



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Tuesday, December 13, 2011*

## **Szczechura's production earns top line promotion**

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 13, 2011

Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville, the wingers on the Sabres' top line, have been teammates for eight years. They know each other well. As for center Paul Szczechura ...

"I've known him for the four games he's been here," Vanek said Monday.

Of all the new names popping in and out of the Buffalo lineup lately, Szczechura's sticks out -- and not just because it's uncommon. Unlike Corey Tropp, T.J. Brennan, Brayden McNabb and other newcomers, Szczechura didn't get drafted by the organization. Technically, he's never participated in a Buffalo training camp.

Yet there he was Monday in the middle of the Sabres' top scorers, reprising the role he starred in for the first time Saturday. He's expected to be there again tonight when the Sabres host the Ottawa Senators.

"They're top players in this league, so I'm just going to try and contribute every way I can," Szczechura said in First Niagara Center. "I just want to play my game. Obviously, I was there because I was playing my game, and I didn't want to change that.

"I just want to focus on the things that I was doing well to get to that position. I didn't want to change a thing. I just wanted to keep it simple, make plays, play with confidence and just sort of go from there."

Szczechura got the first-line call because of production and necessity. He entered Saturday's 4-1 loss to the Rangers with three assists in his first three games.

"We really need somebody that can make some plays in there, has some offensive talent and can be a little creative," coach Lindy Ruff said. "There wasn't a lot of other options, really. I liked the way that [Ville] Leino and Luke [Adam] and [Zack] Kassian have been playing, so it was really the only spot for him."

Szczechura is obviously happy for the opportunity. The chance at a role like this is what prompted him to sign with the Sabres over the summer. He spent four seasons bouncing between the Tampa Bay Lightning and their minor-league squad, including all of 2010-11 in Norfolk.

"The new ownership came in, and everything looked positive," he said of the Sabres. "It looked like there was some opportunity here. Fortunately for me, it's working out right now."

An inability to participate in training camp added to the Szczechura intrigue. He suffered a knee injury during last spring's playoffs and wasn't ready to join his new mates until November.

"It was definitely a different situation," he said. "I wasn't around the guys as much. I wasn't in the games. I wasn't scrimmaging. That was tough. Kind of walking in here a week or two ago, guys kind of saw my face but didn't really know who I was."

Production has a way of speeding up the acclimation process.

"He's not put in easy situations, but he brings that NHL experience," Pominville said. "It's unfortunate we didn't have a chance to see him in training camp because he was injured, but he's stepped in and played well."

The 83 games Szczechura played for the Lightning between 2008 and 2010 prepared him for the recent call-ups. He played on all four lines during his time with Tampa, recording nine goals and seven assists.

The numbers are coming quickly in Buffalo despite having little time to prepare. The practice Monday was Szczechura's first with the Sabres. He'd been a last-minute call-up for most of his games.

"You've got to come to the rink ready to play no matter where you're playing," he said. "Definitely, having that [NHL] experience helps me. The second time around here has definitely been good so far, and I just want to keep going forward."

## **Three Sabres say farewell to injured list**

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 13, 2011

The Sabres, in a change of pace, are actually getting healthier.

Defenseman Mike Weber and forwards Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta participated fully in practice Monday. Coach Lindy Ruff said both forwards might play against Ottawa tonight in First Niagara Center, while Weber told The News he is cleared to return.

"I'm just extremely excited to hopefully get back in the lineup [tonight] and be ready to go," said Weber, who will wait for word from Ruff on his roster status. "I got cleared by the doctors, so I'm just glad I get to play now."

Weber told The News he suffered a broken first rib during a hit against New Jersey on Nov. 16.

"The first couple days were pretty painful, but after that I've been back practicing," Weber said. "I was just waiting for the bone to heal. That took the longest time, so I'm just ready to go now."

The injury didn't prohibit Weber from skating, so he feels he's in game shape.

"I was able to skate and keep the cardio up and get to move at game speed," Weber said. "I think it'll help."

Rookie call-up Brayden McNabb was still with the team Monday. If Ruff opts to insert Weber, the Sabres could send McNabb back to Rochester or scratch struggling D-man Marc-Andre Gragnani.

Kaleta is recovering from a groin injury that has limited him to just seven minutes of ice time since Nov. 19. He had been skating in a noncontact role. He pronounced Monday as his "best day by far."

"I'm on the verge here of coming back," Kaleta said. "I'm ready to get back out there and compete."

\* \* \* \*

Tyler Myers, out since suffering a broken wrist Nov. 19, has begun light puckhandling drills. The defenseman is still expected to be sidelined another one to three weeks.

"He skates early every day," Ruff said. "He's actually now just handling the puck on a limited basis. He's been doing off-ice workouts. He's been doing the on-ice skating. He just can't handle the puck to a high degree right now."

"The encouraging part is he's got the stick back in his hand, and he's using it."

\* \* \* \*

The Sabres made a holiday visit to Women & Children's Hospital following Monday's practice.

"There was a sign-up sheet, and every guy on the team signed up," Kaleta said. "It shows right there what kind of team we have."

It was the second straight day of spreading Christmas cheer for Kaleta. He and members of his HITS Foundation visited the League for the Handicapped's Preschool Learning Center in Springville on Sunday. The foundation, which stands for Helping Individuals to Smile, got the kids' wish lists and had Santa Claus deliver presents.

"It's the best feeling in the world when you see someone like that smile. It makes your day," Kaleta said. "I was happy my foundation was able to help out."

\* \* \* \*

The Sabres close their five-game homestand with visits by the Senators tonight and Toronto on Friday. Ruff is ready.

"It should just be a great, emotional week," he said. "You get to play the teams you like to hate."

\* \* \* \*

Fans can get 20 percent off their purchases at the Sabres Store by participating in "Shredding Day" on Saturday at two First Niagara Bank locations (1455 French Road in Cheektowaga and 4435 Transit Road in Williamsville). Fans can bring in personal documents to be shredded to help fight identity theft. ... The Junior Sabres and the Sabres Alumni Association will host a "Teddy Bear Toss" when the team hosts Brampton at 7:30 p.m. Monday in Northtown Center at Amherst. When the Junior Sabres score their first goal, fans will be encouraged to toss a new, unwrapped bear onto the ice. All collected items will be donated to needy local families.

## **Sabres continue homestand against Sens**

Frank Mentesana

NHL.com

December 12, 2011

### **SENATORS (13-13-4) at SABRES (15-12-2)**

**TV:** SNET-E, TVA, MSG-B

**Last 10:** Ottawa 3-4-3; Buffalo 3-5-2.

**Season series:** Tuesday's matchup is the third of six meetings between these Northeast Division rivals, who square off two more times in December. These clubs played twice in a six-day span in early November, with Buffalo continuing its recent success over the Senators. The Sabres have won six straight over the Sens, including four in a row at home.

On Nov. 5 in Ottawa, [Derek Roy](#) scored a goal in regulation and again in the sixth round of the shootout to give Buffalo a 3-2 victory. On Nov. 11 at the First Niagara Center, Roy notched a goal and two assists, [Drew Stafford](#) posted three assists and [Jhonas Enroth](#) made 36 saves in the Sabres' 5-1 win. Enroth was the winning goaltender in both affairs, while [Craig Anderson](#) took the loss in each contest -- and was pulled in the second meeting after allowing two goals on six shots in the first 2:25.

**Big Story:** Both teams have just three wins in their last 10 games. After turning some heads in the first month of the season, the Senators are now a .500 club, having lost three in a row and going 1-3-2 in their last six. For the Sabres, home has not been so sweet, dropping seven of their last nine games at the First Niagara Center. Overall, Buffalo has not won back-to-back games since a four-game winning streak from Nov. 4-11.

#### **Team Scope:**

**Senators:** The Senators gave five man-advantage opportunities to the top-ranked power play in the League on Saturday, and it cost them. Vancouver visited Scotiabank Place and scored two power-play goals en route to a 4-1 victory, as Ottawa's lone goal came from [Colin Greening](#). The Sens had five chances on the power play as well, but could not convert -- they didn't even register a shot on a two-man advantage for 1:18 early in the third period when they trailed 3-1.

"When it comes down to it, their power play was better than ours," coach Paul MacLean said.

"We're always concerned when we don't win. I think the way that we did it tonight, we played hard against a real good team. We played them physical but there are still areas of our game that have to get better."

