

December 9, 2011

GREENBURGH, N.Y. – Artem Anisimov is sorry for his stick-as-a-rifle goal celebration.

"I just want to say I apologize to Tampa, I didn't mean something by it, it's just my celebration," Anisimov said after the Rangers' practice Friday. "When I score a goal, I want to do some unusual celebration."

But while the Rangers' emerging 23-year-old playmaker swore he'll never aim his stick – and pull the trigger — he'll still celebrate. Surely he's hoping to get a chance to show off other displays tonight in Buffalo.

Anisimov's celebration after his first career short-handed goal in Thursday's 3-2 shootout loss to the Lightning touched off a wild melee, particularly since it appeared Anisimov was aiming at Lightning captain Vinny Lecavalier, who was the first to react. Anisimov said he was just aiming at the net.

"I never do this celebration again, it's a good lesson for me," said Anisimov, who apologized to his teammates immediately after the game but was kept from speaking to the media by coach John Tortorella until Friday. "I do some different stuff I have in my pocket, no more shooting."

Anisimov said he was trying to emulate Russian defenseman Ilja Gorokhov, an eighth-round pick of the Rangers in 1995 who played for Anisimov's hometown team in Yaroslavl and now plays for Moscow Dynamo.

"When I grow up in Yaroslavl, one guy, he scores goals, he's a defenseman and every goal he celebrates like this," said Anisimov, who has five goals and 12 assists. "I watch him and I like it and I tell myself when I'm going to play in the NHL and I score a goal, I do the same thing."

Now, Tortorella, in a self-described "protective mode" Thursday, believes Anisimov will move on. He warned the media to do so as well.

"It's a big part of his success this year that he's gained confidence in himself and he's gained confidence in interacting, he's speaking better," Tortorella said. "I think he's level-headed enough to know that he made a mistake. He's spoken on it and he's just going to go back and be himself and just play."

BRIEFS: Left wing Mike Rupp (left knee), who underwent surgery to repair a torn meniscus on Nov. 9, told The Record he hopes to begin participating in contact drills next week. "It doesn't feel great, but it doesn't feel bad," Rupp said. "As long as it's not getting worse, we can keep progressing. ..." Marc Staal (post-concussion symptoms) accompanied the team to Buffalo, but Rupp, Wojtek Wolski (sports hernia) and defenseman Mike Sauer (concussion) did not.

NY Rangers' Artem Anisimov apologizes to teammates and Tampa Bay Lightning, says he will never repeat Thursday's goal celebration in future

Anisimov learns his lesson following Thursday's loss to Tampa Bay

Pat Leonard

New York Daily News

December 9, 2011

[Artem Anisimov](#) apologized to his teammates Thursday night for his explosive second-period goal celebration at the Garden, and Friday morning, he apologized to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The 23-year-old Russian winger said he meant no disrespect when he bent down on one knee and fired a pretend gun shot at the Lightning net, after scoring shorthanded in a 3-2 Rangers loss that went to, of all things, a shootout.

“I apologize to Tampa. I didn’t mean something bad for them,” said Anisimov, who has worked to improve his English. “It’s just my celebration, and I want to score goal(s) and do something unusual on the ice. I’ll say one more time, I apologize to Tampa.”

Anisimov, who grew up in Yaroslavl, Russia, said he borrowed the celebration from defenseman [Ilya Gorokhov](#), a former teammate on Lokomotiv of the Kontinental Hockey League and a Rangers eighth-round draft selection in 1995 who never played with the Blueshirts.

“I told myself when I go to play in the NHL and I score a goal, I’ll do the same thing, you know?” Anisimov said.

After the loss, [John Tortorella](#) shielded the young winger from the media to “protect him.” But Friday in Greenburgh, Anisimov answered for his actions, which led to a melee, left his team shorthanded and earned him a two-minute minor for unsportsmanlike conduct as well as a 10-minute misconduct.

“I’ll never do this celebration again. It’s a good lesson for me,” he said, adding this will not stop him from celebrating goals altogether. “I’ll do some different stuff I have in my pocket. No more shooting, though.”

