



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Wednesday, February 8, 2012*

## **Sabres' Regier remains upbeat despite latest injury**

*Players feel better in wake of 3-0-1 run*

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2012

Darcy Regier has been in hockey since 1974. He's been with teams from Canada to Texas, Phoenix to Hartford.

As the Buffalo Sabres' general manager stood at the lectern Tuesday discussing -- of all things -- the day-to-day status of his broken-ribbed coach, Regier smiled and said, no, he's never seen anything like this.

The Sabres' season of expectations has turned into a year of forgettable moments. The latest has coach Lindy Ruff possibly missing only the second game of his 15-year tenure when Boston visits First Niagara Center tonight.

With the Sabres well on their way to missing the playoffs, Regier found a moment to brush away the darkness and profess faith that things will get better in Sabreland.

"I have a fairly lengthy history in the game, and you take a certain comfort that this is a very unusual year, and they don't come around very often," Regier said. "Not unlike the winter in Buffalo this year. I think that that awareness allows you to kind of keep your head down, you keep moving, you have confidence in the staff, in the players. You recognize that if you stay with it things will turn."

With just 30 games to go and the trade deadline only 19 days away, the amount of time Regier can stick with that confidence is dwindling. The Sabres are at 11 points out of a playoff spot. They have just 50 points with 60 still available. The average number of points needed to earn the eighth spot in the Eastern Conference the last six seasons is 92, so the Sabres need a points percentage of .700 the rest of the year just to have a chance.

Only the New York Rangers, at .710 entering Tuesday night's game against New Jersey, have played above .667.

"That presents a tall order, and we're all aware of that," Regier said. "I still believe it. You have to move one game at a time. It's difficult to do great things if you don't have the circumstances with which to do them in, and we're situated there. Nobody wanted to be here where we are. It is where we are, and it provides an opportunity, and you have to play to that opportunity. You have to go for it."

Regier's thoughts with the annual swap meet approaching include the number of points his team needs this season, but he seems to be looking toward the future, too.

"Although that's part of it, the focus is wider and broader than that," Regier said. "I think it's the play of the team. It's kind of a sense of reading where things are, including points."

At the moment, the team is feeling good about itself. The Sabres are 3-0-1 in their last four games, tying their season high with points in four straight.

"We're playing well against some teams that are ahead of us, some teams that are really good in the league. That's a good feeling," forward Cody McCormick said. "Things are in a positive mood in here."

Forward Ville Leino has noticed. His first season in Buffalo has featured team and personal struggles, but the atmosphere is lighter without the losses piling up.

"Overall, guys are having a lot more fun out there," Leino said. "Sometimes it seems like, especially around here, I've noticed it gets a little serious. You forget to have fun, and you forget all those things you play hockey for. You get a lot more out of yourself if you're enjoying what you do."

The Sabres' season ceased being enjoyable when they played Boston on Nov. 12, a 6-2 loss that featured ... well, odds are extremely good fans know exactly what it featured. Ryan Miller, Milan Lucic, etc. The rematch in Buffalo was intense, and the Sabres expect the same tonight with the Bruins in town.

"They're a team that we want to beat," McCormick said. "We need the points more than they, and we've just got to show it on the ice."

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## **Patrick to fill in against Bruins if Ruff can't coach**

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 8, 2012

James Patrick feels completely comfortable running the Sabres. The Buffalo assistant coach, in his sixth season on the bench, is in charge of nearly all the team's optional practices. There have been a lot, so assuming control while coach Lindy Ruff takes a breather is nothing new.

There's a chance those head coaching stints could escalate to regular-season games. Ruff was too sore to coach Tuesday, one day after breaking three ribs during a practice collision. General Manager Darcy Regier said Ruff is "day to day" and could miss tonight's game against Boston in First Niagara Center.

"I'm hoping and expecting to see him here," said Patrick, who would take over if Ruff is unable to attend. "We're going to prepare the team like normal. It's going to be the same routine. ... We're going to do everything we can to get ready to win a game. That's our focus.

"If he isn't behind the bench, we're confident we can handle it."

Ruff, hired in 1997, has missed just one game in his 15 years. He skipped a 5-0 loss in Atlanta on March 20, 2006, when his daughter Madeleine had medical problems.

Even if he does come to tonight's game, there's a chance he'll coach from the press box. The broken ribs limit his mobility and could prohibit him from avoiding a puck shot into the bench. He may swap jobs with Teppo Numminen, with the upstairs assistant heading down to the bench and Ruff wearing a headset away from the ice.

"We'll see how he feels in the morning, and he'll make a determination from there," Regier said. "He is in a lot of pain."

Patrick ran Tuesday's practice with help from fellow assistants Kevyn Adams, Numminen and goalie coach Jim Corsi. Ruff talked to them on a conference call before the skate, and the coaches were scheduled to visit with the bench boss at his home later in the day.

"Obviously, he wasn't on the ice and we missed having him here, but it wasn't too different outside of that," Patrick said. "It's killing him because he is the pulse and heartbeat of the team. He's our leader. He's in a lot of pain, but he feels sick that he can't be here.

"I've known him for 25 years. He's as tough as any player I played with, and to see him on the ice, I thought he was kidding for about the first five, seven seconds, and then when he wasn't getting up I was like, 'Holy smokes, that's got to be painful because he's as tough as there is.'

"I felt sick that he's hurting that bad. You guys know how tough he is. He'll be back here as soon as he can."

\* \* \*

The Sabres will host the Bruins without leading goal-scorer Thomas Vanek. The left winger, who has an upper-body injury, skated on his own Tuesday but won't be ready to play until the weekend, at the earliest.