**Sabres:** Buffalo is 1-1-1 on its current five-game homestand, which has featured three of the toughest teams in the Eastern Conference. After a loss to Philadelphia and a win over Florida (both decisions came in overtime), the Sabres were defeated by the Rangers 4-1 on Saturday to fall to 7-9-2 at home. Only 1:04 after New York took a 1-0 lead, [Thomas Vanek](#) responded with his team-leading 14th goal of the season to knot the score midway through the second. But Vanek's tally was the only one of Buffalo's 33 shots to elude former Sabre Martin Biron, as the Rangers controlled play from that point. The Sabres fell behind 2-1 late in the period when they surrendered their second shorthanded goal of the stanza. Two more New York goals in the third - including one on the power play -- provided the final margin.

Enroth was in goal for the first time in just over a week and suffered his third consecutive loss. The Swedish netminder, who won his first six decisions this season, has dropped six of his last seven.

"The last couple of games have been a little worse than the beginning of the year," Enroth said. "Hockey goes up and down, just like normal life. So it's nothing I'm walking around and thinking about. I always trust myself and trust my skills."

**Who's Hot:** Senators forward [Milan Michalek](#), who is tied with Toronto's Phil Kessel and Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos for the League lead with 18 goals, has scored in five of his last seven. In addition, [Jason Spezza](#) has five assists in his last five games. ... Buffalo forward [Jason Pominville](#) has points in his last three and six of his last seven (two goals, five assists).

**Injury Report:** Ottawa welcomed a couple of players back into the lineup on Saturday. Forward [Peter Regin](#) played his first game since Oct. 20 and defenseman [Matt Carkner](#) made his season debut. With those two players suiting up, that leaves [Filip Kuba](#) (upper body) on IR, while [Sergei Gonchar](#) (upper body) missed Saturday's game and is day-to-day. ... The injury-riddled Sabres could be getting some players back soon as well. Coach Lindy Ruff told the team's website that forwards [Paul Gaustad](#) (upper body) and [Patrick Kaleta](#) (groin) are close to returning, and he "expects one or even both to be back sometime this week." Ruff also said there is a possibility that defenseman [Mike Weber](#) (upper body) will play against Ottawa. There is still no timetable for the return of [Tyler Myers](#) (broken wrist), who remains sidelined along with [Brad Boyes](#) (knee), [Nathan Gerbe](#) (head), [Corey Tropp](#) (upper body) and [Jochen Hecht](#) (lower body).

**Stat Pack:** After giving up two shorthanded goals to the Rangers on Saturday, the Sabres have now allowed five shorthanded goals this season, tied with two other teams for second-most in the League. All five of those goals have come in Buffalo's barn. ... The Senators lead the League in third-period scoring with 43 goals, but they have also allowed 42 goals in the final stanza, second-most in the NHL.

**Puck Drop:** It's still only December, but the Sabres -- seventh in the East with 32 points -- have a stretch of critical games leading them into the short Christmas break. They will play two games against the Sens (including Tuesday's matchup), two games against another division rival in Toronto, and one game in Pittsburgh on Dec. 17.

"It's March all the time. You lose the points now, they're hard to get later on," Vanek told the team's website. "We definitely want to finish out good here before our little Christmas break. That's definitely our focus."

The Sens, who are last in the Northeast with 30 points, don't exactly have it easy themselves, despite returning home for a four-game homestand after Tuesday's match in Buffalo. Ottawa will take on Boston, the Penguins and the Panthers on the homestand, along with the other meeting against the Sabres.



## **Ottawa (13-13-4) at Buffalo (15-12-2)**

Alan Ferguson

STATS

December 12, 2011

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) might be getting healthier just in time for what they've deemed an important set of games.

They'll try to begin that stretch by continuing their recent dominance of the visiting [Ottawa Senators](#) on Tuesday night.

Plagued by injuries for much of this season, Buffalo (15-12-2) had four players scratched and another four on injured reserve during a 4-1 home loss to the [New York Rangers](#) on Saturday, the team's first regulation defeat in four games.

The Sabres, though, might get a couple of those players back this week. Coach Lindy Ruff said Monday that defenseman [Mike Weber](#) (upper body) might return as early as Tuesday, and forwards [Paul Gaustad](#) (upper body) and [Patrick Kaleta](#) (lower body) could be back on the ice in any of the next three games.

Buffalo will face Northeast Division rivals Ottawa (13-13-4) and Toronto in its next two contests and four of its next five. The Sabres visit the Senators at Scotiabank Place next Tuesday as part of a three-game trip that begins in Pittsburgh on Saturday.

"It's a big week for us," Ruff said. "We're getting a little bit healthier, and that's a big plus for us. ... I think we've got a lot of good things coming back into the fold, and it should be just a great, emotional week. You get to play the teams you like to hate."

Ruff might label the Senators a team his club doesn't like, but the Sabres certainly seem to enjoy facing them. Buffalo is seeking a series-best seventh straight win over Ottawa and fourth in a row at home.

The Sabres earned a 5-1 victory at First Niagara Center against the Senators on Nov. 11 as [Derek Roy](#) had a goal and two assists. Roy also tallied a goal and the shootout winner in a 3-2 victory in Ottawa on Nov. 5.

[Jhonas Enroth](#) was in net for both of those games, but Buffalo might turn to [Ryan Miller](#), who returned from a concussion Dec. 5, in this one.

Miller has had an up-and-down three games since coming back. He allowed a combined three goals in wins over Nashville and Florida, but gave up five in an overtime loss to Philadelphia on Wednesday.

Miller has yielded four total goals during his three consecutive victories against the Senators - who enter this meeting with three straight losses - and is 5-1-0 with a 1.64 goals-against average in his last six matchups.

In its most recent defeat, Ottawa couldn't recover after giving up two goals in the first 8:23 to Vancouver and fell 4-1 on Saturday.

"We'll take some positives out of this game and move forward," said goaltender [Craig Anderson](#), who is slated to start Tuesday.

Anderson has given up four goals in each of his last two contests and injuries to veteran defensemen [Filip Kuba](#) (shoulder) and [Sergei Gonchar](#) (upper body) haven't helped.

Anderson might want to keep an eye on [Thomas Vanek](#), who has scored in two of the Sabres' past three games. Vanek has two goals and four assists over his last five matchups with the Senators, while [Drew Stafford](#) has six assists in his past four - including three in the Nov. 11 victory.

## **RIVALRY WEEK STARTS TOMORROW**

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

December 12, 2011

It's only mid-December, but the Buffalo Sabres are about to begin as important a 10-day stretch of their schedule as they will face all season.

Starting tomorrow, four of Buffalo's next five games are against their divisional and geographic rivals from Ottawa and Toronto. They will face each of them at home this week (Tues. vs. Ottawa; Fri. vs. Toronto), before heading out on the road next week for pre-Christmas tilts in their barns on Tuesday (Ottawa) and Thursday (Toronto). Sandwiched in between is a road game in Pittsburgh this Saturday.

Buffalo enters play today with sitting seventh in the Eastern Conference with 32 points. They are one point behind sixth-place Toronto, and two ahead of Ottawa in the 11th spot. In a conference that is clustered together worse than holiday shoppers in your local mall, the Sabres know they have to treat this stretch of games like a late season playoff run.

"It's March all the time. You lose the points now, they're hard to get later on," says Thomas Vanek. "We definitely want to finish out good here before our little Christmas break. That's definitely our focus."

Head coach Lindy Ruff understands what these games mean to the team.

"They're very important. It's a big week for us," Ruff stated today. "We're getting a little bit healthier, and that's a big plus for us. Ryan (Miller) is back, he's healthier. I think we've got a lot of good things coming back into the fold, and it should be just a great, emotional week. You get to play the teams you like to hate. You get to play them in your division."

It was uncharted territory for Paul Szczechura today, as he was finally able to take part in a full team practice for the first time this season. The 26-year-old Szczechura has played in four games during three separate recalls from Rochester, but in each case he's never been around long enough to take part in anything more than pre-game warmups. Even during training camp, Szczechura was limited to non-contact drills because he was rehabbing from injury.

"It's been different," said Szczechura, who once again centered a line between Vanek and Jason Pominville. "It was good to get some reps in with those guys to see how they do things a little more. I think it'll help build the chemistry a little bit."