He’ll have his next opportunity Saturday night in Buffalo, when the Rangers (15-6-4) visit the Sabres (14-11-2) looking to snap a two-game losing streak. They are not discouraged about picking up just one point in their last two games, despite coughing up a 2-1 lead to Tampa Bay in Thursday’s shootout loss.

“It’s not a tragedy or anything,” [Marian Gaborik](#), who leads the Rangers with 13 goals, said of Thursday’s loss. “I think we played a pretty good game. We still got a point, but we have to have those two points. We’re going to Buffalo right now and we’re still playing good hockey, so we want to bounce back as soon as we can.”

Meanwhile, the Rangers say they have moved from Anisimov's celebration that created quite a stir.

"It's going to get talked about a little more, but I think for us, it's over," said [Brandon Dubinsky](#), one of the first Rangers to defend Anisimov when [Vincent Lecavalier](#) and other Lightning players came after the Russian.

"He didn't have to do that, apologize to us," said Gaborik, the Slovakian winger. "We all know he's a humble guy and he meant it in a good way, as a celebration. In Europe, it's big that you can celebrate after a (goal), and he didn't mean it in a bad way. He didn't mean it at all."

Anisimov apologizes to Rangers, Lightning

Stephen Marcus

Newsday

December 9, 2011

GREENBURGH, N.Y. -- Artem Anisimov said his rifle-like pointing of his stick after scoring Thursday night against Tampa Bay was a matter of friendly fire, but he apologized for the gesture -- which prompted a melee and earned him 16 minutes in penalties -- and promised it will not be part of his goal-scoring celebrations.

"I just want to say I apologize to Tampa," he said after practice Friday. "I didn't mean something bad. It's just my celebration. I score a goal and I want to do something unusual, celebrate on ice. I say one more time I apologize to Tampa. I never do this celebration again. It's a good lesson for me. I do some different stuff I have in my pocket. No more shooting."

Lightning captain Vinny Lecavalier was the first player to confront Anisimov after the incident, which resulted in five players receiving penalties. "He points his stick like he fires at our net; I'm sure his teammates and their coach were not impressed with that," Lecavalier told the Tampa Tribune. "We were offended and it's disrespectful. It's not like he was happy to score a goal and did some type of [fist] pump; it was directly at our net and our goalie."

Anisimov, 23, said he was not directing his gesture toward anyone. "I point my stick to the net," he said, "not for the goalie, not for Vinny."

Anisimov said he learned the rifle celebration move as a youngster and did it a couple of times in Russia. "When I grow up, one guy, he score a goal and he celebrated like this," he said. "I told myself when I play [NHL](#) and I score a goal, I do same thing."

Anisimov tried to make things right with his teammates after the 3-2 shootout loss to Tampa Bay. "He apologized to the team for the situation that he put us into," [Brian Boyle](#) said. "Hopefully he just forgets about the whole thing. Goal celebrations are a fun part of the game."

[Brandon Dubinsky](#) added, "He's not the type of guy who means anything malicious by it." But he understood Tampa Bay's reaction, saying, "Rightfully so. If I was in that position, I would have been upset, too. That's water under the bridge now. We're ready to move on. It's going to be talked about a little more. I think for us, it's over."

[John Tortorella](#) did not let Anisimov speak to the media Thursday night, giving him a day to think about his actions. He does not want the center to lose his edge over this. "A big part of his success this year is that he's gained confidence in himself," he said. "He's gained confidence in interacting, he's speaking better. I think he's level-headed enough to know he made a mistake and he's just going to go back and be himself and just play."

Rangers' Anisimov apologizes for sparking TB melee

Tim Bontemps

New York Post

December 9, 2011

When Artem Anisimov dropped to a knee, pointed his stick at the Tampa Bay net and pretended it was a shotgun after scoring his shorthanded goal in the second period of the Rangers' 3-2 shootout loss to the Lightning on Thursday, he never expected the reaction that followed.

"I am surprised a little bit," said a contrite Anisimov after yesterday's practice, speaking for the first time since the incident. "I just want to say I apologize to Tampa [Bay]. I didn't mean something by it to them.

