



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres understand need to be better

Ruff: 'It really just falls on my shoulders'

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 3, 2012

Through ownership changes and the ups and downs of many seasons, Lindy Ruff has endured his share of crisis moments during his 15 years as coach of the Buffalo Sabres.

This one is a little bit different.

Expectations -- and the team's payroll -- were sky-high at the start of the season, but the Sabres are failing to come close to them for one of the first times in Ruff's tenure.

They're 11th in the Eastern Conference heading into tonight's game with the Edmonton Oilers in First Niagara Center. Players all over the roster, from former all-stars to youngsters, are underachieving badly.

Armed with the public support of owner Terry Pegula and team president Ted Black, it appears Ruff isn't going anywhere. But that doesn't mean he's deflecting blame for his team's troubles.

"Right now we all understand that we haven't been good enough and I stand at the forefront of all that," Ruff said after practice Monday in First Niagara Center. "From goaltending to some of our defensive play to the lack of scoring, it really just falls on my shoulders."

The Sabres are 1-5-1 in their last seven games and that's the tip of their troubles. They've won just two of their last 10 (2-6-2) and five of the last 19 (5-10-4). They don't have a winning streak since early November. The daily injury discussion is one Ruff is understandably tired of.

"You can say that having two or three defensemen out or five or six forwards out is tough but you still have to find ways to win games," Ruff said. "I think last year when we lost [Ryan] Miller and [Derek] Roy we still found ways to be a good team."

The Sabres continue to struggle offensively and their penalty kill has suffered without Tyler Myers.

But Ruff said a couple of times Monday the real problem starts in the goal crease, where Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth entered Monday 21st in the NHL in goals against average at 2.86. Miller is 37th among individuals at 3.05 and 35th in save percentage (.901).

"Right now, it starts with our goaltending," Ruff said. "Our goaltending has to be better."

Ruff was happy with Enroth's 44-save performance in Saturday's shootout loss against Ottawa, but it was yet another night the offense couldn't get the team enough for a win.

"We have to start putting away opportunities," Ruff said. "That's been really our biggest nemesis. We haven't been able to crawl out of a 2-2 game when we had the opportunities. We should have been able to push by and win that."

The Sabres are hardly out of the playoff hunt, still just five points from the eighth spot. But the urgency is growing in the locker room to open 2012 better than 2011 has finished.

"I wouldn't say we're running out of time but I would phrase it the time is now," said defenseman Robyn Regehr. "You can't be too pessimistic with the way you look at it but you have to be realistic and you have to say we have to get winning games right now."

"It's hard not to get frustrated," said winger Drew Stafford. "All you can control is your work and your habits. You can't control the way the puck bounces out there. You have to make sure you're staying solid and working. Hopefully sooner or later they go in."

"We were in the same spot last year. ... We strung a few [wins] together. We believe in here we can do that. It starts with one."

Ruff said the Sabres' attack has suffered with the injuries to Myers, Andrej Sekera and Christian Ehrhoff. Ruff likes seeing defensemen join the rush but, save for Jordan Leopold, the ones left in the Buffalo lineup don't seem as comfortable doing that.

"We might have to play a little different system, which we've tried here recently," Ruff said. "We have to win tighter games. We haven't pushed through and won those [going 9-6-3 in one-goal decisions]."

The injury concerns continue as Brad Boyes tweaked his ankle in practice Monday and could be questionable for tonight. Jason Pominville left early with the flu but should play.

"It's been nice to get a few guys back and we're hoping more guys come back here," Regehr said, referring to Myers and Tyler Ennis. "... It's about just going out there and dealing with who we have. That's really the reality of the situation. You can't sit around, hope and wish, want this and that. You've got to go out and make it happen."

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Poor production makes Kassian a spectator

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 3, 2012

One point in 10 games. You can wrestle all you want with the hows and whys of Zack Kassian getting scratched Saturday night, but that's the bottom-line reason the former first-round draft pick didn't play against the Ottawa Senators and probably will be in the press box tonight against Edmonton.

"I have one point. That's unacceptable and I know that," Kassian said Monday. "I need to be better. When you go 10 games with one point, call-up or not, I hold myself to high expectations. I have to be better."

"The one area he's been real good at is on the outside hanging on to pucks using his body," said coach Lindy Ruff. " ... He's been great on the outside, great shooting on the outside. But with his size and strength, he's got to get to the inside and be a force around the front of the net."

Kassian has three goals, all in his first six games, and three assists in 16 games. He hasn't scored since Dec. 7 against Philadelphia. He was going well on a line with Luke Adam and Ville Leino, but when Leino went down with a foot injury, Kassian's production ended.

"Obviously I've gone on a little bit of a cold streak," Kassian said. "If you work hard, things will happen. You can't hang your head. You have to keep working."

Might it be better for Kassian to go back to Rochester and get big minutes again?

"I couldn't tell you," he said. "You can develop in both places. Both places have good coaches, good development people, a lot of video. Both places are great spots to be."

* * *

Tyler Ennis would love to play tonight because he is from outside of Edmonton, but he skated as an extra forward again Monday and still seems like he's a few days away from returning from his second bout with a high ankle sprain.

"Every time we play Edmonton, I circle it on my calendar," Ennis said. "It's a cool game to play. But if [the ankle] doesn't feel good, I can't play. The good news is it feels better every day than the last."

Ennis injured the ankle Oct. 22 at Tampa Bay, sat out 17 games and played eight before hurting it again Dec. 17 at Pittsburgh. He has sat out the last six. A 20-goal scorer last year, Ennis has just three this year in 15 games.

Tyler Myers said he has another CT-scan scheduled for this morning on his broken wrist that should give him a better idea of his progress.

Ruff said Myers has still not done things like take slap shots but does seem to be improving.

"I thought today was encouraging," Ruff said. "Having him involved in 5-on-5 play means we're getting closer to where we need to be."

* * *

The Oilers hit town tonight in the middle of a brutal seven-game road trip. They had lost seven straight away from Rexall Place, including the first three on this trip, until Monday's 4-3 win at Chicago.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins, the 18-year-old center selected with the first overall pick last June, entered Monday's play leading NHL rookies in goals (13), assists (22) and points (35). But his status for tonight is iffy after he left Monday's game late in the first period with a shoulder injury after a spill into the boards.

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Sabres need to be shaken to the core

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

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Ted Black rolled his eyes and interrupted Monday when a conversation about the Sabres turned toward Darcy Regier. Black had heard the criticism directed toward his general manager, how he had a reputation for becoming smitten with his own players and having a slow trigger finger.

Maple Leafs GM Brian Burke, in an interview earlier this season with The Score, said Regier speaks a different language when talking trades. It sounded similar to what various NHL executives have told me for many years. Regier is a nice guy, they say, but people are reluctant to deal with him because it's not worth the aggravation.

In case you haven't noticed, the Sabres are in 11th place in the conference going into their game tonight against the Oilers. They're seven points behind eighth place. A friend told me he's switching to Time Warner so he can't watch the Sabres.