**INJURY UPDATES:** Ruff said that forwards Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta are close to returning, and he expects one or even both to be back sometime this week ... Defenseman Mike Weber is also nearing a return, and Ruff wouldn't rule him out as a possibility for tomorrow's game against Ottawa ... Tyler Myers has been skating on his own, and has begun using his stick and handling the puck on a limited basis. While Ruff is encouraged by Myers' progress, there's still no timetable for his return. Myers broke his wrist on November 19 in the second period of a game against Phoenix. The original prognosis called for a 4-6 week recovery process.

## **Sabres' list of problems is long**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

December 13, 2011

BUFFALO — Right now, thanks to a middling start, Sabres fans might believe they've been sold the wrong slogan. Is this really "hockey heaven," as team president Ted Black famously dubbed it? It probably feels more like purgatory.

The optimism the organization created by spending millions of dollars and openly talking about the Stanley Cup during the offseason has been tempered by a frustrating two months in which the inconsistent Sabres have 32 points in 29 games.

Realistically, it was unlikely they would match the exorbitant expectations. But few expected so many problems. Injuries have ravaged the Sabres. They can't win at home. Some of their big summer acquisitions have underperformed. They have little secondary scoring.

Seventh place may be a better spot than it appears, though.

The Sabres, who host the Ottawa Senators tonight at the First Niagara Center, are just seven points from the Eastern Conference lead and five off the Northeast Division's top spot. Of course, they're also three points out of 12th place in the conference.

"Expectations are high. The feeling-out process is over, and it's just time to win some hockey games with the guys we have in the room," winger Cody McCormick said Monday inside the FNC after the Sabres prepared for the Senators.

Tonight's tilt kicks off a five-day stretch that coach Lindy Ruff called "a big week for us." The Sabres also host Toronto on Friday and play Saturday in Pittsburgh.

Luckily, the team's finally getting healthier. Starting goalie Ryan Miller's back. More injured players should also be returning soon. Forwards Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta and defenseman Mike Weber could play tonight.

"We got a lot of things coming back into the fold for the week, and it should be just a great, emotional week," Ruff said. "You get to play the teams you like to hate. You get to play them in your division.

"Pittsburgh's a hell of a team. Toronto's having a heck of a year, and I think the fact that even through all these injuries we've been able to continue to muck around .500."

Here's more on what's ailed the Sabres so far:

### **The injury bug**

Saturday's 4-1 home loss to the New York Rangers ended a stunning stretch in which the Sabres lost a player to injury in five straight games. They've already used 31 players this season. Five rookies have made their NHL debuts. Six players have suffered concussions.

The Sabres have lost 102 man games to injury. Six are currently sidelined.

"I've never seen anything like it when I played," said McCormick, who just returned from a concussion, about the injuries. "You get guys coming up, the energy they bring is something that's welcome, and everybody that's come in (has) played really well."

That's true. The Sabres possess some remarkable depth, with top prospects and strong veterans at the ready in Rochester.

Still, the Sabres haven't fielded their normal team for about the last month. It's hurt them, even with contributions from the newcomers. Would you rather have defense star Tyler Myers or Joe Finley playing? How about veteran forward Jochen Hecht or Colin Stuart?

### **Home play has been terrible**

Minus one "home" win the Sabres earned in Europe, they're an awful 6-9-2.

"I don't know if I would've paid to come and watch the Florida game," Ruff said about Friday's 2-1 overtime win. "And I don't ever want to see another game like that."

The Sabres fall behind early. They blow big leads. They get overly fancy. They become too tight when the crowd gets on them, a regular occurrence.

"You want to be a team that when teams come in here, they expect a tough night, expect a battle," Sabres captain Jason Pominville said. "I think at times we've been really good but haven't been consistent."

### **Summer acquisitions haven't lived up to expectations**

Defenseman Christian Ehroff has played well, averaging a team-high 24:30 each game. With the defense down two or three regulars recently, he's been receiving mega minutes, including a career-high 32:48 on Nov. 29.

Nonetheless, Ehrhoff, who's receiving \$10 million in the first season of a 10-year, \$40 million contract, hasn't lived up to expectations. The German's scored only twice, once into an empty net, and is a minus-5. He averaged 14 goals and 47 points in the past two seasons.

Meanwhile, center Ville Leino, who inked a six-year, \$27 million deal, has three goals and 10 points after recording five points over a recent five-game stretch. He's switched from center to the wing back to the middle.

Leino, who had 19 goals and 53 points last season, has been a colossal disappointment. He's a notoriously slow starter, though, and he finally appears to be getting comfortable.

### **There's little secondary scoring**

Pominville, Luke Adam, Derek Roy and Thomas Vanek have combined for 40 of the team's 77 goals (52 percent).

"It's a must," Ruff said about the need for secondary scoring.

Fresh off a 31-goal campaign, Drew Stafford has only five scores. Nathan Gerbe has three, Brad Boyes two and Tyler Ennis one. The defense has only 12 goals, five from Jordan Leopold.

•••

Myers (broken wrist) has been skating alone and handling the puck on a limited basis.

"The encouraging part is he's got a stick back in his hand," Ruff said.

## **Sabres could get Gaustad and Kaleta back**

Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

December 12, 2011

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres took to the ice at First Niagara Center on Monday with a pair of home games on the slate to round out their current five-game home stand. Head coach Lindy Ruff may have Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta back for tomorrow night's matchup with the Ottawa Senators.

Both forwards skated on a line with Matt Ellis, while Cody McCormick was the extra forward on the line. They each said they still need medical clearance to play in Tuesday night's game, but Kaleta said that if the decision were up to him he would be in for sure.

Kaleta missed a pair of weeks with a groin injury, and was re-injured in his first game back on December 2nd against the Detroit Red Wings. Kaleta said that while his teammates were skating on the ice, he was doing everything he could off ice to keep sharp mentally, adding, "I've learned a lot, over the past year of frustration and not using my energy for negativity but to keep a positive [attitude]...a hundred percent I'd rather be out there [on the ice] than sitting out but I'm not going to help my team on the ice if I'm injured."

The Angola native did not mix his words when talking about the games against Ottawa on Tuesday and the Toronto Maple Leafs at home on Friday. He sees the significance and wants to contribute to the team this week, noting, "they're our bitter rivals, and [I want] nothing more than to play these teams and get up for them, it's an exciting time...and for me personally I can't wait to get back out there and just go."

Gaustad said that he is "getting close" to a return to the lineup following his injury suffered against the Nashville Predators on December 3rd. The same can be said for defenseman Mike Weber. Ruff believes that Weber could be ready for game action this week, following several weeks on the shelf. That would give the bench boss some much needed flexibility on the defensive side of the puck.

Ruff also said that rear guard Tyler Myers is skating on his own before practice and is progressing in his recovery from surgery to repair a broken wrist. He could not put a timetable on a return for Myers, but said he is doing off-ice work to strengthen the injury. The next step is trying to handle a puck on a consistent basis during workouts, according to Ruff.

The head coach was complimentary of the play of the callups from Rochester, including Paul Szczechura. He was recalled from the AHL and was thrust into the role of centering a line between Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville. Ruff said that it was more out of necessity than

anything and that, "we really feel like we need someone that can make some plays and that has some offensive tempo, can be a little bit creative."

He also noted that the play of Ville Leino-Luke Adam-Zack Kassian was a bright spot recently for the team and that he did not want to break up that trio. The other line in practice on Monday consisted of Drew Stafford-Derek Roy-Tyler Ennis. Ruff said that he really feels like Ennis' play is almost where it needs to be.

He mentioned that with all of the turnover recently due to injuries he has tried to leave the lines alone and that has helped Ennis. Ruff added that the second year forward, "came off of a tough injury and I think his last couple of games he's started to skate. He was in on 4 or 5 scoring opportunities."

No one in the locker room downplayed the week ahead, even looking at a road matchup against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday. Ruff added, "It's a big week for us, you know, we're getting a little bit healthier which is a big plus for us. Ryan is back, he's healthier. I think we've got a lot of good things that are, you know, coming back into the fold...this should be a great emotional week, you get to play the teams that you like to hate, you get to play them in your division."



## **The Curious Case of Shaone Morrisonn**

Matthew Coller

WGR 550

December 12, 2011

Shaone Morrisonn skates hard up the ice, arriving just in time. Evan Rankin has just taken a low slap shot. There it is, the puck just sputtering and spinning toward him like a tire with a loose lug nut. Houston Aeros goalie Darcy Kuemper knows it went to his left. He knows someone's following the play and he'll never get there in time.