"It's just my celebration and, when I score goals, I want to do something unusual. I apologize to Tampa [Bay]."

Anisimov, who will be in Buffalo with the Rangers for tonight's game with the Sabres, said he picked up the celebration from his former teammate with Lokomotiv Yaroslavl in Russia. He said defenseman Ilya Gorokhov would celebrate each of his goals that way.

"When he scored a goal, he celebrated like this," Anisimov said. "I watched and I liked it, and I told myself, 'When I go to the NHL and score a goal, I'll do the same thing.' "

Doing so, however, prompted a strong reaction from the Lightning. Tampa Bay captain Vincent Lecavalier responded by charging after the 23-year-old center. Several of his teammates soon followed, leading to a scuffle between the two teams.

Anisimov received a two-minute unsportsmanlike-conduct penalty, a double minor and a 10-minute misconduct after he wrestled with Tampa Bay forward Steve Downie, who left the bench to chase him down Anisimov in the ensuing fracas.

"It's been talked about enough, I think," said Brandon Dubinsky, who fought Tampa Bay's Marc-Andre Bergeron in the aftermath of the celebration. "He's not the type of guy that means anything malicious by it. If I was in their position, I'd have been upset, too. We're ready to move on from it."

Anisimov, who apologized to his teammates, appreciated the team had his back on the ice.

"One for all, and all for one, you know?" he said.

After finishing his rookie season with 12 goals and 28 points two seasons ago, Anisimov improved to 18 goals and 44 points last year. This year, he's scored five goals through 25 games, and, with 17 points, is fourth on the team in scoring, and is on pace to surpass last year's totals.

Rangers coach John Tortorella attributed Anisimov's improvement to an increased confidence in himself, and hopes Thursday night's events do nothing to change that.

"It's a big part of his success this year, that he's gained confidence in himself," Tortorella said. "He's gained confidence in interacting, he's speaking better. I think he's level-headed enough to know he made a mistake, he's spoken on it, and he's just gonna go back to being himself, and just play."

Brian Boyle, whose locker is next to Anisimov's, feels the same way.

"Hopefully he just forgets about the whole thing. Goal celebrations are a fun part of the game. As long as he keeps scoring, we're gonna be happy.

"He's had some interesting ones in the past ... not really sure what he was trying to accomplish, but we got the goal, so we were happy."

* Tortorella said defenseman Michael Sauer, who missed Thursday's game with a concussion, is day-to-day.

Rangers lose to Lightning in shootout after 'wrong' celebration

Larry Brooks

New York Post

December 9, 2011

When Rangers forward Artem Anisimov pulled an imaginary trigger while dropping to one knee in a sniper's pose in the right circle, his stick aimed like a rifle at the Lightning net after scoring a second-period goal at the Garden last night, he triggered a series of events that concluded with coach [John Tortorella](#) launching an impassioned defense of the 23-year-old Russian even while calling his display "wrong."

Anisimov was charged at first by Tampa Bay captain Vincent Lecavalier, then by a handful of Lightning players defending their colors and their pride in what became a 3-2 shootout victory for the visitors.

The Rangers led 2-1 until [Dominic Moore](#) tied the match on a shorthanded goal of his own with 1:57 to play in regulation before getting the only score in the skills competition.

"It was the wrong thing to do, we all know that, but he's a solid, solid guy who made a mistake," said Tortorella, who did not permit Anisimov to speak to the press following the match. "I want to protect him; I still don't think he really understands.

"I don't blame Tampa (Bay) at all for the way they reacted. I would hope our team would do the same thing. Artie knows it was wrong. He feels awful about it. He apologized to the team right away.

"I don't want this to be a bigger deal than it is," said Tortorella, who will have Anisimov available to the media following today's practice. "He's a good kid; he's not an idiot, and there are some idiots in our league.

"Our leadership group will take over and help him through this."

Anisimov, who was given a two-minute unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for excessive celebration plus a double minor and a 10-minute misconduct for wrestling with [Steve Downie](#) — who came off the bench to get involved in the fracas — has been expressive before in celebrating goals, even though those types of displays are contrary to what Tortorella preaches.