The Flyers over the summer, after two very good seasons, traded away Mike Richards and Jeff Carter and remain one of the best teams in the league. The Sabres are practically begging for a significant move that might change their chemistry and help them make a U-turn.

Is Regier working the phones, is he calling ...?

"I can tell you with 100 percent certainty that he's doing his job," Black said.

Black wouldn't elaborate, but it sure sounded as if Regier has been shopping players. If that's the case, it's about time. It would be a start, but trying isn't enough for a team bent on winning the Stanley Cup. This is a results business, and he needs to get something done.

Lindy Ruff's job is safe, by the way, so fans looking for him to get fired can search elsewhere. Ruff took a share of responsibility Monday for the Sabres' poor play. He also pointed toward a lack of scoring and poor goaltending. Allow me to add a lack of effort.

Black said they've reached a crossroads in their season, reiterating Monday what he told WGRZ-TV last week. He struck a tone different than one from a few weeks ago, when he made a plea for patience. There was a sense he was trying to give everyone in the organization a swift kick in the pants.

"With regards to my statement that we're at a crossroads, we're in 11th place in the standings," Black said. "This team needs to pick itself up and move forward if we're going to make the playoffs."

The Sabres don't need to blow up the roster, but the players need to get their acts together. Where they stand isn't good enough. Every team has injuries. The Penguins have had more success and withstood more man games lost to injury, a list that includes Sidney Crosby.

Regier has trade bait up and down his roster, including his so-called core group. Thomas Vanek and Jason Pominville have played well, but Derek Roy, Drew Stafford, Paul Gaustad and Ryan Miller haven't met expectations or justified their contracts.

Roy has two goals in 21 games, eight in 38 games this season. Stafford, who had 31 goals last year before signing a big extension, has six goals. Gaustad has three goals and eight points. Miller has a 9-10-0 record with a 3.05 goals-against average and .901 save percentage.

They should be part of the solution, but they have become part of the problem along with several others [see: Boyes, Brad]. If they're going anywhere, they need to play much better.

"I agree," Miller said.

"We're trying to figure it out and gain confidence and play the way we've proven we can play," Miller said. "That's the trick. You're not going to find the answers immediately. You're going to find the answers when we start making it click out there. We're trying to figure out. It's taking longer than we had hoped."

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Sabres fans still out in cold as cable dispute gets nowhere

Game tonight due to be first victim amid MSG, Time Warner impasse

Dan Herbeck

The Buffalo News

January 3, 2012

Barring some very surprising development, hundreds of thousands of local hockey fans will be unable to watch to-night's game between the Buffalo Sabres and the Edmonton Oilers on TV.

That's because two cable television giants are locked in a dispute that's as ugly as when Jim Schoenfeld and Wayne Cashman traded punches during the Sabres' glory days.

Time Warner Cable subscribers in the region will miss their first broadcast of a game at 7 tonight because of the continuing impasse in money negotiations between Time Warner and the Madison Square Garden Network. As of Monday, Time Warner stopped carrying MSG programming.

Spokesmen for both cable TV companies say they are very unhappy about the impasse. Late Monday, both sides reported no progress in the talks or on plans to resume discussions.

How many people are affected? According to Time Warner spokesman Matthew Tremblay, about 241,000 Time Warner customers in Western New York get their Sabres broadcasts through the MSG Network. About 89,000 Time Warner customers do not get the MSG Network.

The fans who will be shut out include Patricia Mahady, a North Tonawanda resident who loves watching the games on TV with her family, especially her parents — Patricia and Kenneth Hoelscher, 84 and 86, respectively.

“This is very disappointing. I've finally reached a point in the past couple of years where I've been following the Sabres and getting to know the players,” Mahady said. “My mom and dad don't get out much. They really look forward to watching the games. My mom was just in the hospital for 6z week 1/3 , and watching the Sabres was one of the things that helped her get through it.”

Tremblay said the cause of the dispute is that MSG — which produces broadcasts of most Sabres games — is trying to charge Time Warner an unreasonably high price for delivering the broadcasts to its customers.

“We want to negotiate fair prices for our customers. We want the cost of cable to reasonable,” Tremblay said. “We're waiting for MSG to come back to the negotiating table.”

MSG officials insist that they are offering a fair price. They said Time Warn-

er has been paying the same price for the broadcasts since 2005.

“All we have asked is for Time Warner Cable to value our programming in the same way as other TV providers—nothing more, nothing less,” said Michael Bair, MSG Media president.

Accusations that MSG has demanded an increase of 53 percent in payments from Time Warner are a “gross mischaracterization,” Bair said.

“Not true. They have rejected every offer we’ve made to them for nearly two years,” Bair said.

While the impasse is upsetting to Sabres fans, it is also upsetting to officials of the Sabres, who want their team to get as much exposure as possible.

“I’m as concerned as everyone else because I’m a Time Warner subscriber,” Ted Black, the team’s president, said after the Sabres practiced Monday in First Niagara Center. “If [the impasse] stretches onward, it does become an issue and concern for fans.”

Tonight’s game is in Buffalo. The Sabres have 11 other games scheduled this month, including nine games on the road.

Sabres officials said they hope to make broadcasts of at least some of the games available for public viewing on the giant scoreboard in the downtown arena.

“It’s likely that we’ll have a viewing party in the arena Friday night, if the impasse is not settled,” said Sabres spokesman Mike Gilbert.

Details of that event will be released Wednesday. Gilbert said he hopes the dispute gets settled soon, adding that he is not sure how many nights First Niagara Center will be available for viewing parties.

Can the Sabres somehow pressure the two sides into resuming talks and finding some middle ground?

“Only just to let both parties know this is obviously important for hundreds of thousands of Buffalo Sabres fans,” Black said. “It’s important for the franchise that they get this thing resolved.”

How long could the impasse last?

Hopefully, not as long as the last dispute involving a TV service provider that couldn’t reach agreement with MSG.

On Oct. 1, 2010, the Dish Network stopped carrying MSG’s Sabres broadcasts because the agreement between the two expired, and the two sides could not agree on a price. More than 15 months later, the Sabres broadcasts are still not on the Dish Network.

MSG has been urging Sabres fans to get rid of the Time Warner Cable service and switch their TV service to Verizon FiOS or Direct TV, both of which still carry the MSG games.

Asked whether large numbers of Sabres fans are moving to Verizon FiOS, a spokesman for the company declined to comment, saying Verizon does not want to make such information available to its business competitors.

Direct TV officials could not be reached to comment Monday.

The Buffalo News asked Tremblay, the spokesman for Time Warner, whether the impasse has caused many customers to complain or to cancel subscriptions. He said he was unable to find out because Monday was a holiday and many Time Warner employees were off for the day.

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After big win at Chicago, Oilers head to Buffalo

Davis Harper

NHL.com

January 3, 2012

OILERS (16-19-3) at SABRES (17-17-4)

TV: SNET-EDM, MSG-B

Last 10: Edmonton 3-7-0; Buffalo 2-6-2.