Kuemper's only hope is a bad bounce or maybe a whiff. No sooner does the goalie have the thought then does it disappear with a blaring horn. He doesn't look back, he only sprays some water into his mask and stares out at Rankin and Morrisonn celebrating on their way back to the bench.

"We know this isn't where 'Mo wants to be," Rochester Americans coach Ron Rolston says after the game. "But, he's doing a great job for us."

The 28-year-old defenseman is playing his 20<sup>th</sup> game for the Americans. The goal is his second of the season and seventh point.

0:00

In late February, billionaire Terry Pegula purchased the Buffalo Sabres, vowing to turn Buffalo into "Hockey Heaven." In the first two weeks of his ownership, Pegula promised his goal is to win the Stanley Cup. The blue print? Simple: sign free agents and entice more by improving the arena and facilities.

In his first off-season as owner, the oil mogul kept his promise, refining the roster and arena, spilling money on Villie Leino and Christian Ehrhoff and stocking beautiful locker rooms with state-of-the-art workout equipment and a logo in the middle that nobody can step on.

While progress seeped in with every Pegula move, so did reality for Morrisonn. Ehrhoff's signing along with a trade for veteran Robyn Regehr gave the Sabres one too many defenseman. It also dried out their surplus of cap room.

0:00

"Shaone is a very talented defenseman," Amerks assistant coach Jay McKee says after an early-season loss. "Don't be surprised if you see him again this year in the NHL."

At 6-foot-4, 210 lbs., Morrisonn is known as a tough-guy, stay-at-home defenseman. He doesn't really think of himself that way. Earlier this year, he told Kevin Oklobzija of the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle he was pigeon-holed into the role in Washington from playing with more offensive defenseman Mike Green.

"I played with guys like Green and (Joe) Corvo; it was their show," Morrisonn told Oklobzija

There's little evidence to back his claim. In 179 games in the score-happy WHL, he scored 103 points. In the same league, Green scored a point-per-game in his final season with the Saskatoon Blades. In his early AHL days, Morrison's production was also limited, scoring five goals and 16 assists in 61 games.

The self-proclaimed offensive ability never showed up in the NHL, either. He's scored only 75 points in 480 NHL games. Green has 250 points in 374 games.

When he was drafted, there were expectations he'd turn into a descent puck mover. Morrison was taken late in the first round by the Boston Bruins in 2001. The Associated Press wrote that scouts said Morrison's physical play was questionable. Hockey's Future called him a "long-term project" and claimed the Bruins had reached by at least 15 slots.

The Bruins didn't stick around for the long-term, however, trading him to Washington less than two years into his NHL career for offensive defenseman Sergei Gonchar.

The scouts were wrong about his toughness. Morrison branded himself as a tough guy, most famous around the internet for a fight with Colton Orr and for playing during the 2008 playoffs with a broken jaw and separated shoulder. He found a niche in the thankless stay-at-home job, leading the Caps in blocked shots and hits, while Green led the NHL in goals and moved the puck for one of the best post-lockout offenses in the NHL.

After the broken-jaw playoffs, the Capitals didn't want to pay up. Negotiations didn't go well, ending in arbitration and a one-year deal.

In Sabre land, the off-season before Pegula purchased the team, two skilled defenseman Henrik Tallinder and Toni Lydman were allowed to walk. Lydman wanted too many years, Tallinder too much money. Too much for ex-owner Tom Golisano to break even, anyway.

The Sabres offered Morrison's career new life, signing him to a two-year deal for a little more than \$2 million per year. Whether he knew it or not, the Sabres made the move to fill a void in toughness that was evident in the previous year's playoff series against the Boston Bruins.

"It's going to get easier and easier as we go along here," Morrison said after one of his first games as a Buffalo Sabre.

It didn't, though.

The Sabres' defense struggled and the former first-rounder found himself a healthy scratch. Shaone spent much of Buffalo's comeback run toward the playoffs watching from the press box. He played in just one of seven playoff games in the first round against the Philadelphia Flyers.

This pre-season, the Sabres feared he'd be injured, thus counting against the cap, so he was scratched for every pre-season game, then waived. Nobody picked him or his \$2.075 cap hit up.

For the first time in six years, Morrison was assigned to the AHL.

0:00

The Amerks are short on defense, these days. With injuries in Buffalo, Morrison has watched Amerks' D-men Brayden McNabb, T.J. Brennan and Joe Finley all go up. He has 480 games of experience. Those three had a combined zero before their call.

In order to come back to Buffalo, the veteran defenseman would have to pass through re-entry waivers. If he were claimed, the Sabres would take a appx. \$1 million hit; one they can not currently afford.

Morrison's goal isn't enough for Rochester. They lose 4-3 to the Aeros. Several terrible defensive mistakes by inexperienced players lead to at least three of Houston's goals.

0:00

In Rochester, the locker room is small with brown carpeting. And the hallway is bare.

That's where Morrison is now.

A couple other reporters grow tired of waiting for him – one on deadline, the other working his second shift of the day. So, it's just me and him.

0:10

Me: *Nice to meet you Shaone*

Him: ....

0:15

Me: *Well, you scored a goal on the power play for the second straight game, do you feel your offensive game is coming along?*

Him: Not really. I played on the power play in juniors

0:25

Me: *How about your leadership role on the team? I've talked to your coach and teammates, they all seem to feel you've done a nice job working with some of the younger players...*

Him: Everyone's a leader on this team

0:45 (we wait for an equipment manager to push a cart of gear out toward the bus)

Me: *So, then you feel like your recent play could help you find a better situation? Maybe in the NHL?*

Him: Obviously.... Is that it?

Me: *Yes.*

1:18

Morrisonn walks back into the locker room confidently, not having to worry about stepping on a logo.

## **PROSPECT REPORTS**

Marcus Foligno – Last week, Amerks coach Ron Rolston said Foligno is either dominating or struggles, there's no in between. Friday night against Albany, he was dominating. Foligno drove hard to the net several times and was rewarded with a flukey goal. Since the calls of Kassian and McNabb, he's taken on pressure to be more of a leader and goal scorer. Most recently, he's been coming into the role.

“He's learning still, it's a situation where he's growing game to game, practice to practice,” coach Ron Rolston said after the win. “He's doing a lot more of the things he needs to do and one of those is being aggressive and attack the net.”

“I've been working with (assistant coach) Chris Taylor this month and I think that I'm finding my game and sharpening the tools,” Foligno said. “Driving the net is the biggest thing.”

Last week, Foligno had several opportunities to drive hard and passed instead. He didn't do that Friday night.

STAT LINE: 22 games, 9 goals, 2 assists, Plus-3

Drew Schiestel – Friday night against Albany was easily his best game of the season. He moved the puck on offense, once on the power play creating a one-timer goal by Alex Biega. Schiestel also did not turn the puck over; something he'd struggled with earlier this season. As usual, he used his size to keep opponents off the puck and blocked shots.

Remember, he was an AHL All-Star last season and is recovering from a difficult knee injury. For the first time this year, he looked like he was confident skating hard on the knee.

STAT LINE: 16 games, 1 goal, 3 assists, minus-2

Dennis Persson – Persson played for the first time since opening night and looked surprisingly good. Coach Rolston was impressed after the game with his skating ability and decision making. It will be a huge benefit to the club to have him back; he may even see a call at some point if there are more injuries on the defensive side.

“He did a real nice job tonight,” Rolston said. “It's been a long time to get him back in the lineup. He battled, he was competitive, he's smart and makes good decisions, he's a very good skater who can close on people and take things away defensively.”

Derek Whitmore – Maybe he's more of an organizational player than prospect at this point, but he's in the prospect report because Whitmore deserves a chance to play with the Buffalo Sabres. He scored again Friday night, finishing on a power play opportunity. In late November, he scored four goals in one game and three were flat-out hustle plays.

He's taken on much more ice time than expected and performed.

“It's something I take a lot of pride in, working hard every day trying to find scoring positions in practice, doing the little things,” Whitmore said. “I know that I have to keep getting better on the power play, I can't get complacent because there's a lot of good hockey players on this team.”

Whitmore is now leading the Amerks in points

STAT LINE: 24 games, 12 goals, 6 assists, plus-8

Alex Biega – Biega had two points Friday night including a one-timer goal. He's been so-so for most of this season, but stood out on both sides of the ice.