"There's a possibility that he'll skate [this] morning, but he won't play," Regier said. "Looking down the road, hopefully it's just a few days away."

Forward Colin Stuart, who suffered a knee injury Dec. 17 in his second appearance of the season, practiced with the Sabres for the first time. The Rochester Americans' captain expects to return to a game within a week.

"I don't foresee it being too much longer," Stuart said. "It's been a long process with the rehab and just trying to stay positive about things. I'm just really excited to be back out on the ice. I had a blast out there. It's nice to be out there with other guys and not just talking to myself out there."

\* \* \*

The Bruins still lead the Northeast Division and are second in the Eastern Conference. Lately, though, they've lacked the dominance shown during a 24-4-1 run from November to mid-January. They are 5-5-1 in the last 11 games, with two of the victories coming via shootouts.

They beat Washington, 4-1, Sunday.

"We took another step in the right direction," forward Milan Lucic told Boston reporters.

"Building our consistency in our game right now is the biggest step in getting back where we want to be."

\* \* \*

Ruff, long known to bellow instructions, spoke quietly during his phone calls, Patrick and Regier said. Captain Jason Pominville couldn't imagine Ruff not screaming at the players.

"Sometimes yelling at guys is a way to get us going," Pominville said. "That will be missed."

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## Sabres get another crack at Northeast rival Bruins

Brian Hunter

NHL.com

February 8, 2012

**BRUINS (33-16-2) at SABRES (22-24-6)**

**TV: NBCSP (HD), TSN2**

**LAST 10:** Boston 5-4-1; Buffalo 4-5-1

**Season Series:** Third of six meetings between these Northeast Division rivals. The Bruins earlier beat the Sabres twice in the span of 12 days, as [Tyler Seguin](#) scored twice and added an assist in a 6-2 win on Nov. 12 in Boston, while [Benoit Pouliot](#)'s goal in the fifth round of a shootout proved decisive in a 4-3 victory on Nov. 23 in Buffalo.

**Big Story:** In danger of losing three straight for the first time since their Stanley Cup hangover-plagued month of October, the Bruins responded with a decisive win in Washington on Sunday and will now look to string back-to-back victories together, something Boston hasn't accomplished in its last dozen games. The Sabres, meanwhile, have a ways to go in order to climb back into the playoff picture, but their rally against the Islanders on Saturday night was a good starting point.

### Team Scope:

**Bruins:** This past weekend marked Boston's second trip to Washington in less than two weeks. [Tim Thomas](#) was conspicuous by his absence the first time around, not only from the Bruins' trip to the White House -- which set off a media storm -- but also the game itself, as [Tuukka Rask](#) got the start in what ended up a 5-3 defeat. This time around, with the Bruins needing to stop a brief slide, Thomas stood front and center. He finished with 35 saves and was supported by a goal and assist each from [Brad Marchand](#) and [Rich Peverley](#) in a 4-1 win over the Capitals.

"Tim's capable of doing that for us, and he's done that a lot in the past," coach Claude Julien said. "And I thought he was on top of his game today."

**Sabres:** In order for Buffalo to get into the postseason it'll take a pretty hefty comeback in the standings. The Sabres showed the proper mentality on Saturday night, as they fell behind 3-1 after one period on Long Island, but worked their way back into the game and eventually stole a 4-3 shootout victory. [Derek Roy](#) scored late in the second, [Paul Gaustad](#) evened things up midway through the third and goals by [Brad Boyes](#) and [Jason Pominville](#) in the penalty-shot tiebreaker sealed the critical two-point effort.

"This team needed one of those nights," goalie [Ryan Miller](#), who passed Dominik Hasek as the franchise's all-time winningest goaltender, said in the Buffalo News. "If we're gonna come back in a season, we're going to have to come back in a game."

**Who's Hot:** Marchand has 3 goals and 3 assists over the Bruins' last six games. ... Gaustad has 2 goals and 2 assists over the Sabres' last three games. Miller is 3-0-1 in his last four starts, giving up just five goals during that span with a .959 save percentage.

**Injury Report:** Boston forward [Nathan Horton](#) is out indefinitely with a mild concussion. ... Buffalo forward [Thomas Vanek](#) (upper body) is day-to-day. Defensemen Brayden McNabb (concussion-like symptoms) and [TJ Brennan](#) (concussion-like symptoms) and forwards Corey Tropp (upper body), [Colin Stuart](#) (lower body) and [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) are on injured reserve.

**Stat Pack:** Seguin scored his team-leading 20th goal Sunday for the Bruins, while Marchand and [Milan Lucic](#) each remained one behind with their 19th tallies. ... The Sabres, who have matched their season high with three straight road wins, also have points in eight consecutive games at First Niagara Center (4-0-4).

**Puck Drop:** Buffalo's struggles this season have led to some trade talk surrounding Miller, who has stated he has no desire to play elsewhere. There were happier to things to talk about Saturday after he passed the legendary Hasek in the franchise's record books.

"I'm proud of it, it's nice. I'm proud of being a Buffalo Sabre," Miller said. "I was really excited coming in as a young player, looking up to Dominik Hasek. To be here that long, and to play with some great teams and great players. And to play for a coaching staff and a support staff that has had my back for a number of years now, it's nice. I get a source of pride from that."

## **Boston (33-16-2) at Buffalo (22-24-6)**

Nicolino DiBenedetto

STATS

February 8, 2012

The [Boston Bruins](#) may be atop the Northeast Division, but they feel they're putting some recent struggles behind them.

[Ryan Miller](#) is one of the reasons the [Buffalo Sabres](#) are gaining momentum.