Season Series: This is the only meeting of the season between these inter-conference opponents. When the teams last met on Dec. 28, 2010, Buffalo topped Edmonton in Rexall Place behind two goals from defenseman [Mike Weber](#).

Big Story: Edmonton enters Buffalo looking to build on some rare momentum after a 4-3 victory against the Western-leading Chicago Blackhawks. However, they'll likely be without rookie center [Ryan Nugent-Hopkins](#), who suffered a shoulder injury in the opening period and did not return.

"I don't know exactly what happened, or if there was a sniper in the press box, because he just fell down," Oilers coach Tom Renney said. "That happens, but in talking to him, he thought he caught an edge."

Team Scope:

Oilers: With a win in Chicago, Edmonton has salvaged something from their current season-long, seven-game road trip. Coming into Monday, the Oilers had lost three straight – to Vancouver, Minnesota and the New York Islanders – but got 39 saves from usual backup [Devan Dubnyk](#) to kick off the calendar year in a positive way. Edmonton received balanced scoring – the Oilers got goals from four different players – and were able to hold off a late Chicago comeback.

"It means a lot, but it doesn't mean anything if you don't build on it and make something happen (Tuesday) night in Buffalo," Renney said. "The only way we were going to beat them is by playing together and sticking to a gameplan -- and we did that. Special teams again were outstanding, as they have been pretty much all year. Goaltending was solid. The guys just really stuck with it."

Sabres: Coming off a two-game road losing skid in Washington and New Jersey, Buffalo returned home on New Year's Eve to face Ottawa. The Senators ruined the homecoming, though,

skating off with a 3-2 shootout win despite never leading until the shootout winner.

Even though he saved 44 of 46 shots, Buffalo goalie [Jhonas Enroth](#) fell to 0-4-1 over his last five. Sabres coach Lindy Ruff commented on his team's lack of luck since Christmas, the biggest indictment coming when Daniel Alfredsson trickled a shot through Enroth's legs to keep the Sens alive in the third round of the shootout.

"Somehow, the hockey gods gave that one a little extra push and it went in," Ruff said of Alfredsson's goal. "The battle was there, and the drive was there. We just gotta keep trying to grind it out."

Who's Hot: Edmonton's [Jordan Eberle](#) recorded two assists in the win over Chicago. Eberle still has 8 points (4 goals, 4 assists) over his last seven games.

Injury Report: Besides Nugent-Hopkins, defenseman [Tom Gilbert](#) left Monday's game against the Blackhawks with a lower-body injury and did not return. Defenseman [Ryan Whitney](#) (right ankle) did not play. [Alex Plante](#) (facial lacerations), [Cam Barker](#) (left ankle surgery), and [Taylor Fedun](#) (broken right femur) are all on injured reserve. ... For Buffalo, [Christian Ehrhoff](#) (upper body), [Andrej Sekera](#) (upper body), [Colin Stuart](#) (lower body), [Tyler Ennis](#) (left ankle), [Ville Leino](#) (lower body), [Corey Tropp](#) (upper body) and [Tyler Myers](#) (broken wrist) will all miss significant time.

Stat Pack: Two teams in the bottom third in wins are surprisingly strong on special teams. Buffalo is ninth in both power play (19 percent) and penalty kill (82.5 percent), while Edmonton is second in man-advantage efficiency (20.8 percent) and 11th on the penalty kill (84.1 percent). Whichever team stays out of the box may have the advantage.

Puck Drop: "Wins often do come with a price. The guys that are healthy are the guys that will work to make the difference for us moving forward, and we'll assess where we are with the injured fellas and move on." -- *Oilers coach Tom Renney after Monday's 4-3 win at Chicago*

Edmonton (16-19-3) at Buffalo (17-17-4)

Jeff Bartl

STATS

January 3, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) are dealing with a plethora of injuries, contributing to their current losing streak.

Facing the [Edmonton Oilers](#) may help ease the pain.

Buffalo seeks its sixth straight win over Edmonton when the teams meet Tuesday night at First Niagara Center.

The Sabres (17-17-4) have lost three consecutive games and six of their last seven after falling 3-2 to Ottawa in a shootout on Saturday, scoring fewer than three goals for the fifth time in six games.

Buffalo played without five regular contributors including defenseman [Christian Ehrhoff](#), who suffered an upper-body injury in Friday's 3-1 loss at Washington. Making matters worse, [Brad Boyes](#) - who scored in Saturday's loss - and [Jason Pominville](#) left Monday's practice early.

Though [Tyler Myers](#) and [Tyler Ennis](#) are close to returning, the Sabres are struggling without their regular lineup.

"We just have to keep grinding it out," Ruff said. "We did some good things. We're just not converting. It's something we're going to have to work on."

Ruff said he expects Pominville to play through an illness, while Boyes' injury may keep him from playing Tuesday after he fell against the boards during a drill.

"Boyes just tweaked his ankle for a second and it's one of those where it could just be a stinger but we'll have to wait and see," Ruff told the team's official website.

It may not matter who the Sabres have on the ice Tuesday given their recent success against the Oilers. Buffalo has outscored Edmonton 22-7 during its five-game winning streak in the series.

[Ryan Miller](#), who got the night off Saturday, should be back in net for the Sabres. He's started each game during Buffalo's winning streak over Edmonton, posting a 1.40 goals-against average in those victories.

He'll face an Oilers team that ended a seven-game road losing streak with a 4-3 win over Chicago on Monday, though the price may have been losing two key players.

Defenseman [Tom Gilbert](#) took a hard hit into the boards in the second period and came down awkwardly, leaving his status up in the air for Tuesday.

Also uncertain to play is rookie sensation [Ryan Nugent-Hopkins](#), who suffered a lower-body injury after playing less than four minutes in the first period. The No. 1 overall draft pick leads all rookies with 13 goals and 22 assists.

Edmonton (16-19-3) was able to hold on for the victory Monday to end a three-game skid, but is still only 4-11-1 in its last 16 games.

[Andy Sutton](#) scored, [Taylor Hall](#) had a goal and an assist and [Jordan Eberle](#) added two assists for the Oilers, who scored at least four goals for only the second time in their last nine contests.

“That’s the way we played at the start of the year,” said Sutton, speaking of Edmonton’s 8-2-2 start. “I don’t know what’s so complicated about playing that way. Just don’t turn the puck over. We were tenacious on the puck and the results speak for themselves.”

[Devan Dubnyk](#) made 39 saves in his second straight start in place of the struggling [Nikolai Khabibulin](#) (2-6-1 with a 2.90 GAA in his last nine starts). It’s unclear who will be in net Tuesday, but Khabibulin has lost his last four starts against Buffalo.

MYERS & ENNIS CLOSE TO RETURNING

Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

January 3, 2012

The Buffalo Sabres took the ice for the first time in 2012 this morning and are looking to get a few regular contributors back into the lineup soon.

Both defenseman Tyler Myers and winger Tyler Ennis participated in today's practice and while they aren't ready for action quite yet, both said they're feeling better and getting closer.