## **AMERKS LONG ROAD TRIP CONTINUES THIS WEEK IN THE LONE STAR STATE**

Amerks.com

December 12, 2011

**WEEKLY NOTES:** After a rather lengthy and enjoyable homestand throughout the month of November, the Rochester Americans now find themselves in the middle of a very grueling December that has the team away from the comforts of home. Currently in the midst of its season-long five-game road trip, and a stretch that has Rochester playing just two of its next 12 on home ice, the upcoming weekend features the third straight three-in-three for the Amerks, who have had some struggles on the road as of late. Despite just coming up with three out of a possible six points this past weekend, Rochester is still clinging on to second-place in the American Hockey League's North Division, where only eight points separate the Amerks from the top spot in the division standings. Looking ahead, this week the Amerks take their long road trip south to the Lone Star State to renew an old rivalry, begin a new one and avenge an earlier setback as Rochester visits San Antonio, Texas and Houston before returning home.

### **LAST WEEK'S RESULTS:**

**Friday, Dec. 9 vs. Albany – W, 3-0...** Coming into the game on a three-game losing streak, the Rochester Americans returned to their winning ways on Friday night as goaltender Drew MacIntyre stopped all 40 shots he faced to lead the Amerks to a 3-0 victory over the Albany Devils. The Amerks also got goals from Marcus Foligno, Alex Biega and Derek Whitmore to secure the win, but it was MacIntyre who stole the show in recording his first shutout of the season and the 15th of his AHL career. The nine-year veteran was particularly strong in the third period when he stopped 18 shots. The game also featured the return of defenseman Dennis Persson, who missed 22 games after suffering a lower-body injury in Rochester's season-opener in Hamilton on October 8.

**Saturday, Dec. 10 @ Adirondack – OTL, 3-2...** Newcomer Evan Rankin scored both goals for Rochester, but it was not enough as the Amerks dropped a 3-2 overtime decision to the Adirondack Phantoms Saturday at the Glens Falls Civic Center to kickoff off their season-long five-game road swing. Rankin broke a 1-1 tie midway through the third period to give the Amerks a one-goal cushion, but Garrett Roe's game-tying tally minutes later would force the extra frame and Ben Holmstrom would seal the victory for the Phantoms just 2:06 into the overtime session on the power-play. The game was Rankin's second two-goal outing this season since joining the Amerks on a professional tryout on November 25. Phil Varone assisted on both Rankin tallies and Foligno recorded a point for the third straight game with an assist as well. MacIntyre, making his fourth consecutive start between the pipes, finished with 25 saves for the Amerks.

**Sunday, Dec. 11 @ Hamilton – L, 2-1...** The Amerks closed out their second of three consecutive three-game weekends on Sunday afternoon with a 2-1 road loss to the North Division rival Hamilton Bulldogs at Copps Coliseum. By going 1-1-1-0 on the weekend, Rochester picked up three of a possible six points. After jumping out to a 1-0 lead early in the contest on a goal by Travis Turnbull, the Amerks allowed two goals in the second period and

were unable to net the equalizer in the third period despite several quality scoring chances. David Leggio got the start in goal for Rochester, his first appearance since December 2, and stopped 33 of 35 Hamilton shots. Amerks captain Colin Stuart was back in the lineup after playing for the parent Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night while Turnbull, who returned to the lineup Friday night against Albany after missing nine games due to injury, scored his second goal of the season in Sunday's contest and his first since November 6.

**THE ROAD 'MORE' TRAVELED:** The reunion between the Buffalo Sabres and Amerks not only restored hockey's longest NHL-AHL affiliation, but it made the commute for those fortunate enough to earn a recall to Buffalo almost effortless to get there. The Amerks have seen eight different players make the 75-mile trek west down Interstate 90, including several on game day, with Stuart becoming the most recent call-up over the weekend to join the big club. The eight-year pro made his season debut for the Sabres on Saturday, earning 9:11 of ice time in Buffalo's 4-1 loss to the New York Rangers at the First Niagara Center. In addition to Stuart, the Sabres have also required the services of goaltender Drew MacIntyre, defensemen Joe Finley, T.J. Brennan, Brayden McNabb and forwards Corey Tropp, Zack Kassian and Paul Szczechura, who along with McNabb, remain with Buffalo.

**THIS WEEK'S OPPONENTS:** The Amerks continue their long road trip on Friday, December 16 when they travel to San Antonio to face the Rampage at the AT&T Center. The 8:00 p.m. EST contest will be the first of three straight in the Lone Star State for the Amerks and the first meeting in three years between the two teams. Fans can tune in for the live broadcast on 107.3 FM and 1280 AM, Rochester's Sports Talk. San Antonio earned a two-game sweep of Rochester in the season series during the 2008-09 campaign, outscoring the Amerks 5-3 through both get-togethers. Rochester, however, has the upper-hand with an 8-6-0 all-time record against the Florida Panthers' affiliate. The game will be a walk down memory lane for some, especially for Rampage head coach Chuck Weber and assistant coach Jason Cipolla, who both shared the bench in the same capacity in Rochester last season. Cipolla served as the Amerks assistant coach for four seasons (2007-11), finishing his tenure in Rochester with a 128-172-20 record (287 points) in 320 career games. Several Rampage players also called Rochester their home in 2010-11, including Bill Thomas, Mark Cullen, Michal Repik, Colby Robak, Michael Caruso and Jacob Markstrom to name a few.

Rochester makes its way to Austin on Saturday, December 17 to take on the Texas Stars at Cedar Park Arena in the first-ever meeting between the interconference rivals. The 8:00 p.m. EST matchup will be carried live on 107.3 FM and 1280 AM, Rochester's Sports Talk. The same two teams will meet again later this season as Texas makes its inaugural trip to Western New York on Friday, February 10.

The Amerks bring yet another busy weekend to a close on Sunday, December 18 as they visit the Toyota Center to battle the Houston Aeros in the second and final gathering between the team this season. Faceoff is slated for a 6:05 EST start and can be heard live on 107.3 FM and 1280 AM, Rochester's Sports Talk. Houston skated to a 4-3 win over the Amerks in the previous matchup at The Blue Cross Arena on December 2. After jumping out to a 2-0 lead in the opening 20 minutes on goals by Shaone Morrisson and Rankin, the Amerks surrendered three goals in the

second period and eventually saw Houston score the game-winner early in the third as the Aeros left Rochester with their seventh straight road win. Rochester is 5-9-3 all-time against Houston.

**UPCOMING PROMOTIONS:** The Amerks return home on Wednesday, December 21 to host the North Division rival Lake Erie Monsters at 7:05 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena. Wednesday's game falls on the next installment of the Amerks "WindDown Wednesdays", Rochester's midweek Business Persons Special that invites patrons to exchange their business cards at The Blue Cross Arena Box Office for an \$11.00 ticket in the best available seating location anywhere in the arena.

Amerks Holiday Packs are still available as well! The Holiday Hat Trick Pack includes two tickets for the Amerks' home game on Friday, Dec. 30 versus the Hamilton Bulldogs; four ticket vouchers that can be redeemed for any 2011-12 regular season home game; and one Amerks/Sabres "Reunited" knit hat. The package is available for just \$59 for a savings of more than 50%.

In addition, the Amerks are also offering a Stocking Stuffer pack that includes two vouchers for any 2011-12 regular season home game and an Amerks travel mug for only \$28.

All Amerks Holiday Packs can be purchased online at [www.amerks.com](http://www.amerks.com), by calling 1-855-GO-AMERKS or at the Amerks Holiday Pack Table, located on the main concourse of The Blue Cross Arena during all Amerks home games through Dec. 21.

**AMERKS NOTES:** Rochester (11-11-3-1, 26 points) enters the week after earning three out of a possible six points over the weekend in a stretch that has the Amerks playing 10 of their next 12 on the road. Coming off 3-0 whitewash of Albany on Friday and gaining another point in an overtime loss to Adirondack the next night, the Amerks have now collected points in two of their last three games and eight of their last 14 to maintain their second-place standing in the American Hockey League's North Division, just eight points behind division-leading Toronto.

**HOME, SWEET HOME:** Home-ice advantage has certainly been a factor in Rochester's recent success as the Amerks are 7-2-0-0 in their last nine games at home. Rochester's season-long five-game homestand last month was highlighted by a four-game winning streak that saw Rochester outscore its opponents 15-11. After beginning the season with just two home wins, the Amerks show a 9-4-0-1 record (19 points) this season when playing in their downtown barn. Conversely, Rochester is 2-7-3-0 (7 points) away from the friendly confines of The Blue Cross Arena.