Before Tortorella spoke, [Sean Avery](#) told The Post that it would be wrong for anyone who hasn't played in the NHL to judge Anisimov.

"Unless you have played a game in the NHL, nobody should have an opinion on what Artie did," Avery said. "It's not for anyone else to say what 'the code' is or isn't.

"We'll deal with that in here as a club. That's not why we lost the game."

The Rangers ultimately lost the game because they could not put away the Lightning after a strong opening 20 minutes and could not convert several glorious opportunities in overtime against [Mathieu Garon](#) after being outshot 23-11 over the second and third periods.

“We got sloppy,” said Brad Richards. “We maybe could have buried one or two more in the first on our power plays to take the life out of them but we didn’t and they were able to hang around, which always becomes a dangerous situation.”

Ryan Callahan did score a first-period power-play goal, but the Rangers failed on two other man-advantages in the opening period and then three more in the third to allow Moore to be in position to tie the game.

Still, lost opportunities and the lost second point didn’t dominate the post-game talk. It was the display by Anisimov — who got seven shifts without incident after being released from the box — that did.

“I don’t think Artie was doing it against their team, but obviously Vinny is going to think that without knowing Artie,” Richards said. “Artie wasn’t trying to embarrass anybody, he was celebrating a nice goal.

“Artie won’t do that again. We’ll all move on from that.”

With injured defenseman Michael Sauer out Thursday, NY Rangers turn to Anton Stralman to help blueliners

Missing Marc Staal and Michael Sauer, Rangers defense put to test

Kristie Ackert

New York Daily News

December 7, 2011

At least the Rangers' defensemen are prepared for this. All season they have played without All-Star [defenseman Marc Staal](#), and have actually played pretty well. Thursday night, it is likely they will be without [Michael Sauer](#), another of their top-four defensemen when they host the Lightning at the Garden.

After taking a crushing hit Monday night from the Maple Leafs' [defenseman Dion Phaneuf](#), Sauer was diagnosed with a concussion. He is listed as "day to day," according to Rangers coach [John Tortorella](#), who had to be happy that he is just down one more man on defense — and not two.

[Michael Del Zotto](#), who crashed into the boards head-first Monday night, was back at practice Wednesday and grateful not to have been severely injured..

"I got out of that a little lucky," Del Zotto said. "I watched it once after the game. It was scary. I had a lot of people texting and calling to see if I was OK."

For a team that began its season without its top defenseman, the Rangers' blueline has been impressive. Staal is still recovering from a concussion suffered last season. Even without him, the Rangers blueliners have been among the best in the NHL.

The Rangers are fifth in the NHL in goals against, allowing just 53 in 24 games. They have also been a big part of the Rangers offense. Behind [Ryan McDonagh](#)'s four goals and 13 points, Ranger defensemen have scored 12 goals and have 43 points this season.

"It's a team defense," said [Steve Eminger](#), who is likely to be paired with Del Zotto in Sauer's absence. "The forwards are all coming back on defense, the goaltenders have been great if there is any breakdowns,. So we've been able to have guys step in there when there are injuries and just play within the system."

Stepping in Thursday night will be [Anton Stralman](#), who will be active for only the second time since signing with the Rangers signed him on Nov. 5.

Stralman said that he felt like he was "chasing the pace," when he played in the Nov. 23 loss to the Panthers. After practicing with the Rangers for over a month now, he said he "has more jump," in his legs.

Tortorella said he will have to fit into the fast-paced flow of the Rangers system.

“That comes with just not playing too, it will just take some time, to get into the tempo of game. That is very difficult when all you do is practice,” Tortorella said of Stralman. “We are trying to play with pace and speed, it will take him a little bit of time. But that’s the concentration. We want him to defend. We know he has some offensive instincts and he probably see some power play time along the way. The key is to play fast and get within the tempo of the game as quickly as possible.”

FLASHES

[Mike Rupp](#) (knee) practiced with the team for the first time since arthroscopic surgery last month. He wore an orange non-contact jersey, but went through drills. He said there is no timetable for his return yet.