Myers, who has been out since Nov. 23 with a broken wrist, worked out as the extra defenseman but took regular repetitions in 5-on-5 drills with the rest of the team.

"I take another CAT scan tomorrow morning," Myers said. "We'll know a little bit more there, if I can start leaning on my stick a lot more, start engaging in physical play. I think today was its best day."

Although the initial diagnosis was four-to-six weeks, Myers said he expected it to take extra time to heal.

"In my experiences in the past with broken bones, I've always taken a little bit longer," Myers said. "It's always frustrating not being able to get out there, but at the same time I'm staying positive. I feel good on the ice so I'm close."

Ennis has been out for the last six games after injuring his ankle. He missed 17 games earlier in the season with the same injury. He says now that while there is some concern that it could become a nagging problem, pain is normal and he's feeling better every day.

"It's kind of tough to balance the cautiousness and the anxiousness to get back in the lineup," Ennis said. "I'm feeling good, but last time I was feeling pretty good, too. It's just kind of a weird thing. I just need to keep doing the same thing. Ice it, work on it, skate on it. Just do everything I can to push myself, too. You don't want to take any extra time off that you could be playing."

Ruff said that it's going to be up to Ennis to decide when he will return to the lineup.

"He's close. I talked to him today. That's one of the ones where only the player knows and he doesn't feel he's quite ready yet," Ruff said.

Forward Brad Boyes, who missed 13 games earlier this year with an ankle injury of his own, fell near the half-wall during a drill towards the end of this morning's practice. He got up in some discomfort and skated to the bench where he sat for a few minutes before heading off to the dressing room. Ruff said he hopes that it isn't serious.

“Boyes just tweaked his ankle for a second and it’s one of those where it could just be a stinger but we’ll have to wait and see,” Ruff said.

Jason Pominville also left practice early with an illness but Ruff expects him to be fine for tomorrow night’s home game against the Edmonton Oilers.

The Philadelphia Flyers and New York Rangers face off in the fifth Winter Classic today, the seventh outdoor game in NHL history. Derek Roy, who played in the first Winter Classic here in Buffalo, remembers having some jitters before that game in 2008.

“It was great. You felt nervous and in a lot of NHL games, you just go in and you don’t feel nervous because it’s just pretty much the same thing. But to see 70,000 people and to play outdoors and to know it’s nationally televised is great,” Roy said. “It was a great experience. I had butterflies in the stomach going to [Ralph Wilson Stadium] that day and it was snowing. It was a great experience and it was fun.”

Defenseman Robyn Regehr participated in the second Heritage Classic last season in Calgary when he was a member of the Flames. Initially, he says, he wasn’t looking forward to it.

“When I first heard about it, I thought, you know what, I’m not too excited because as a kid I played outside and there were some really cold days out there,” Regehr said. “They were enjoyable, but your hands and your feet were freezing and things like that. But you still had a smile on your face. I wasn’t sure what the ice conditions were going to be like and all that. For me, I was kind of lukewarm with the idea.”

However, as the game approached and he was able to get out to McMahon Stadium the day before the game, his feelings changed.

“The stadium was right near where we lived and I got really excited. It was a great event and I highly recommend it for anyone whether it was a player or a fan or anything. The experience is fantastic,” Regehr said. “For me, it brought back all those memories of as a kid playing outside, playing on the road, playing in outdoor rinks and things. It was a great experience.”

TODAY'S FORWARD LINES AT PRACTICE:

Thomas Vanek-Jochen Hecht-Pominville. Nathan Gerbe-Roy-Drew Stafford. Matt Ellis-Paul Gaustad-Patrick Kaleta. Cody McCormick-Boyes-Luke Adam. Ennis and Zack Kassian skated as the extra forwards.

Myers, Regehr, Jordan Leopold, Mike Weber, Marc-Andre Gagnani, T.J. Brennan and Brayden McNabb participated on defense. Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth manned the nets.

Struggling Roy losing ice time, on pace for worst season

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

January 3, 2012

BUFFALO — At the end of practice Monday, struggling Sabres star Derek Roy zoomed in on Ryan Miller during a shootout drill, twisted and put the puck on his backhand before using a nifty move to beat the goalie.

It was a slick score only a handful of NHL players could pull off. But for the Sabres, Roy's goal came two days too late.

With the team knotted in a shootout with Ottawa on Saturday, the center couldn't beat Craig Anderson using a different move in the top of fourth. Bobby Butler scored the winner in the next round.

But, hey, at least Roy had a chance with the game on the line. The 28-year-old lost his opportunity late Friday in Washington, when Sabres coach Lindy Ruff benched him for the final few minutes of the 3-1 defeat.

On Nicklas Backstrom's winning goal early in the second period, Roy coasted back to defend the play after coughing up the puck up to the Capitals' Alexander Semin.

Ruff wasn't pleased.

"Just a couple big turnovers and the play he made coming back (on) the goal against. It wasn't good enough," Ruff said Monday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt against the Edmonton Oilers. "I thought other guys were playing better than he was."

Roy said the two spoke Saturday morning and "hashed some things out," something that "definitely helped." Making more plays and creating scoring chances came up.

"It's tough because it's a (3-1) game. I want to help my team win the game," Roy said. "I didn't play the last five minutes of the game maybe. That's tough to sit there and watch, not being able to contribute."

Roy hasn't contributed much in what is quickly becoming the worst of his eight NHL campaigns. In 38 games, he has only eight goals, 23 points and an awful minus-7 rating.

He has two goals and nine points in the past 21 games. His last two-point contest was Nov. 14. Not coincidentally, his lone four-game point streak in early November was the last time the Sabres won consecutive tilts.

Roy's 17-tally, 50-point pace would set new career lows for a season he spent entirely in the big leagues. He averages 27 goals and 71 points.

“It’s been OK. OK isn’t good enough, though,” Ruff said about Roy’s season. “He’s had some opportunities. He’s either got to make the opportunities happen or put the opportunities away himself.”

It can be argued the injury-ravaged Sabres, who earned just 11 of 30 points (4-7-4) in December and sit in 11th place, need Roy’s offensive prowess now more than ever.

Almost everyone’s experiencing a down season. The Sabres have only 98 goals and need a big finish to avoid a post-lockout low. A mere three players — Luke Adam, Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek — are scoring at a 20-goal clip.

“The biggest part we struggled at is scoring goals,” Ruff said. “A few of our key forwards — if you want to start with (Tyler) Ennis and (Drew) Stafford, Derek Roy — struggled on the offensive side.”

The Sabres’ veteran stars need to start picking the team up.

“Oh yeah, 100 percent. ... It’s the core, leader guys that are in here that need to step up and play better,” Roy said. “I’m one of them.”

Ruff cited two point-blank chances Roy missed during a two-man advantage in 2-1 loss to the Islanders on Nov. 29.

“Those are the type of finishes that haven’t been there,” Ruff said.

When the Penguins throttled the Sabres 8-3 on Dec. 17 in Pittsburgh, Roy missed an early chance to tie the game and swing the momentum.