**TEAM AND LEAGUE LEADERS:** Whitmore remains Rochester's top point-getter with a team-high 12 goals and 18 points, in addition to a team-best 89 shots on goal. His 12 goals also rank him tied for ninth among the AHL's top goal scorers as the Rochester native has now scored six goals in his last eight games. Mark Voakes, who shows five assists in his last six games, leads the Amerks with 12 assists, in addition to owning a team-best plus-nine on-ice rating and being one of just three players to appear in all 26 games thus far. Leggio, who's started seven of the last 11 games for Rochester, boasts a 7-7-0 record with a 2.91 goals-against average and a .902 save percentage in 14 games. His seven wins tie him for 18th among AHL



netminders, while he also ranks among the top 20 backstops in saves with 417. MacIntyre shows a 4-7-1 record with a 2.57 goals-against average and a .917 save percentage in 12 games.

**BY THE NUMBERS:** The Amerks are 5-5-2-1 (13 points) this season against North Division rivals, but show a 6-6-1-0 (13 points) mark versus non-divisional foes. The third period has been the Amerks' strong suit thus far as the club has accounted for 23 goals while allowing 18. The Amerks have scored the first goal in just 12 of the first 26 games of the campaign and show a 6-5-1-0 record when doing so, including a 5-2-0-0 mark at home. Rochester is also 6-0-1-0 when leading after two periods, a streak that also shows an unblemished 4-0-0-0 mark at home.

**TOO CLOSE FOR COMFORT:** Nine of the last 14 games for the Amerks have been decided by one goal, including six of the last 10. Of Rochester's 26 games thus far this season, 14 of them have been determined by a one-goal difference, six of which were settled either in overtime or via the shootout, for a 5-5-3-1 mark.

**WHO'S HOT:** Whitmore enters the week with eight points (7+1) in his last nine games, a stretch that includes a three-game point streak (5+1) from November 19 to November 26. Rankin has recorded seven points (4+3) through his first eight games with the team and his four goals are the result a pair of two-goal games, including his first career AHL multi-goal outing two weeks ago against Houston. Varone has three assists over his last three games, sparked by his first career multi-point game (0+2) Saturday in Adirondack. Voakes shows six points (0+6) over his last seven appearances, in addition to posting back-to-back two-point games to kickoff the month of December as the team leader in assists. Meanwhile, Morrisonn has collected six points (2+4) in his last eight games and Foligno saw his three-game point streak halted Sunday afternoon in Hamilton, a stretch that included goals in consecutive games.

**MILESTONE WATCH:** Back for a second stint with the Amerks, veteran forward Michael Ryan is just two games away from his 400th professional game, 214 of which have been played in Rochester. A week removed from skating in his 500th professional game, Stuart is on verge of yet another personal milestone, needing just 11 more points for 200 in his AHL career. Szczechura, though currently on NHL recall with the Sabres, needs just seven more assists to reach the century mark in his AHL career. MacIntyre is a mere four wins shy of 50 AHL victories.

**SPECIAL TEAMS BREAKDOWN:** After some recent struggles on the power-play, the Amerks have gone 10-for-63 on the man-advantage over their last 13 games. On the penalty kill, Rochester has successfully killed off 90-of-110 (81.8%) shorthanded situations, including 56 of 63 at home for an 88.9% efficiency rate, good enough for the league's third-best rating in that category. As a team, Rochester has allowed a league-most five shorthanded goals against, four coming at home and the other on the road.

---

## **AMERKS WEEKLY SCHEDULE\***

### **DAY TIME LOCATION**

Monday, December 12 Day Off ----

Tuesday, December 13 10:30 a.m. practice Blue Cross Arena

Wednesday, December 14 Travel Day ----

Thursday, December 15 11:00 a.m. practice AT&T Center (San Antonio, TX)

Friday, December 16 11:00 a.m. gameday skate AT&T Center (San Antonio, TX)

8:00 p.m. @ San Antonio AT&T Center (San Antonio, TX)

Leave for Austin immediately following game

Saturday, December 17 11:00 a.m. gameday skate Cedar Park Arena (Austin, TX)

8:00 p.m. @ Texas Cedar Park Arena (Austin, TX)

Leave for Houston immediately following game

Sunday, December 18 6:05 p.m. @ Houston Toyota Center (Houston, TX)

***\*schedule subject to change (all times EST)***

## **Game Day: Senators at Sabres**

Don Brennan

Ottawa Sun

December 13, 2011

**Ottawa Senators (13-13-4) vs. Buffalo Sabres (15-12-2).** Tuesday, 7 p.m., First Niagara Center

**TV:** Sportsnet East, TVA Sports. **Radio:** Team 1200, CKOI 104.7 (French)

### **SPECIAL TEAMS**

**OTT:** PP 17.9% No. 12; PK 80.4% No. 23.

**BUF:** PP 17% No. 19; PK 85.8% No. 7

### **LAST 5 GAMES**

#### **Ottawa**

- VAN 4, OTT 1
- NJD 5, OTT 4 (SO)
- WAS 5, OTT 3
- OTT 4, TBL 2
- WAS 3, OTT 2 (OT)

#### **Buffalo**

- NYR 4, BUF 1
- BUF 2, FLA 1 (OT)
- PHI 5, BUF 4 (OT)
- BUF 3, NAS 2
- DET 4, BUF 1

### **SENATORS LINES**

- Colin Greening-Jason Spezza-Milan Michalek
- Peter Regin-Nick Foligno-Daniel Alfredsson
- Erik Condra-Zack Smith-Chris Neil
- Bobby Butler-Jesse Winchester-Kaspars Daugavins

#### **Defence**

- Chris Phillips-Sergei Gonchar
- Jared Cowen-Erik Karlsson
- David Rundblad-Brian Lee

## **Goalies**

- Craig Anderson
- Alex Auld

## **SABRES LINES**

- Thomas Vanek-Paul Szczechura-Jason Pominville
- Tyler Ennis-Derek Roy-Drew Stafford
- Luke Adam-Ville Leino-Zack Kassian
- Colin Stuart-Matt Ellis-Cody McCormick

## **Defence**

- Robyn Regehr-Andrej Sekera
- Marc-Andre Gagnani-Christian Ehrhoff
- Brayden McNabb-Jordan Leopold

## **Goalies**

- Ryan Miller
- Jhonas Enroth

## **INJURIES**

### **Ottawa**

- D Filip Kuba (upper body) is expected to miss another week
- C Sergei Gonchar (upper body) is day-to-day

### **Buffalo**

- C Jochen Hecht (lower body) is day-to-day.
- RW Corey Tropp (head injury) is out indefinitely
- LW Nathan Gerbe (concussion) is out indefinitely
- C Paul Gaustad (upper-body) is out indefinitely
- D Mike Weber (upper body ) is out indefinitely
- D Tyler Myers (wrist) is out indefinitely
- RW Brad Boyes (lower body) is out indefinitely
- RW Patrick Kaleta (lower body) is out indefinitely

## **SIZING UP THE SIDES (which team gets the edge in key areas)**

**Forwards: OTT.** Sabres have too many injuries up front.

**Defence: OTT.** Minus Kuba and Gonchar, Sens lack experience on the back.

**Goalies: BUF.** Anderson lasted two minutes in most recent visit to Buffalo.

**Power play: OTT.** Sabres PP is 0-for-8 in past two games.

**Penalty killing: BUF.** Sens gave up two power-play goals to Vancouver.

**Coaching: BUF.** Long-serving Ruff has team winning despite injuries.

**Overall: BUF.** Both teams currently struggling.

## **PLUS**

Daniel Alfredsson has 81 points (41) in 81 career games vs. Sabres ... The venue may actually work in the Senators favour. The Sabres are 7-9-2 at First Niagara Center this season, compared to 8-3-0 on the road ... Buffalo native Nick Foligno will be playing his 300th NHL game. He has at least one point in six of his past seven games. Foligno is also tied for 10th in the league in hits, with 84 ... Erik Karlsson leads all NHL defencemen with 25 points. His 93 shots on goal is second most among all blueliners.