The Bruins look to win back-to-back games for the first time in almost a month by beating the division rival Sabres again Wednesday night.

Boston (33-16-2) is trying to build on Sunday's 4-1 victory at Washington after failing to pull away in the Northeast race due to a 4-5-1 stretch since last winning consecutive contests Jan. 10-12.

"I think overall we're starting, the last couple of days, to go in the right direction and started to play the type of hockey the Boston Bruins play," goaltender [Tim Thomas](#) told the team's official website.

Thomas is certainly helping, winning four of his last five starts after making 35 saves against the Capitals. That may be reason enough for him to be back in net Wednesday, and he's also 4-0-2 in his last six meetings with the Sabres (22-24-6), including wins in both matchups this season.

Thomas made 31 saves before stopping all five shootout attempts in a 4-3 victory at Buffalo on Nov. 23.

Miller missed that meeting with a concussion suffered when he was hit by [Milan Lucic](#) in a 6-2 loss at Boston on Nov. 12. The rest of the Sabres were criticized for not going after the Bruins' left wing, but [Paul Gaustad](#) fought him in the following matchup.

Miller appears to be finally putting that injury behind him, winning three of his last four starts with a 1.18 goals-against average and one shutout. Prior to that stretch, he was 6-9-2 with a 3.32 GAA since returning.

He turned in another strong performance Saturday, making 35 saves and one more in the shootout of a 4-3 win over the [New York Islanders](#).

The victory gave Miller 235 for his career, breaking a tie with [Dominik Hasek](#) for the most in franchise history.

"He gives us a chance every night. We're excited and happy for him because he's an elite goalie," center [Jason Pominville](#) said. "I'm glad he was rewarded."



Pominville and the rest of the Sabres may be just as thrilled when coach Lindy Ruff is able to return to the bench after he was upended by defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) in an on-ice collision during Monday's practice.

"He still has his sense of humor," said assistant coach James Patrick, who is filling in for Ruff. "He was telling jokes in the hospital. He told the nurse that he had to cancel his dance lesson.

"We're going to prepare the team like normal. We're going to do everything we can to get ready to win a game. And if (Ruff) isn't behind the bench, we're confident that we can handle it."

Buffalo may also be without Tomas Vanek for a third consecutive game due to an upper-body injury, leaving the team without its top scorer with 19 goals.

Gaustad is providing some unexpected scoring punch with two goals and two assists in the last three games, matching his point total from the previous 23.

Boston is looking for another strong performance from [Tyler Seguin](#), who has four goals and three assists in four meetings with the Sabres, including one of each at Buffalo in November. The second-year center leads the Bruins with 20 goals.

## **Sabres coach Ruff day to day after breaking 3 ribs**

John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 7, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—The pain from three broken ribs was too much to allow [Buffalo Sabres](#) coach Lindy Ruff to attend practice Tuesday. It wasn't enough to prevent Ruff from cracking a few jokes.

“He still has his sense of humor,” assistant coach James Patrick said. “He was telling jokes in the hospital yesterday. He told the nurse that he had to cancel his dance lesson.”

Ruff's dancing and coaching days are on hold a day after he was upended by defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) in an on-ice collision during practice.

General manager Darcy Regier listed Ruff as day to day, while announcing that Patrick is taking over on an interim basis. That includes the possibility of Patrick coaching the Sabres in their home game against Boston on Wednesday.

Still in severe pain, having difficulty speaking and unable to get much sleep, Ruff stayed home, leaving Patrick to run practice. Ruff was strong enough to hold an early morning conference call with his staff. And the assistant coaches are planning to hold another meeting with Ruff at his home later in the day.

“Based on this morning, it's certainly very painful. He was in a lot of pain,” Regier said. “But he was in good spirits”

Though there's a possibility Ruff will be able to attend the game Wednesday, it's unlikely he'll be behind the bench. Regier expressed concern that Ruff's movements are limited as a result of the injury, which would make it difficult for him to avoid an errant puck.

The 51-year-old Ruff was hurt late in practice during a puck-chase drill when Leopold was trying to cut off forward [Ville Leino](#). Ruff was standing in the middle of the ice looking the other way when Leopold lost his footing and went sliding head first on his stomach and crashed into the back of his coach's skates.

Ruff fell backward and landed on his right side with a heavy thud. He was in pain as he was escorted off the ice, and spent much of the afternoon being treated at a hospital before being released.

Several onlookers said Ruff was fortunate his head didn't strike the ice when he fell.

Ruff's injury is the latest bizarre twist to occur in a Sabres season in which very little has gone right. A rash of injuries have forced every player but captain [Jason Pominville](#) to miss at least one game leaving the Sabres (22-24-6) sitting in 13th place in the Eastern Conference.

“Shake your head,” Pominville said. “I mean, throughout the season, you expect to have players miss practices and stuff like that. But to have a coach not out there because of an injury during practice is a first. I’ve never seen it happen.”

Ruff wasn’t the only NHL coach to get hurt on Monday. The [Edmonton Oilers](#) lost 6-3 at Toronto without coach Tom Renney, who stayed at the team hotel after being struck in the head by puck during the morning skate.

Saying, “Misery enjoys company,” Regier said Ruff received a sympathetic text from Renney.

Patrick is prepared to take over as coach for as long as necessary. He’s a former NHL defenseman, who is in his sixth season as a Sabres assistant.

“We’re going to prepare the team like normal,” Patrick said. “We’re going to do everything we can to get ready to win a game tomorrow. And if (Ruff) isn’t behind the bench, we’re confident that we can handle it.”

The Sabres are at least staying close to home, playing eight of their next nine games in Buffalo.