Roy thought he generated some solid chances beside Stafford and Nathan Gerbe, his new wingers, in the 3-2 loss Saturday.

“We just didn’t finish them again,” he said. “We got to get pucks to give us some more chances to score. The onus is on us to make those plays. When we have a chance to score, we got to finish it. There’s no excuse now. We just got to finish them.”

Of course, Roy’s a notoriously fast finisher. He went on tear late in 2009-10, compiling 15 goals and 32 points in the last 29 games.

“It’s usually one player or one situation or comeback game that you gain confidence through,” Roy said. “At the start of the year when I had my stretch of games where I was playing real well, I just got to get back to that, keep stringing games together instead of having one good game and one OK game.”

Ennis not yet ready to return

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

January 3, 2012

BUFFALO — Winger Tyler Ennis, an Edmonton native, said whenever the Sabres play the Oilers, “I circle it on my calendar, kind of a cool game to play.”

But Ennis, shelved the last six games after re-injuring his ankle Dec. 17 in Pittsburgh, won’t play tonight at the First Niagara Center.

Ennis, however, is improving and said he’s day-to-day. He’s being extra cautious since the same injury cost him 17 games earlier this season. He doesn’t want to rush back.

“I just don’t want to re-tweak it where I lose my strength,” Ennis said Monday about the sprain. “I feel like I’m getting really close with my speed. I just need to do some battle drills.”

In other injury news, Tyler Myers (broken wrist) plans to have a CT scan this morning. The defenseman said he could “do quite a bit” during practice. He still hasn’t started battling or even taken a slap shot, however. Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said he’s getting closer.

Meanwhile, forward Brad Boyes tweaked the ankle that just sidelined him 13 games and left practice.

“It could be just a stinger,” Ruff said. “We’ll have to wait and see.”

The Sabres also returned rookie winger Corey Tropp (concussion) to Rochester after he passed his baseline test.

Captain Jason Pominville has been feeling ill and left practice early but should play tonight.

Sabres fans await TV deal

Staff Reports

The Tonawanda News

January 3, 2012

The Buffalo Sabres play their first game of 2012 at 7 tonight when they host the Edmonton Oilers at First Niagara Center.

But unless you're one of the 18,690 ticket holders, have Verizon FiOS or Direct TV, you likely won't see the game.

A battle between Time Warner Cable and Madison Square Garden Network, which holds the broadcasting rights to Sabres games, has resulted in MSG and MSG-Plus being taken off the cable provider.

The Associated Press reports neither MSG nor the cable company have more talks planned.

And with hockey fans left out in the cold, both sides are pointing the fingers at the other.

Time Warner says it won't pay a 53 percent fee increase sought by MSG. MSG says it is not seeking a 53 percent increase. It says it wants to be paid the same as other TV providers. MSG has urged viewers to switch cable providers.

On a web page entitled "MSG Pulls the Plug on Sports fans," Time Warner claims in a statement that MSG Networks "rejected all proposals, refused to engage in any meaningful way, and refused to allow us to keep the channel on."

"We think MSG is being unreasonable, and unfair to fans," the statement reads. "We do want MSG to return to our channel lineup, and we will continue to work hard to reach an agreement that gives you the sports you love at a price you can afford to pay."

Addressing the matter on their website, MSG Networks states Time Warner has rejected every offer made in the past two years and accuses the cable company of "grossly mischaracterizing" the network's position.

"All we have asked is for Time Warner Cable to value our programming in the same way as other TV providers — nothing more, nothing less," reads a statement from the network.

According to dozens of media outlets, part of the dispute deals with the Fuse music channel, owned by MSG's parent company, Cablevision. MSG hopes to package the music channel with the sports networks, but Time Warner would rather negotiate for them separately.

Other facts could also be playing roles for each side: Madison Square Garden is in the middle of a renovation that will cost nearly \$1 billion, and Time Warner just paid \$5 billion for Los Angeles Lakers broadcast rights.

While the dispute lingers, Time Warner is offering a free preview of the NBA League Pass through Jan. 8 and preview of the Time Warner Cable Sports Pass, a 15-channel package, through Jan. 31. That includes a nightly hockey highlight show.

“For our customers in Western New York, the launch of YNN Hockey Tonight, a new nightly hockey show, premiering Jan. 2,” is also included. According to Time Warner, YNN Hockey Tonight will have live interviews and analysis, scores, standings and other hockey information every night at 11:15 p.m. through the end of the NHL season.

The cable company is also showing the NBA Network on channel 28 and the NHL Network on channel 70, the two channels that were occupied by MSG and MSG-Plus.

Time Warner also notes on the web page that even without the MSG Networks, “fans can still see 20 percent of the remaining Sabres games on cable.” Including tonight’s game, there are 44 regular season Sabres games remaining, and Time Warner reports seven will be on NBC or NBC Sports Network, formerly known as Versus.

MSG remains in a similar dispute with Dish Network. The sports channel has been missing from the satellite TV provider since September 2010.

The loss of MSG, even for a short period, has more than just Sabres fans scrambling. The network also broadcasts New York Knicks basketball games as well as New York Rangers and New Jersey Devils hockey games. Cablevision holds a majority of the New York City cable TV market share, but Time Warner has about 1.3 million subscribers in the New York City-New Jersey area, according to a New York Daily News report.

Monday night games involving the Knicks and Devils were the first ones missed during the dispute.

Sabres prepping for rare home game in January

Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

January 3, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR550) -- The Buffalo Sabres took to the ice on Monday afternoon at First Niagara Center in preparations for another three-game week. Two of the team's three home games take place this week, with games against the Edmonton Oilers tomorrow and the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday night on home ice. Buffalo heads to also travels to Carolina to take on the Hurricanes Friday night.

The full, healthy roster of players started the skate, but forwards Jason Pominville and Brad Boyes each left early. Head coach Lindy Ruff said Pominville was not feeling well, while Boyes tripped and fell on the ice and "tweaked" his ankle. The bench boss believes the captain will be to go against the Oilers tomorrow, while he said he would have to wait and see how Boyes feels tomorrow. Boyes missed a month due to an ankle sprain earlier this season.

Tyler Ennis has been battling an ankle sprain nearly the whole season. The youngster missed significant time after he suffered the initial injury at Tampa Bay in October, and re-injured his ankle on December 17th at Pittsburgh. Both he and Ruff said the Edmonton, Alberta product is close to a return. The blue and gold could use his offensive input when he is healthy. Ennis has taken part in just 15 of the team's 38 games this season and has added 5 points (3G, 2A). Last year he amassed 49 points (20G, 29A) in 82 regular season games.

Ennis is just one of a number of Sabres that needs to produce offensively when he is in the lineup and healthy. Two others are Derek Roy and Drew Stafford. Roy has 8 goals in 38 games this season, and is well under his 70 (28G, 42A) and 69 (26G, 43A) point seasons in the 2 seasons prior to last year's injury shortened campaign. Roy has added 15 assists this year to account for the other portion of his 23 points.