## **MINUS**

The Senators are 1-4 in the first half of back-to-back games ... The Senators have managed just one of a possible four points against the Sabres this season, salvaging it in a 3-2 shootout loss in Ottawa Nov. 5. They lost 5-1 Nov. 11 in Buffalo ... The Senators were 1-3-2 vs. the Sabres last season. Their one victory was in Buffalo, 4-2 on Oct. 22. They lost their other two games at HSBC Arena, 4-2 on Feb. 25 and 6-4 March 13. They also lost in Ottawa by scores of 2-1 (Oct. 8), 1-0 Dec. 4 and 3-2 Jan. 25 ... The Senators are 43-44-10-11 all-time versus the Sabres and 20-26-3-4 all-time in Buffalo.

## **ONLINE EXTRA**

Each of Nick Foligno's nine assists this season have come on the road ... Chris Neil's next assist will be the 100th of his career ... Senators assistant coach Mark Reeds was cut under the left eye by a deflected puck in practice Monday ... Zack Smith, on an exchange of words with Vancouver's Max Lapierre in Saturday's 4-1 loss to the Canucks: "He's all talk. He never answers the bell." ... Veteran Mark Parrish and rookie Patrick Cannone are tied for the Binghamton Senators' scoring lead with 15 points. D Tim Conboy leads the team in penalty minutes with 72 ... Because of injuries, the Sabres have used nine rookies this season. That's second most in the league behind Philadelphia's 10 ... This is the second of a five game homestand for the Sabres ... Tomas Vanek's goal last Wednesday moved him ahead of Don Luce into ninth place among Sabres all-time scorers ... Buffalo is 50-27-9 in Decembers since the lockout.

## **Brennan: Alfredsson going stronger at 39**

*Sens captain has picked up scoring pace after injury*

Don Brennan

Ottawa Sun

December 13, 2011

BUFFALO - Only 364 days from his 40th birthday, Daniel Alfredsson is still one of the best players on the Senators.

He's tied for sixth in team scoring, but he has also played six fewer games than most everybody else because of a hip flexor and concussion. Of his 16 points, seven (two goals, five assists) have come in the past seven games -- or about the time veteran Nick Foligno became his centre.

In most of the previous 17 games, Alfredsson played with rookie Stephane Da Costa.

Alfredsson turned 39 Sunday and naturally spent the day at the rink — only this time it was with his family, for a kids Christmas party. Afterwards, he went home where his clan was joined by brother Henric and his wife. Birthday gifts included underwear, socks, a tie and "hot chocolate packages from the kids."

On Monday, it was back to work, then a flight to Buffalo, where Alfredsson scored his biggest goal -- the game winner to send the Senators to the 2007 Stanley Cup final.

With the better-than-expected play of this season's team, we were wondering if it has caused Alfredsson to rethink his future -- not that he has made any concrete decisions yet.

"No it hasn't," said Alfredsson. "I'm just enjoying this year, trying to do as good as I can, and for our team to do as well as we can. I think after the season, that's when I'll evaluate how I feel and how my body feels more than anything.

"See what happens after that."

Of his own game this season, Alfredsson isn't completely satisfied.

"It's been okay," he said. "I felt really good in the beginning. Then I think I struggled when I came back from my concussion. In the last week or so I feel my skating is getting better, feel like I'm getting around and getting in position a lot more. It's okay right now."

It's been good enough that he's still one of the best Senators.

## **DRAFT DAY IN DECEMBER**

Alfredsson and Chris Phillips each made their first two picks for the Senators Dec. 28 skills competition. Team Phillips has defeated Team Alfredsson the past three years.

"It's been a good run and I have a few tricks up my sleeve again," Phillips said. "I guess I could kind of be called the Billy Beane of skills competitions. I kind of look inside hard at the task and it's paid off for me the last couple of years."

Like Beane, the shrewd GM of the Oakland A's and subject of Moneyball, the Phillips strategy could be called Money Puck.

"Yeah, but I'm not going to say that three times fast," said Phillips.

Said Alfredsson: "Usually I try to put the blame on everybody else, but three in a row I've got to look at myself in the mirror. I've done some research here and I'm going to do a better job of selecting my team."

Alfredsson had first pick overall and he took Jason Spezza.

"It's a skills competition, right? When you think skill, I go to Jason right away," said Alfredsson, who likes his team's chances this year. "He can do pretty much every competition ... there's a lot of passing and a lot of shooting. He's going to come out and get some points I think."

Spezza was beside himself — when he was beside Alfredsson.

"It's a huge honour," he said. "I'm nervous right now. Shocked really. I wish my family could be here to share this with me."

Phillips pulled out one of those tricks up his sleeve with his first pick.

"The last 10 minutes I've been really busy," he said. "I traded up to get the second pick. And with the second pick overall, we're pleased to announce Matt Carkner was the first pick of Team Phillips."

Unlike Spezza, Carkner wasn't surprised at all.

"Obviously he saw me last year in the fastest skating competition and he couldn't resist," said Carkner. "I'm really excited to be a part of this."

To be fair, Carkner did win the hardest shot competition last year.

"It's the only thing I'll ever beat Alfie in," he said.

Alfredsson took Erik Karlsson next. Why?

"He's Swedish," said Alfredsson.

Nick Foligno was Phillips' second pick.

"He was closest to (the door) and coming out for the media release here," explained Phillips.

Said Foligno: "I'm a little nervous, but I like our chances."

## **THIS AND THAT**

It looks like the Senators may catch a break, as both Eastern Conference powerhouses about to visit Scotiabank Place could be doing so minus their captains. Zdeno Chara is expected to miss a week with a leg injury and Sidney Crosby is out indefinitely with more concussion-like symptoms ... Senators prospect Patrick Weirchioch is still recovering in hospital after taking a slap shot in the throat last week. "There's nothing different. He's stable, he's obviously comfortable now," said GM Bryan Murray. "He's in Syracuse and he's being looked after by one of the best doctors in the business. We expect a full recovery." ... Senators assistant coach Mark Reeds will have a nasty shiner after being hit by a deflected puck just under the left eye at Monday's practice. "He has to have a baseline test tomorrow. See if he can pass it," joked Paul MacLean. "It's just a boo-boo. He'll be all right. It's a long way from his heart." ... Peter Regin played 12:29 in his first game back after a missing two months with a shoulder injury. He should expect a bigger workload going forward. "It feels good," he said. "Obviously, it's going to take a couple of days to get the timing back and everything. I've only played one game and it was a pretty fast game against Vancouver. It was a tough game to start, and that was the biggest challenge in the beginning, I felt. The speed and timing and the whole game ... it got better as the game went on, I thought." Regin was asked if he was worried about affecting the chemistry on a team that has so far exceeded expectations. "I think we have a good team and the guys have played great the last month," he said. "Hopefully I can help. Hopefully we won't get worse. That wouldn't be good. I'll do my best to try and help out."



## **Filatov 'gamble not over yet' for Sens**

*Murray allows Russian to return home, vows to retain his right*

Don Brennan

Ottawa Sun

December 13, 2011

BUFFALO - If Nikita Filatov really does have a desire to get back to the NHL next season, it will either be as a Senator or to a team that is generally managed by a Bryan Murray trading partner.

Upon announcing that he is allowing the 21-year-old Russian's return to the KHL's CSKA Moscow, Murray said he would make a qualifying offer to Filatov when he becomes a restricted free agent in July.

"We won't retain his rights if we don't," said Murray. "I'm saying today we will retain his rights.

"It was a no-lose situation," he added of obtaining Filatov from the Columbus Blue Jackets, where he never scratched the surface of his potential. "We had a lot of picks, so it was a good gamble. And the gamble is not over yet."

To get Filatov last summer, the Senators traded a third-round pick in a year they were able to grab four forwards in the first two rounds.

Filatov, the sixth selection overall (or nine picks before the Senators took Erik Karlsson) in the 2008 draft, had no goals and one assist in nine games with Ottawa. He was going to be sent back to Binghamton and his \$65,000 AHL salary, but preferred to develop while collecting many more rubles in his homeland.

"He wants a chance to come back to the National Hockey League at some point (and go to Russia) rather than play in the minors," said Murray. "I totally understand that's a financial thing for him and his family. That's why I'm letting it happen.

"If he wants to be a player in the NHL and he spends some time in physical development, strength and conditioning, then he can be a player."

From Binghamton, Filatov had made noise about going back to Russia last month, so the Senators promoted him for another chance at cracking their lineup. He started three games as Jason Spezza's winger but produced nothing more than a couple of chances.