In his 14th season with the Sabres, Ruff is the team’s winningest and longest-serving coach. He last missed a game in March 2006, when he stayed home in Buffalo to be with his daughter Madeleine, who was ill.

In speaking to Ruff, Patrick can tell how difficult it is for him to be away from his team.

“It’s killing him,” said Patrick, who was a teammate of Ruff’s with the [New York Rangers](#). “It’s killing him because he is the pulse and the heartbeat of our team. He’s our leader. He’s in a lot of pain, but he feels sick that he can’t be here.”

Patrick knew Ruff was seriously hurt when he remained on the ice and had a team trainer tend to him.

“I thought he was kidding for about the first 5-7 seconds,” Patrick said. “And then when he wasn’t getting up, I said, ‘Holy smokes, that’s got to be painful because he is as tough as there is.’”

## **RUFF UPDATE: "DAY-TO-DAY"**

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

February 7, 2012

Normally Lindy Ruff would be the one providing injury updates after practice. But with Ruff at home today in considerable pain nursing three broken ribs suffered in on-ice a spill at Monday's practice, general manager Darcy Regier took over his duties today.

"As you will notice, Lindy Ruff is not on the ice today," Regier explained. "I think most of you are also aware that he has broken three ribs – which is a little different than we historically refer to these as 'upper body injuries.' He's listed as day-to-day ... and hopefully it remains that way.

"I did speak with (Lindy) this morning; he is in a lot of pain. He said he got about four hours of sleep last night. He was, when I came in this morning, on a conference call with the coaches going over practice."

Regier was unsure as to whether Ruff would be behind the bench for Wednesday's home game against Boston. His condition will be evaluated in the morning, and a determination will be made at that time. In Ruff's absence, James Patrick will assume the day-to-day duties – including running practices as he did today. In addition, Teppo Numminen would move from his current seat in the press box to behind the bench.

There's some concern that even if Ruff wants to go behind the bench tomorrow, it would more than just a pain tolerance issue. There's always the chance that he'd be unable to move quick enough to avoid a puck that might be shot out of play. With this in mind, Regier said they'd consider an alternative plan if Ruff is feeling healthy enough to come to the arena.

"I think a possibility would be that he's in-house, but maybe not available behind the bench."

Regier also mentioned another potential problem.

"My concern is he won't be able to yell at the guys," joked Regier.

Ruff has only missed one game in his Sabres career: a 5-0 loss in Atlanta on March 20, 2006, when he remained at home to deal with a medical issue regarding his daughter, Madeleine.

Whether Ruff is in the building or not, Patrick doesn't foresee any problems for the team as they get set for yet another big divisional matchup against the Bruins.

"We're going to prepare the team like normal. It's going to be the same routine. We're going to meet with Lindy today and go over preparation for tomorrow. We're going to do everything we can to get ready to win a game tomorrow. That's our focus. If he isn't behind the bench, we're confident we can handle it. I'm hoping and expecting to see him here tomorrow. I don't know if it'll be in the morning or later on."

Regier did confirm that [Thomas Vanek](#) won't return to the lineup on Wednesday, as he continues to recover from an upper body injury suffered January 31 in Montreal. Vanek has started skating on his own, and Regier wouldn't rule him out for this weekend's back-to-back home games against Dallas (Fri.) and Tampa Bay (Sat.).

## **AROUND THE NHL**

*Brian Duff of SabresTV takes his weekly look around the league*

Brian Duff

Sabres.com

February 7, 2012

Despite the recent scoring outburst from Edmonton's Sam Gagner and the best efforts over the last number of weeks from Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin, it doesn't appear as though we'll be seeing any scoring records fall during this 2011-2012 NHL regular season. In fact, it's possible that for the first time since 2003-04 (the last season before the work stoppage and subsequent rule changes to enhance scoring) we won't have a 50-goal sniper or a 100-point scorer.

Malkin is averaging 1.33 pts per game entering this week, and will need to stay on that pace to hit exactly 100 points. Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos is scoring .67 goals per game, and if that pace continues he'll end up with 54 goals and a second Rocket Richard trophy in the past three seasons.

The writing for this league wide drop in production was on the wall last season, when only Corey Perry of the Ducks hit 50 goals (and not a single goal more); and only Daniel Sedin of the Canucks joined the century club for points, finishing with 104.

Combine that with Sidney Crosby's long-term absence due to injury, along with many other star players being sidelined at least for short periods of time with various ailments, and we are left to wonder where it's all heading. Ironically, it's right in front of another round of CBA talks as the league's Collective Bargaining Agreement is set to expire this summer.

But enough of that.

What can be celebrated is the goaltending numbers being posted by clearly the league's elite.

We all knew what type of year Henrik Lundqvist was having for the Rangers before he brought his act to First Niagara Center last week. After witnessing his 1-0 shootout win over the Sabres, how many of you don't believe he is the favorite to secure his first ever Vezina Trophy? He might even trump the single season save percentage record of .938 posted just last season by Boston's Tim Thomas.

Like the Rangers tandem of "The King" and Martin Biron, the Blues duo of Brian Elliott and Jaroslav Halak are both on pace to post goals against averages below 2.00. And with a decent finish over the final two months, Thomas and his crease-mate Tuukka Rask might make it three pairings in the same exclusive club.

But two 'tenders not yet mentioned are chasing a little history of their own.

The NHL record for most wins in a season is 48, established by all-time wins leader Marty Brodeur of the Devils in 2006-07. Up until last Thursday, there was an extremely good chance that the record was ready to fall. That night Detroit's Jimmy Howard emerged with a shootout decision over Vancouver, his league leading 32nd win of the season. However, the win was overshadowed by an injury. Howard suffered a

fracture in his right index finger (the stick-hand for Howard) leaving his pursuit of history in doubt.