Roy recorded a point a game last season with 35 (10G, 25A) in as many games. He thinks that playing more of a team game will help bring success. By doing that Roy believes that "having the confidence that we're going to go in and win the game. Not hoping that we come out with the lead, or hoping that we're going to win. Knowing...that we're going to go out and do the job and win the game."

Both he and Stafford admitted there is frustration whenever a scoring chance is missed, but for Roy it can be about the chances you don't create that can be just as maddening, saying, "if you only get one chance a game you don't score, then you're not doing your job. I think you've gotta generate more offensive opportunities, five, six a game, and set guys up and be in that scoring

area."

Stafford has 6 goals and 13 assists in 37 games this season, well off of his 31 goals and 21 assist totals in 62 games last season. He was one of the catalysts for the second half run that propelled the Sabres into the playoffs. With that in mind the team's 1st round draft pick from 2004 is trying to look forward instead of back on the opportunities missed. Stafford admitted that, "the way things have been going here, you know, the best thing we can do is just...turn the page and just keep on trying to get better, that is all that you can control. You can't worry about what happened in the past."

Nathan Gerbe was added to the wing alongside Roy and Stafford at the skate. Pominville was paired on a wing opposite Thomas Vanek, with Jochen Hecht joining the team's offensive leaders at center. Paul Gaustad was in between Matt Ellis and Patrick Kaleta, while Boyes was matched up with Cody McCormick and Luke Adam before leaving the skate early.

Tyler Myers continues to work back from the broken hand that has sidelined him since November 19th. The rear guard said he is scheduled to have another CAT scan done on his surgically repaired hand tomorrow, and hopes to be close to a return. He still has to prove the hand can sustain contact in practice, and "leaning on the stick" is something Myers is not able to do all that well currently. The third-year defenseman said the strength is coming back, that he was able to lean on his stick a bit more than normal, but the more will be known after the test tomorrow.

Myers was the extra defenseman for the Sabres, while TJ Brennan joined Jordan Leopold, Robyn Regehr, Marc Gragnani, Mike Weber, and Brayden McNabb among the regular defensive pairs.

The Sabres and Oilers drop the puck just after 7 o'clock Tuesday night on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550 and wgr550.com. Pregame with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog begins at 6 p.m.

Oilers have Blackhawks number once again

Despite injuries, Edmonton grinds out slim victory in Windy City

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Journal

January 3, 2012

EDMONTON - If the Chicago Blackhawks were looking to even the score and maybe run up the score after the Edmonton Oilers slapped them around 9-2 six weeks ago at Rexall Place, they didn't do either in Chicago on Monday as the short-staffed Oilers won a battle of attrition.

The Oilers lost Ryan Nugent-Hopkins to a left shoulder injury late in the first period — he left the game with his arm in a sling — and Tom Gilbert to a damaged right knee early in the second, but they shrugged off the fallen bodies to knock off the

No. 1-ranked Blackhawks 4-3.

Former Hawks winger Ben Eager, who was chastised for some bad penalties against the New York Islanders on Saturday and was benched for the final 20 minutes of a 4-1 loss, insured the Oilers win with a backhand on Cory Crawford in the third, which ended their seven-game losing streak on the road.

Goalie Devan Dubnyk recovered for an indifferent game against the Islanders to make 31 stops over the last 40 minutes.

“Wins often come with a price,” said Oilers coach Tom Renney, who said it was a single-car accident for Nugent-Hopkins.

Nobody hit him on his fifth shift of the game, late in the first period. He stumbled.

“I don't know what happened, maybe a sniper in the pressbox,” he said. “He just fell down. In talking to him, I think he caught an edge.”

Gilbert was pitched into the end boards by Daniel Carcillo 7-1/2 minutes into the second and landed awkwardly on his right knee as he rebounded off the wall. He left the rink under his own power — no crutches — but Renney didn't think either player would be on the ice to face the Sabres in Buffalo on Tuesday night. They will likely call up defenceman Colten Teubert from the farm after just sending him there last weekend because Ryan Whitney says he's not ready to play (ankle).

While Carcillo was in a walking boot after the game, his left leg twisted after the hit when he appeared to slow down and then belted Gilbert, he faces a possible hearing with NHL head of player discipline Brendan Shanahan after getting a major for boarding and a game misconduct.

“I haven’t seen the hit (on tape),” said Gilbert, who didn’t comment on what he thought of Carcillo’s action.

The Oilers scored twice on Carcillo’s penalty, even without Nugent-Hopkins who usually runs the power play from the half-wall.

Ryan Smyth banged one in from the blue paint and Taylor Hall, who got three against the Hawks in the 9-2 pasting on Nov. 19, slipped a 20-footer past Corey Crawford just after he smacked Niklas Hjalmarsson in the face with his stick. The referees felt it was on a follow-through.

“We had to make them pay ... lots of times on a five-minute power play you’re lackadaisical and don’t apply yourself with the proper level of intensity and execution, but we knew if we were going to beat Chicago in this one we had to do something in that five minutes,” said Renney.

Andy Sutton sashayed into the high slot for a third Oilers goal in the middle period, taking a perfect feed from Jordan Eberle.

Jimmy Hayes got his first NHL goal in the dying minutes after Jonathan Toews (first period) and Andrew Brunette (deflection) scored on Dubnyk, who didn’t let Renney down after he gave up two softies on Long Island, but had a 16-save (no goals) final period.

Eager, who didn’t win any points with his coach on Long Island, responded with a knife to his former club’s heart in the third, sailing a backhand past Crawford after out-legging Duncan Keith.

“I must have raced Keith 1,000 times in practice here and never beat him,” said Eager.

Dubnyk couldn’t believe the Hawks shot total in the final 20 minutes.

“When I heard them announce 23 I looked over to Khabi (Nikolai Khabibulin) and said, ‘Really? Didn’t seem like that many, although they were throwing lots of pucks at the net (Marian Hossa had six in the third and finished with eight in all),’” said Dubnyk. “I was just trying to battle as hard as I could and get sight-lines and battle for position on rebounds.”

ON THE BENCH: Oilers captain Shawn Horcoff, who played 22 minutes and took 33 draws, appeared to hurt his left shoulder when belted by Jamal Mayers late in the third, but came back a few shifts later. He should be ready for the Sabres.

Oilers GM Tambellini not interested in another lottery pick

Underachieving team has struggled with injuries, lack of scoring

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Journal

January 2, 2012

EDMONTON - Steve Tambellini looks at the standings and doesn't like what he sees.

"Do I want to be a lottery pick again? No, I've said that from the beginning," said the Edmonton Oilers general manager.

It isn't his intention to be picking in the top three of the NHL entry draft in Pittsburgh this June. His game plan isn't to be the fifth worst team in the NHL right now, with a club that looks an awful lot like last year's version. The Oilers were 12-18-7 after 37 games in 2010-11, with 31 points. On Jan. 1, 2012, the Oilers are 15-19-3, with 33 points. That's not a leap forward. Forget playing meaningful games in March. How about February? How about this month?