Filatov was a healthy scratch for the past five games, essentially losing his spot to Bobby Butler. Despite having no goals, no assists and just three shots on goal in those games, Butler wasn't losing it back.

"(Filatov) was in the lineup lots and got to play with our best players. The dimension he brought to our team, the skill and creating offence, didn't happen often enough," said coach Paul

MacLean. "He didn't have an attitude. I thought he worked really diligently without the puck. We didn't have any problem with that. No, it was the fact that his dimension with the puck in the American League was noticeable, and that's what he brought. We just didn't get that here."

Filatov, who has just six goals (including a hat trick) in 53 career NHL games, did produce with Columbus' AHL team in Springfield last season, but rather modestly, with 20 points (nine goals) in 36 games. He had seven goals and five assists in 15 games for Binghamton earlier this season.

In 2009-10, he left Columbus to play for CSKA Moscow, with whom he had nine goals and 13 assists in 26 games.

"They play at a different level of competition than we do over here," Murray said of European leagues in general. "They think having the puck all the time is the way to play. We think having the puck part-time and running into people once in a while, winning battles along the wall once in a while ... I think it's a learning curve, and some people take longer than others."

Murray told Filatov the same thing he has told other Europeans in the past.

"Sometimes, like a Canadian or American player, you have to spend time in the minors," said Murray. "You have to take time to develop. We've got some players on our team that were 23, 24 by the time they made it. When (Filatov) is 23 or 24, maybe he'll make it."

Spezza can vouch for the AHL. When he was the same age as Filatov is now, an NHL work stoppage led to Spezza spending the entire season in Binghamton.

In 80 games, he had 32 goals and 117 points in 2004-05.

"I got better playing in the American League in the lockout year," said Spezza. "It helped me a lot, to develop and make me the player I am today, because I had that year to really work on my game. Obviously it was easier because there was no NHL at the time, but it's a league you can develop in. I guess he feels it's a better league in Russia for him."

Spezza had no problems with Filatov as a teammate.

"He worked hard when he was here, things just didn't get going for him, in his game," said Spezza. "But it wasn't a bad attitude or work ethic thing. I think he worked hard and wanted to do well. But it's a tough league to be an offensive guy in. It's an every day thing and it's hard to be consistent."

## **Filatov sent back to Russia, but not forgotten**

*Senators to retain struggling forward's NHL rights*

Allen Panzeri

Ottawa Citizen

December 13, 2011

About halfway through his team's practice on Monday, Ottawa Senators general manager Bryan Murray was summoned from his seat in the top row of the lower bowl.

Nikita Filatov wanted to talk to Murray before he left Scotiabank Place for the last time and returned to Russia, where he'll join the Central Red Army team.

The 21-year-old forward wanted to thank Murray for the way he was treated by the Senators and for giving him another chance to play in the National Hockey League.

Murray's response?

"I think if he wants - and I said this to him - and it's totally up to the player, always, but, if he wants to be a player in the NHL and he spends some time in physical development, strength and conditioning, he can be a player."

So the gamble Murray took in June, when he traded a third-round draft pick to the Columbus Blue Jackets for Filatov, whom the Blue Jackets took sixth overall in 2006, is not yet over. Suspended, yes, but not over.

The Senators have only assigned him to Central Red Army, meaning they retain Filatov's NHL rights.

Murray said the Senators would extend a qualifying offer (a two-way contract) when Filatov became a restricted free agent on July 1.

The hope, maybe faint, is that Filatov will discover the resolve to back his desire to play in the NHL. Then the gamble will have paid off, as Murray had hoped it would this season.

Murray could have played hardball with the 21-year-old left-winger and assigned him to Binghamton of the American Hockey League for the rest of the season, but that would have accomplished nothing and created only resentment.

Plus, it would have damaged Murray's reputation among Russian players. Over the years, he has been a coach and general manager to many Russian players and has a well-earned reputation for fairness.

There was also a financial consideration for Filatov, who supports his family.

In Binghamton, he would have made only around \$50,000. In the KHL, he's expected to make 10 times as much.

So Murray is keeping his fingers crossed for the future and has no regrets about trading for Filatov.

"I think it was a no-lose situation," he said.

"We had a lot of picks, so it was a good gamble and the gamble's not over.

"Sometimes, when you make a trade, you have to wait a couple of years for the guy to emerge to be what you thought he was going to be

"It's the same circumstance here.

"We've got some players on our team who were 23 or 24 by the time they made it.

"Maybe by the time he's 23 or 24 he'll have made it."

This time, he said, Filatov didn't quite give enough to merit a permanent spot on the NHL team's roster.

"We just wanted to see the compete level at a little higher pace," Murray said.

"We wanted to see him get points, because, if he's the type of guy who's going to play on your team, talented kids have to play probably in your top six and contribute offensively, and he wasn't able to do that."

For coach Paul MacLean, that, too, was the bottom line.

In nine regular-season games, Filatov had just one assist. While he had 13 shots during pre-season games, which showed he was shooting the puck, he didn't have any goals and only three assists.

When you're billed as an offensive player and you're spending time with the team's top players, and you're also on the power play, then the reasonable expectation is that you will score or set up some goals.

Filatov wasn't.

After he scored seven goals and five assists in 15 AHL games, making it almost look easily on occasion, the Senators thought he could reproduce those numbers in the NHL.

They were disappointed.

"We just didn't get that here," MacLean said.

"I'm not sure why he couldn't do it here, but it just couldn't happen for him.

"The only thing I wanted him to do was go to the AHL and work on his game and really work at making it consistent, and he chose not to do it."

As a coach, MacLean said, he tries not to get frustrated when a young player doesn't develop as expected, or as hoped for. When they don't, he added, sometimes you just have to move on.

Yet, even as Filatov leaves his second NHL team scratching its collective head, Murray said it wasn't fair to say Filatov didn't care.

Murray said he spent a lot of time over the past few days talking to Filatov and believed there was a chance he could one day find his way back to the NHL.

"We think he's a very talented kid that plays some night and other nights couldn't contribute very much," Murray said.

"I think he has to get stronger and be a little more competitive. I think from a talent point of view he can play in the league and be very successful.

"He's a young player. He can go back and play there and be an important player, so we'll let that happen."

## **Milestone hits Foligno in a flash**

Allen Panzeri  
Ottawa Citizen  
December 13, 2011

Nick Foligno will get a lesson today in how quickly time flies.

Only yesterday, it seems, he was playing his first game for the Ottawa Senators.

Tonight, in his hometown, where he was born when his father Mike was playing for the Sabres, Nick will play his 300th NHL game.

It was a milestone that caught him by surprise.

"I wasn't thinking that it was creeping up on me this quick, but I'm obviously pretty proud of it," he said.

"I'm hoping I'll get 700 more, but it's a nice accomplishment, and I'm proud to be a player in this league.

"It's kind of neat to see how fast things go by. Hopefully I have a long way to go."

The guest list for tonight's game hasn't been finalized, but Foligno said Monday he was expecting to have family and friends at the game.

## **WIERCIOCH RECOVERING**

Senators prospect Patrick Wiercioch, struck in the throat by a puck during an American Hockey League game Friday night at Binghamton, remained in a Syracuse hospital on Monday.

But the Senators say the 21-year-old defenceman is expected to make a full recovery.

Wiercioch was hit in the throat at 3:08 of the first period and lay face down on the ice as Binghamton Senators trainer Glen Kinney tended to him. Wiercioch was in the path when Norfolk's Radko Gudas attempted to clear the puck.

"He's stable," Ottawa general manager Bryan Murray said Monday.

"He's comfortable now. He's in Syracuse being looked after by one of the best doctors in the business, and we hope in the next few days we'll have a big upgrade on his part."

## **INJURY UPDATE**

Senators defencemen Sergei Gonchar (upper body) and Filip Kuba (left shoulder) continue to make progress in their recoveries, but coach Paul MacLean expects it'll be at least a few more days before they're able to resume practising with the team.

## WORSE FOR WEAR

Coaches normally come out of practices unscathed, but Senators assistant coach Mark Reeds ended up on the unfortunate side of an accident at Scotiabank Place on Monday.

He was in the wrong place at the wrong time and emerged with a terribly swollen face after a puck deflected off a stick and hit him just under the left eye.

MacLean joked a little and called it a "boo."

Even with an ice pack applied to his face, Reeds fought a losing battle on Monday afternoon with the swelling, which threatened to close his left eye.