According to the Macomb Daily, Howard was told by medical personnel in Vancouver that the injury might keep him out 4-6 weeks. His response? Two weeks sounds about right. He said he's played with broken fingers before – although not the index finger – and believes there is no way he'll be out six weeks. You have to love his competitive spirit. But the reality is, even if he comes back in two weeks, he'll be hard pressed to match or better 48 wins.

Right now, Howard is winning 73 percent of his starts. Had he remained healthy he likely would have started 25 or 26 of the Red Wings 29 remaining games. If he kept up that pace, he'd have become the first netminder to win 50 games in a season!

Assuming he comes back on his schedule, let's say February 17, the Wings would have 24 games remaining. Howard would have to start all of them, and win at his current pace, to get the 17 victories required, and leave him with a new record mark of 49.

And while Howard may not be as obsessed with this record as I appear to be, he's not the only with an outside chance of breaking it.

The runner-up for the Vezina in 2011, Nashville's Pekka Rinne, is in the conversation. Starting this week with 30 wins, and currently winning 64 percent of his starts, Rinne could match Brodeur by doing something very "Marty" like, and that is play in all of the Predators remaining 29 games. Highly unlikely but you never know. Backup Anders Lindback made a rare appearance last week so Rinne should be good to go for at least the next month.

But assuming Rinne plays a logical 26 out of the final 29, his current pace would leave him with 46-47 wins. And when you are that close to the record, you just never know.

What all of this speculation does is simply reinforce the greatest trait of Martin Brodeur's soon to be Hall of Fame career: his durability.

It takes good fortune and great health to carve out the numbers he has. And in that record setting season of 2006-07, Brodeur played in a career high 78 games.

We'll see where this quest for the wins record goes in the coming weeks.

I for one have February 17 circled on my schedule, as hopefully Jimmy Howard will be back for the Wings by then and be staring down the ice to see Pekka Rinne at the other end.

May the best man win.

## **Sabres assistant Patrick to coach if broken ribs sideline Ruff**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 8, 2012

BUFFALO — James Patrick's been close friends with Sabres coach Lindy Ruff since they played together more than 20 years ago. The assistant coach appreciates Ruff's quick wit and ability to elicit laughter. He also admires the toughness Ruff showcased on the ice.

So when defenseman Jordan Leopold plowed into Ruff during practice Monday, knocking him down in a bizarre and scary collision in which the coach broke three ribs, Patrick wasn't sure what had happened.

"He's as tough as any player I've played with," said Patrick, who will coach the Sabres tonight at the First Niagara Center if Ruff doesn't feel well enough. "To see him on the ice, I thought he was kidding for the first five, seven seconds.

"And then when he wasn't getting up, I was like, 'Holy smokes, that's got to be painful' because he's as tough as there is."

As he was crumpled on the ice in pain, Ruff joked he wanted his players shown a clip of him "to lighten the mood," Patrick said.

Ruff only slept four hours and was still hurting Tuesday morning, so he stayed home and let Patrick and the other assistants run practice inside the FNC.

Sabres general manager Darcy Regier joked Ruff's "listed as day-to-day." If Patrick temporarily takes over, Teppo Numminen will come down from the press box and coach from the bench.

The coaches planned to visit Ruff later in the afternoon and prepare for the Boston Bruins. Ruff also held a conference call with his staff in the morning.

"It's killing him (being away) because he's the pulse and the heartbeat of the team," Patrick said. "He's our leader. I mean, he's in a lot of pain. But he feels sick that he can't be here."

With limited mobility, it seems unlikely Ruff would coach from the bench. He could work from somewhere else in house, possibly upstairs, Regier said.

"There's a concern that he wouldn't be able to get out of the way quite honestly," Regier said. "And the pucks do make their way onto the bench."

In a press release Monday afternoon, the Sabres said they expected Ruff back Tuesday to "resume his normal coaching responsibilities." But Ruff was still at the hospital then. Patrick said Ruff told the nurse "he had to cancel his dance lesson at 5 o'clock."

Patrick sounded more optimistic than Regier that Ruff would coach.

“My concern is he won’t be able to yell at the guys,” Regier said with a grin.

Sabres captain Jason Pominville added: “We need that voice. We need him to be vocal back there to get us going. He’s a great leader.”

Patrick, an assistant since 2006, is more soft-spoken and mild-mannered than Ruff. Patrick often runs optional practices. Regier’s “very confident” in him.

“I asked him ... how he felt about (coaching),” Regier said. “He said he’s ready. I said, ‘You got lots of support, lots of help.’ I think he’ll focus on a few things. He’ll talk to Lindy. But he’ll be ready to go.”

Patrick added: “We’re going to prepare the team like normal.”

The Sabres’ 2011-12 campaign has been anything but normal. A chic Stanley Cup pick, they’ve fallen near the bottom of the Eastern Conference. The team’s endured a shocking number of injuries, sometimes playing without seven or eight regulars.

Now the coach is hurt.

Regier, who entered professional hockey in 1976, has never experienced a season like this one.

“I have a fairly lengthy history in the game, and you take a certain comfort that this is a very unusual year and they don’t come along very often, not unlike the (mild) winter in Buffalo this year,” he said. “So I think that awareness kind of allows you to keep your head down.

“You keep moving. You have confidence in the staff and the players. You recognize that if you stay with it, things will turn.”

The Sabres, with 50 points, could be entering a make-or-break stretch. Tonight kicks off a run of four straight and eight of nine at home. They’ll likely need about 95 points to secure the final playoff spot.