Tambellini does not want to be at TSN's Toronto studio this spring for another lottery telecast as one of the league's bottom feeders, even if that would give the Oilers a shot at Team Canada junior defenceman Ryan Murray, who might be the second coming of Scott Niedermayer.

That wouldn't be progress, and that's what this is supposed to be, right?

Right now Tambellini's club is coming off three wins in 12 games in December. They've lost seven in a row away from Rexall Place and have the Chicago Blackhawks, Buffalo Sabres, St. Louis Blues and Dallas Stars next, on what is turning into more of a death march than a road trip. Jordan Eberle, Taylor Hall — who was very good against the New York Islanders on Saturday with three goalposts and 10 shots directed at Evgeni Nabokov's net — and Ryan Nugent-Hopkins are a joy to watch. But they aren't getting nearly enough scoring help. Or leadership help, in some cases.

Where does Tambellini want to finish? If they get 45 points in their last 45 games, that's 78 points, a 16-point improvement over last year.

"I'm not going to put a number on it. I want to finish as high as possible," he said. "Again, I don't want a lottery pick."

They're 10 points out of eighth spot, but more importantly have four teams — Dallas, the Calgary Flames, Colorado Avalanche and Phoenix Coyotes — to climb over.

"I think our team knows they have the skill, but the mental toughness to bring it every night is a lot of work. I certainly want to see the group commitment back (from the 8-2-2 start). I want to see our veteran players express themselves and contribute," he said. "I think they've worked hard, but we can be better."

Tambellini says there are no trades on the front-burner, but some bodies might be coming up from the Oklahoma City Barons, one of the American Hockey League's top three teams, before the road trip is over. Bet on winger Teemu Hartikainen, who is recovering nicely from a shoulder injury. There is no timetable yet on Magnus Paajarvi, who has four assists in six games for the Barons, returning. Linus Omark will be assessed on Jan. 11, so forget him.

"I think trade possibilities might heat up the middle of this month. Lots of teams were calling around prior to Christmas to get a sense of where people thought they were or where they might go. I'm not giving up our future, for sure, but if I can help us now, I will do it," Tambellini said.

The kids — Eberle (39 points), Hall (24 in 29 games) and Nugent-Hopkins (35) — have been carrying the team although, predictably, Nugent-Hopkins is having more difficulty with other teams keying on him (no goals in nine games, five assists). Ryan Smyth (30 points) and Ryan Jones (12 goals) have done their bit. The rest of the veterans have struggled to help with some offensive pop.

Nobody ever knocks captain Shawn Horcoff's work ethic, but he has one goal in 15 games and only five points. Ales Hemsky has one goal in his last 14 games and four points. Sam Gagner, who scored against the Islanders in the 4-1 loss Saturday, has a goal and three points in his last eight. Eric Belanger has one goal and four points his last 14 games. Ben Eager has four points in 26 games and has taken too many minor penalties.

"We have a lot of guys who can generate offence, young and old. I don't want to single out any one veteran player, but I know the sacrifice that was evident in our play when we were winning a lot of games (8-2-2 start). Two things: there's sacrifice when it comes to stopping goals going into your net and sacrifice that's needed to score goals. Some of the goal scoring may have to do with missing some of defencemen," said Tambellini.

Hemsky has become a lightning rod with fans. He's got tons of ability, but precious little is happening. He has points in eight of 24 games.

"We need Ales Hemsky to be Ales Hemsky. He's worked hard to get his body back to its strength. We need him on a nightly basis, no question. We've had some discussions (about a new contract), but nothing to report right now (he'll be an unrestricted free agent on July 1)," he said. There's a better chance he'll be traded unless he somehow gets really hot.

Belanger, who signed a three-year, \$5.25-million deal, is winning 56.7 per cent of his draws (seventh-best in the league) but absolutely nothing is happening outside the faceoff dot, offensively. He has 55 shots, and one goal.

"Eric is frustrated he hasn't generated more offence (10 points) ... for sure he has the ability to do more, but Tom (coach Renney) trusts him in terms of his defensive play and intelligence. If he's not getting points, then I expect him to be a good faceoff man," said Tambellini.

Eager can skate and hit, but his on-ice savvy needs work. When Islanders forwards Josh Bailey and Matt Martin didn't want to fight him after walloping Oilers with clean hits on Saturday, he

should have skated away. Instead, he took two penalties, then a third for complaining, then a misconduct, and Renney didn't play him the last 20 minutes.

"We need his heaviness in our lineup, but he has to control of emotions for sure. He plays with an edge and I know there's a couple of things he'd like to take back," said Tambellini.

So who are the real Oilers? The team in the first 12 games? Or the team in the last 25?

"The first month and a half of this season showed our capabilities. It wasn't an illusion, not to me," said Tambellini. "If you look at our team when our defence is healthy and our goaltending is the way it was then, that's the type of hockey I think we can play. It was the skill forwards paying a price to get inside to score, it was the tenacity of, say, an energy forward who refused to give up on a puck or the play of Nikolai Khabibulin, who's been banged up the last while. I don't want to use this is a cop-out, but we've missed (Ryan) Whitney, (Andy) Sutton, (Cam) Barker and (Corey) Potter for a great time of the season. That's put pressure on our team. We were much stronger in front of our net when they were all playing. That was an obvious upgrade from last year."

"I really believe there's much more potential with this team in a lot of areas than last year's team. I know people are talking about our points being about the same, but we've been as high as No. 2 on the power play in the last while and top 10 in penalty killing for some time. That's a significant in talent there," he said. "But we're not winning games."

Winning becomes much harder the second half as teams scramble for playoff spots. Winning is hard, losing becomes easy.

"It better not," said Tambellini.

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Oilers recall two players from farm team

Jim Matheson

Edmonton Journal

January 2, 2012

EDMONTON - The Edmonton Oilers have summoned defenceman Colten Teubert and forward Josh Green from their AHL farm club.

With injuries to Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Tom Gilbert the Oilers need reinforcements for Tuesday's game in Buffalo. Nugent-Hopkins hurt his left shoulder and Green his right knee in their 4-3 win in Chicago.

Oilers ground 'Hawks

Derek Van Diest
Edmonton Journal
January 3, 2012

CHICAGO - They weren't talking how, but how many heading into the contest.

Having blown out the Chicago Blackhawks in the previous meeting, the Edmonton Oilers were expecting to face a motivated opponent.

As it turns out, the Oilers had some motivation of their own, pulling out a 4-3 victory and snapping a three-game losing skid in the process.

Ryan Smyth, Taylor Hall, Andy Sutton and Ben Eager scored for the Oilers, while Jonathan Toews, Andrew Brunette and Jimmy Hayes countered for the Blackhawks.

"It's great, we needed it," said Sutton. "That's the way we played at the start of the year. What's so complicated about playing that way? Just don't turn the puck over, be tenacious on the puck and the results speak for themselves."