Regier hopes the Sabres use Ruff’s injury as a rallying point.

“You have to use it as an opportunity for good things and the belief that you can make good things happen,” he said. “I don’t think there’s any other way to look at it.”

Regier insists he still believes in his team.

“Nobody wanted to be here where we are,” he said. “It is where we are and it provides an opportunity. You have to play to that opportunity. You have to go for it.”



## **Sabres goalie Miller enjoying wins milestone as play picks up**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 8, 2012

BUFFALO — Finally, after about three wretched months, Ryan Miller's found a groove and started performing like an elite NHL goaltender again.

In his last four starts, the 31-year-old's sporting a tight 1.18 goals against average and a gaudy .959 save percentage. Not coincidentally, the Sabres are 3-0-1 entering tonight's contest against the Boston Bruins at the First Niagara Center.

Still, Miller's enduring the toughest of his seven full big league campaigns. His overall numbers — 14-15-3, 2.88 and .905 — are bad.

He's watched Milan Lucic get away with steamrolling him, suffered a scary concussion and been subjected to trade rumors as the Sabres have slipped to 13<sup>th</sup> place in the Eastern Conference.

So, with three days between games, Miller's paused briefly to enjoy one of the lone bright spots this season, becoming the franchise's all-time wins leader.

His strong 35-save effort Saturday in the Sabres' 4-3 shootout triumph in New York over the Islanders earned Miller victory No. 235, moving him past the legendary Dominik Hasek.

Miller cherishes the milestone.

"Setting the team record is a source of pride for me," Miller said Monday. "To be able to be here that long, contribute and be a part of the Sabres organization has been a dream fulfilled for me to play in the NHL."

Sabres captain Jason Pominville said passing Hasek, a surefire NHL Hall of Famer, is "pretty impressive."

"It's well-deserved for him," he said. "He's a competitor. You get what you expect from him every night."

Well, at least the past couple of weeks and most of October.

Miller hasn't been his normal self other than those two stretches. He allowed three or more goals 18 times during a 23-start stretch from late October to late January, winning just seven times.

In today's low-scoring NHL, giving up three goals usually means losing.

"Not everything's going to go your way," Miller said about the rough season he's experienced. "It's a lot like life. You're going to have ups and downs, and how you handle those ups and

downs is a big thing. If you're going to sit there and wallow in it, you're probably going to be a person that doesn't see the light at the end of the tunnel and get any satisfaction out of life.

“But if you can take the hard times and roll with it and find a way to enjoy your time and also better yourself, then you find your way through it and hopefully you get rewarded for it.”

Now, with his regular defense back, Miller looks in control again. Is this the best he's felt since starting the season 4-1?

“I'm trying to get myself to that point,” Miller said. “There's still a little bit higher level. I'm just trying to work on making what I'm going through right now ... consistent. I feel like I'm reading the play pretty well. I do feel like my concentration, my focus has been a lot better than it was coming back in late November (from a concussion).

“I'm just trying to work on those real foundational-type things – just stay in shooting lanes and focus.”

Sabres defenseman Jordan Leopold said seeing “those two, three big saves a night” proves Miller's on his game.

“That's a big thing,” Leopold said. “When he's in a zone, he ends up making those look easy. That's Ryan's game.”

Miller broke the record in 432 games. Hasek played 491 times with the Sabres, going 234-170-70 over nine seasons.

Of course, shootouts have helped Miller reach the mark quickly. There are no ties; every game has had a winner since 2005-06.

Miller's 32-20 in shootouts and has one NHL tie. Hasek had 70 ties with the Sabres. Incredibly, Hasek won only two of 13 shootouts later in his career.

“For the way it's written up I'll appreciate it,” Miller said. “I've accumulated some wins here. It's been a lot of fun to do it with this group of guys, this staff and these coaches. I'm not trying to draw any comparisons. I know there's an asterisk next to it because Dom would've had his fair share of shootout wins. ...

“I'm trying to enjoy it and take something positive and something nice from it because no matter how you cut it up it's a nice accomplishment.”

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Sabres general manager Darcy Regier said Oilers coach Tom Renney, who took a puck in the head Monday morning and missed his team's 6-3 loss in Toronto, texted Sabres coach Lindy Ruff, who broke three ribs in a practice collision about an hour later.

“There’s a certain comfort amongst these coaches ... so misery enjoys company,” he said.

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Sabres winger Colin Stuart, out since tearing his MCL on Dec. 17, practiced Tuesday and should return “within a week.” It’s likely he’ll be sent to Rochester then.

Regier said winger Thomas Vanek (upper body) skated alone Tuesday and could return later this week.

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In practice footage captured by WKBW, Ville Leino and Cody McCormick nearly fought after McCormick slashed Leino. Both downplayed the incident.

## **Sabres' Ruff 'Day-to-Day,' May Not Coach Wednesday**

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

February 7, 2012

Buffalo, NY -- Following an on-ice collision during Monday's practice with defenseman Jordan Leopold, the Buffalo Sabres announced that head coach Lindy Ruff had broken three ribs due to the hard fall on the ice.

On Tuesday, Ruff did not take part in the Sabres' practice. General Manager Darcy Regier addressed the media during the session and said that the head coach is day-to-day, and that assistant head coach James Patrick would take over responsibilities behind the bench until Ruff can return.

When asked if Ruff would be able to coach Wednesday night when the Sabres take on the Boston Bruins at First Niagara Center, Regier simply replied: "Day-to-day. We'll see how he feels in the morning and he'll make a determination on it from there."

The man in charge of practice on Tuesday, Patrick, spoke with the media afterwards. He said it's eating away at Ruff that he couldn't come in to work to run the practice.

"I know it's killing him. It's killing him because he's the pulse and heartbeat of the team. He's our leader, and he feels -- I mean he's in a lot of pain -- but he feels sick that he can't be here."

Team captain Jason Pominville agrees from a player's perspective. He commented how different it would be to not have Ruff behind the bench in a game setting.

"We need that voice," the captain said. "We need him to be vocal back there to get us going. He's a great leader. Obviously when you look at him on TV, he looks mad a lot of times but he's got a good personality. He gets along with a lot of the guys and sometimes yelling at guys is a way to get us going. That will be missed."

If Ruff isn't feeling well enough to be behind the bench Wednesday night, Patrick would take over as head coach and assistant Teppo Numminen would likely move down from the press box to the bench.

If it is Patrick as the man in charge, he says the team will be ready for the Bruins.

"It's a huge game. That's our focus. It's a game we've got to get ready to win. We've got to do all we can do to prepare. They've probably been the toughest, the best team in the East all year. Them and the [New York] Rangers," Patrick started off. "And we know Boston's going to be a big challenge but we feel we can beat any team in the league."

It's a common question, but a necessary one. Has Regier ever seen anything like this before?

"No," the GM laughingly started out. "One of the interesting things about when you asked the question 'Have you seen anything like this before' is at least I have a fairly lengthy history in the game. And you take a certain comfort that this is a very unusual year and they don't come along very often, not unlike the winter in Buffalo this year.

"I think that that awareness allows you to kind of keep your head down. Keep moving. You have confidence in the staff and the players. You recognize that if you stay with it, things will turn."

You can listen to Darcy's full interview below:

Twitter: @JoeB\_WGR

## **Rochester Americans to stick to reshuffled line**

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 8, 2012

Since the Rochester Americans don't score many goals, coach Ron Rolston is often forced to experiment with line combinations.

Like on Saturday in Syracuse, when he moved center Paul Szczechura to the wing and put him on a line with center Phil Varone and left winger Marcus Foligno.

In the previous five games, the Amerks had scored just eight goals. Over the previous 10 games, they had scored just 20.

That type of production simply puts too much pressure on the goaltending and team defense to be close to perfect, something that realistically isn't possible.

For one night anyway, the switch worked. Szczechura scored three goals and the line produced four as the Amerks rallied from a 4-2 third-period deficit to defeat the Crunch 5-4 in overtime.

"It's good to get a little switch-up sometimes," Szczechura said.

Since recovering from off-season knee surgery and returning to the ice in November, Szczechura has been productive; he just hadn't been scoring goals.

He has definitely demonstrated a pass-first, shoot-later mentality, with just six, along with 14 assists, in his first 27 games with the Amerks. Moving him to the wing forced a change in his approach, Rolston believes.

"Earlier in the season he was distributing more, but being on the wing he was probably in more of a shooting mode," Rolston said.

The line played well. Varone sees the ice well and Foligno has been an imposing force along the wall and in the corners. Foligno has vaulted to the team lead in scoring with 12-16-28 in 45 games, and Varone is second with 7-20-27 in 47 games.

Szczechura is closing in on the lead, which is where he was expected to be as one of the prime free-agent acquisitions last summer. He has 9-15-24 in 28 games.

Rolston hopes the line can continue to produce today.

The Amerks play a critical 11 a.m. game against the Toronto Marlies at Ricoh Coliseum.

It's a school-day special, so kids will fill the building.

The Marlies lead the North Division with 55 points. The Amerks are second at 51.

The division winners receive an automatic Top-3 seed for the playoffs.

The other five playoff berths are determined by overall conference standing.

The Amerks enter today ninth.

"We're hanging around there, we're right in the mix, and we're starting to get healthy so we're in a good position to make a run," Szczechura said.

"This is the time of year where teams make a push. You make a playoff push or you start getting ready for the summer."

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## Is Milan Lucic Responsible for Derailing the Buffalo Sabres' Season?

Staff Report

NESN

February 8, 2012

The Bruins will be back in Buffalo on Wednesday night, and that means there's a chance for fireworks again.

Every meeting between these two teams has had a little extra spice to it ever since **Milan Lucic** barreled over Buffalo goalie **Ryan Miller**, but the Sabres haven't had that same bite in the rest of their games this season.

Since the Lucic-Miller collision, the Sabres have been in a bit of a free fall. Considered a dark horse for a deep playoff run before the season started, instead they're instead nearly a dozen points out of a playoff spot.

There's plenty of possible excuses for the team's struggles this year. Miller hasn't been his usual self, posting a 2.88 GAA, a .905 save percentage and a 14-15-3 record. His backup, **Jhonas Enroth**, has been a little better statistically, but not by much.

They've also had to battle through injuries. **Tyler Myers**, **Mike Weber** and **Jordan Leopold** have all missed time, and even their coach, **Lindy Ruff**, suffered broken ribs after an accident during the team's practice. Maybe they're just unlucky.



## **Defensive approach paying off**

Fluto Shinzawa

Boston Globe

February 7, 2012

The good times are back a-rollin' with the Bruins, who looked very much like their big and bad selves in a 4-1 road spanking of the Capitals Sunday.

Now, they must build on the good things they did and continue to right the play that had gone wrong for stretches of January and February.

There were few, if any, areas of complaint regarding their game in Washington. Tim Thomas, in net less than 24 hours after manning the crease during a 2-1 home loss to Pittsburgh, was excellent. The only blemish in Thomas's game was not of his own doing. In the third period, Marcus Johansson banked a shot off Dennis Seidenberg for Washington's only goal.