Aiding the Oilers get the victory was a five-minute boarding penalty on Blackhawks winger Daniel Carcillo, who hammered defenceman Tom Gilbert into the end boards.

Both players were racing back for the puck and both had to leave the game with leg injuries.

The Oilers also lost Ryan Nugent Hopkins, who fell and left the arena with his left arm in a sling.

"I don't know what happened, maybe there was a sniper in the press box," said Oilers head coach Tom Renney about Nugent-Hopkins. "He just fell down. In talking to him he thought he caught an edge."

Regardless, despite not having Nugent-Hopkins after the first period, the Oilers capitalized on their extended advantage with a pair of goals to take a second-period lead.

"I think the hits speaks for itself and the penalty does as well," said Renney. "At least to his point it has been addressed and I hoped it's looked at even further."

Smyth scored 16 seconds into the advantage, while Hall added another just over three minutes later.

Sutton then restored the Oilers lead, after Andrew Brunette had tied the contest on a tip in front of goaltender Devan Dubnyk.

The Oilers defenceman slipped into the slot undetected, took a behind-the-back pass from Jordan Eberle and snapped a shot over the shoulder of goaltender Corey Crawford.

“Ebs is a great heads-up player and we’ve been talking about getting him to curl and hit the late guy,” said Sutton. “He found me twice, actually. The first time I should have shot it, but I tried to slide it backdoor to Hallsy. Ebs is a great player and I was just trying to get open for him.

“I guess I knew where I was going with the shot, I might have blacked out, what happened?”

Eager extended the Oilers lead in the third period, taking a pass from Jeff Petry in the slot and firing a backhand past Crawford.

The Oilers winger redeemed himself after a tough afternoon in Long Island Saturday, taking three penalties in that contest, two of which were scored on.

“Obviously the last game was disappointing, I wasn’t happy with how I played and costs the team with bad penalties,” Eager said. “It would have been nice to play the next day so I could bounce back. Tonight I wanted to come with a good effort and I was fortunate to score a goal and it happened to be a big one.”

Dubnyk also had a redemption game, bouncing back strong after giving up four goals on nine shots in the loss to the Islanders.

The Oilers goaltender turned away 39 shots, 22 in the third period alone to preserve the victory.

“It feels real good,” Dubnyk said. “It was pretty exciting to get the opportunity. It was nice for Tom to give me a chance to get back in here. We talked about how we needed this one. We battled hard for the whole game. It was fun, there were definitely some nerves for me at the start, which isn’t a bad thing. I settled in nice, I just didn’t want to let anything bother me all night and I thought I did that.”

It was expected Renney would go back to Khabibulin for the contest, but he decided to give Dubnyk an opportunity to get back on the horse.

“You have to give guys an opportunity,” said Renney. “Maybe down the road, when we’re closer to a finished product in terms of our team, you can bench a guy or put him in the press box. I think you have to give guys an opportunity to learn from a tough circumstance, battle through it, gain some confidence in himself and move forward. Oftentimes, people deserve a second chance.”

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Dubnyk stops 39 shots as Oilers edge 'Hawks 4-3

Marc Ciampa

Oilers.com

January 3, 2012

Taylor Hall had a goal and an assist while Jordan Eberle had two helpers to help lead the Edmonton Oilers to a 4-3 victory over the Chicago Blackhawks at the United Center on Monday night.

Devan Dubnyk made 39 saves, including 22 in the third period alone to help lift Edmonton to victory.

FIRST PERIOD

Just under four minutes into the game, the first penalty of the game went to Dan Carcillo. As the Blackhawks were leaving their own zone, he hooked Corey Potter. Edmonton managed one shot with the man advantage but otherwise, Chicago did a good job killing off the two minutes.

Three minutes later, it was Chicago's turn on the power play as Potter was sent off for two minutes for holding.

On the ensuing power play, Dubnyk had to be sharp during a goalmouth scramble in front. The Oilers netminder sprawled out and made several big stops as the 'Hawks were buzzing around the crease. Near the end of the penalty, Dubnyk stuck out his left pad and denied Bolland for another huge save, enabling the Oilers to kill off the penalty.

Jonathan Toews opened the scoring with 7:06 to go in the opening frame. Toews wristed a shot along the ice from the high slot that just went past the left pad of an outstretched Dubnyk.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins took a tumble awkwardly into the boards in the later half of the period and had to get some attention on the bench and later in the room. He did not return to the game due to a shoulder injury.

With just over a minute left in the period, Ryan Jones used his speed to get in behind the Chicago defence and break in alone on netminder Corey Crawford. Jones tried to go five-hole but was denied on the doorstep of the Blackhawks goalie.

Shots on goal were even at 10 apiece after 20 minutes of play but Chicago had a 1-0 lead on the scoreboard.

SECOND PERIOD

Ales Hemsky took a hooking penalty early in the second to put Chicago back on the power play.

Tom Gilbert took a tumble into the boards behind the net with Dan Carcillo. For his efforts, Carcillo received five minutes for boarding and a game misconduct and also injured himself. Gilbert was also injured on the play, though it appeared not as severely but both he and Carcillo went to their respective dressing rooms for treatment.

Gilbert did not return to the game after suffering a right knee injury.

The Oilers didn't waste any time as 16 seconds into the major penalty, Ryan Smyth jammed the puck in at the side of the net to tie it up at 1-1.

With 1:23 left in the five-minute penalty, Taylor Hall wristed a shot from the bottom of the right circle that beat Crawford through the five hole. The goal came moments after he stuck Niklas Hjalmarsson in the face with a follow through on a clearing attempt.

Hjalmarsson got a measure of revenge 99 seconds later, firing a shot from the left point that was tipped in front by Andrew Brunette, beating Dubnyk and tying the game at 2-2.

With the second period winding down, Jordan Eberle made a great play to get the puck to Andy Sutton in the slot. Sutton made no mistake, wristing it past Crawford to give the Oilers a 3-2 lead.

Oilers outshot Chicago 13 to 9 in the second period. Overall, Edmonton had a 23 to 19 edge on the shot clock.

THIRD PERIOD

Edmonton extended its lead to 4-2 just over eight minutes into the third period. Ben Eager skated in and backhanded a shot past Crawford for the goal.

Eric Belanger took a four minute high sticking penalty with 8:46 to play in the period, giving Chicago their best opportunity to get back in the game.

For the first three minutes of the power play, the Oilers penalty killers were able to ensure the Blackhawks did not even get a shot on goal. Chicago did get some pressure as the Belanger penalty was winding down but nothing of the five-star variety.

With 3:49 to go, Jimmy Hayes spun and fires from the bottom of the left faceoff circle that eludes Dubnyk after going through several legs on its way to the net.

12 seconds later, Ryan Jones bowled over Crawford in the crease to give Chicago a power play with a chance now to tie it up.

With 11 seconds to play, Ales Hemsy couldn't beat out the icing call setting up a faceoff in the Oilers end.

Chicago had 22 shots in the third period but could not convert more than one goal, giving the Oilers the 4-3 victory.