Zdeno Chara and Johnny Boychuk, given the task of rubbing out Alex Ovechkin, kept the Capitals sharpshooter off the scoresheet.

Up front, the trio of Brad Marchand, Patrice Bergeron, and Tyler Seguin, currently the club's most consistent line, was spared of shutdown duties. Washington coach Dale Hunter, owning the last change, matched sandpaper forwards Matt Hendricks, Brooks Laich, and Troy Brouwer against Bergeron's line. As a result, coach Claude Julien would have found it difficult to roll out Bergeron's unit against Ovechkin, Johansson, and Alexander Semin.

But Julien countered by flip-flopping David Krejci and Chris Kelly. Krejci, who had been centering Milan Lucic and Rich Peverley, had gone scoreless in consecutive losses to Pittsburgh and Carolina. By slotting Kelly into Krejci's position, Julien had a defense-first center to help wear down Ovechkin's line.

"We talked, as a group of forwards, about getting more involved," said Lucic after Sunday's win. "It felt like we were today. It was nice to win a game like that."

Tomorrow, the Bruins take on the Sabres, who are only a point out of last place in the Eastern Conference. On Saturday, they host Nashville at TD Garden. They will then depart for their longest road trip of the season. They kick off a six-game swing Feb. 15 at Montreal that concludes Feb. 25 in Ottawa.

By then, the roster will most likely feature some additions. The trade deadline is Feb. 27, but management would prefer to add the final pieces before or during the trip to ensure maximum bonding time away from home.

But although Kelly, Peverley, and Tomas Kaberle were complementary pieces last year, Thomas, Chara, and Bergeron helped lead the way. As they proved in Sunday's win over Washington, a very Bruin-like victory, the three core stars will be crucial during the stretch run.

## Caron makes impact

When the Bruins square off against Buffalo, Jordan Caron will be in the lineup for the second straight game.

Caron, recalled from Providence Saturday, played Sunday for the big club for the first time since Jan. 17. Caron skated on the No. 3 line alongside Krejci and Benoit Pouliot in place of Zach Hamill, who was a healthy scratch.

“I think it went pretty good,” Caron said. “I think we played a good game. Playing with Krech and Benny makes things easier.”

Caron was at his best in the first period. In only 3:10 of action, Caron landed three shots on Tomas Vokoun and threw one hit. Caron finished with four shots, second-most on the team behind Tyler Seguin (five), in 11:25 of ice time. Caron gave the third line some much-needed presence.

## Change good for Krejci

*Line shift may energize center*

Steve Conroy

Boston Herald

February 8, 2012

WILMINGTON — When the [Bruins](#) hit the ice for practice yesterday at Ristuccia Arena, David Krejci found himself in the gray jersey of the third line, skating with Benoit Pouliot and Jordan Caron, the same players he centered in the team's 4-1 win over the Capitals on Sunday.

It is an unusual spot for a player who is used to skating among the top six forwards and very often as the No. 1 center. But after steaming into the All-Star break on a hot streak in which he notched points in 15-of-17 games, Krejci started the post-break portion of the schedule decidedly cooler. After recording an assist in the first game back against Ottawa, Krejci went pointless in a pair of losses to Carolina and Pittsburgh in which the B's high-powered offense — of which Krejci is a large part — scored just one goal in six periods.

Thus, the change.

“It doesn't mean I'm not going to change them (again), but I think it's keeping everybody on their toes,” coach Claude Julien said. “I think everyone responded well. We played a good team game. We knew what their coach (Dale Hunter) was going to try to do, so we tweaked our lines a little bit and tried to counter that the best way we could and it worked out.”

Was there a message behind the switch?

“I don't think there are necessarily any messages more than (that) we expect our players to come and be the best they can be every night,” Julien said. “That's something I think they owe to the organization, especially based on their contracts. And that's what we expect from them no matter where they are. The message should be the same whether he plays with his normal (linemates) or he plays with other players.”

Krejci, who signed a three-year, \$15.75 million extension earlier this season, has certainly suffered through worse blips in his career, and the production he provides when he gets through it is usually worth the wait.

This year, he started the season with just one point in the first eight games and then had a five-game drought in November. But Krejci had his game cranked up before the break, and he didn't think a few days off had cut off his own personal momentum.

“I can think something and other people can think something else. I came back against Ottawa and I thought everything was fine. Then we lost the next couple of games. I got changed to another line and that's how it is,” said Krejci, who had not been able to create the same kind of chemistry on the top line with Rich Peverley taking the place of injured Nathan Horton (concussion).

“I can think about it (all) I want, whether it’s wrong or right, but I’m on the line I’m on right now and I like my linemates. They’re good players and (if not) they wouldn’t be in this league. And they’re good guys. We get along off the ice, too. I just have to find my game again. I think I’m playing the way I want to, but the puck just has to go in the net more often for me, just like it did before the All-Star Game.”

Krejci said he hit a low point in the game against Pittsburgh on Saturday, when the team had gone five periods without a goal.

“A couple of games ago, I had one of the worst feelings I had in hockey,” Krejci said. “But I’m a professional and I’m here to help the team to win. The situation is where I am right now, so whatever. It’s my job to go out there and prove people wrong. I wouldn’t make a big deal of it. It’s just a couple of games. Before that, I had points in (15 out of 17) games and no one talked to me from the media. You know, whatever.”

The good news is that the switch seemed to do both the team and Krejci some good.

“They were good,” said Julien of the Krejci-Pouliot-Caron line. “I didn’t mind them at all and they did the job. I thought David was good himself. It’s just about getting everybody going again, and sometimes those changes are not bad things.”

— sconroy@bostonherald.com