



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres offense on a mini hot streak

Shifting Ennis to center is paying off as Buffalo has scored nine goals in the past two games

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 10, 2012

It's only two games, so even the Sabres themselves caution there's not yet reason to put a Stanley Cup parade float on hold. But during those last two games, Buffalo has scored nine goals. For some teams, that might be just an above-average week. For these guys? It's a reason to celebrate.

The Sabres enter tonight's home game against Dallas on their second-best scoring run of the season. They torched Boston, 6-0, Wednesday, tying their season high for a single game. They found the net three times Saturday against the New York Islanders as part of a 4-3 shootout victory.

Here's a little perspective on the two-game total: It matches the output of their previous seven games combined.

"It feels good to score that many goals," center Tyler Ennis said Thursday. "We haven't done that at all this year. A lot of things are coming together right now. Unfortunately, we still have a long way to go, but things are looking up right now."

Ennis is getting credit for helping key the red-light specials. The erstwhile left winger moved to center four games ago when he returned from an ankle injury. Coach Lindy Ruff hoped Ennis' speed and creativity would shine in the middle. It sure did Wednesday.

Ennis accepted a pass just inside his blue line, sped past one Bruin, split two others and had a defenseman backing off when he got near the Boston net. Ennis' backhand hit the post and went in, tangible proof his position switch has benefits.

"I'm just having fun playing hockey right now," Ennis said in First Niagara Center. "It's fun to be able to always be moving and get down low and have my feet moving. Like [Wednesday] night when I scored, I'm able to come back and pick up that speed and skate through the middle there. Before when I was a winger, I wasn't able to come back that low and pick it up."

"There's different things I like about it. Right now I'm really enjoying it."

Ennis, who's missed 34 games with a pair of left ankle sprains, has had trouble building on his 20-goal rookie season. His one-goal, two-point night against the Bruins lifted his season totals to four goals and seven points in 19 games.

"Ennis has made a world of difference playing in the middle," Ruff said. "That was a gamble, but he's really played well. He's made a lot of things happen. He's one guy you notice out there."

Ennis has been respectable on faceoffs, winning at least 53 percent in three of his four games. He's plus-1 and learning more about the defensive side of things every game.

"The first time I was just trying to have good position, and then my next game I realized I have to box out a little better," he said. "The more video you watch and the more you play the position the more you learn. I've got to learn quick.

"At center you're always in the game. Down low, I'm enjoying trying to read where guys are going and reading the offensive plays on their end. I like getting the puck first and weaving my way through and passing it to my linemates. There's still some things I can do better, maybe draw a couple guys to me rather than move it to my winger right away and have [opponents] kind of close on them."

Ennis could have a new left winger tonight against the Stars. Thomas Vanek hopes to play after missing three games with an upper-body injury. Ville Leino has filled Vanek's first-line role well, combining with center Derek Roy and right wing Jason Pominville for three goals and seven points, meaning Vanek could skate elsewhere should he return.

Ruff likes the line of Brad Boyes in the middle of Paul Gaustad and Patrick Kaleta, so Vanek might find himself alongside Ennis and Drew Stafford.

"The three games I missed the team played great," Vanek said. "For me, it's just to try and find a spot in the lineup then work myself up again. I know what I have to do to produce. To me, it doesn't matter. I'm just hoping to be back in, contribute and play well."

He would be coming back to a team that's playing its best hockey of the season. Buffalo is 4-0-1 in the last five and 5-0-4 in its last nine at home. The Sabres are actually scoring, too, just off the 11-goal pace they had during victories over Winnipeg and Ottawa in early November.

"The biggest things are we're playing fun with a lot of energy," Ennis said. "As long as we compete and outwork the other team, we have a chance to really do something special and make a really good push."

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Assistants filling the void for ailing Ruff

John Vogl
The Buffalo News
February 10, 2012

Lindy Ruff sat alone in the stands Thursday, nursing his broken ribs while the Sabres practiced in First Niagara Center. It's a scene that will be replayed until the coach is healthy enough to return to the ice.

The Sabres, though, are hardly lacking in coaches. Buffalo expanded its staff this season, and there were still five assistants on the ice to coach and teach players while Ruff watched.

"The wealth of knowledge that we have hockey-wise out there for us is pretty unbelievable," defenseman Mike Weber said.

Assistant coach James Patrick again led the session, and he'll be the lead man on the bench when the Sabres host Dallas tonight. He was helped Thursday by assistants Kevyn Adams and Teppo Numminen, goaltending coach Jim Corsi and player development coach Dennis Miller.

"Everyone is extremely hockey smart," Weber said. "Obviously, you miss the veteran leadership of Lindy, but just like our team in here, they're all leaders and they're all coaches for a reason."

Patrick has been with the Sabres for six seasons and was the bench boss for Wednesday's 6-0 victory over Boston. Adams, who was the player development coach for two seasons, and Numminen are in their first year. Corsi has been with the club for 14 years. Miller has been a pro scout since 2007.

They're the last ones off the ice even when Ruff is there, and they've been putting in extra time this week.

"The true test is what went on [Wednesday] night where guys had to step in," Ruff said. "You want them to be ready, and I thought they were. I thought they did a heck of a job for us."

The contributions of Patrick and Adams have been well-documented. Numminen, who played 20 years in the NHL, has been able to pass on his experience.

"He's played in a couple different eras and he was always a top-caliber player," Weber said. "He's that guy kind of floating around for any questions you have for him."

Miller, a Buffalo native, played for the University of Vermont in the late 1980s.

"He's great on the video and watching and talking to you," Weber said. "He's the guy you can grab at any point in practice and say, 'I need some pucks here, some passes here, can we work on this?' He's always a yes man, so he's another key component to what you need."

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Center Jochen Hecht, who has been out since suffering a concussion Jan. 21, is set to have a non-surgical procedure done on his neck in an attempt to alleviate symptoms.

"They've done some further examination," Ruff said, "and I think right now they're going to do a procedure on his neck where maybe some of that pain has been coming from."

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Dallas has one of the most famous victories in Buffalo, claiming the 1999 Stanley Cup at the foot of Washington Street. The Stars haven't won in the building since.

The Stars' last regular-season victory in Buffalo was Oct. 7, 1997. That span of 14 years, four months and two days is Dallas' longest drought between wins in any NHL city. The last time the Stars won in Buffalo, Ruff was making his NHL coaching debut.

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Ruff is expected to watch from the press box for the second straight game. He's getting a firsthand look at what it's like to view a game with Corsi. The goalie coach is legendary for yelling at players and referees from three levels away from the ice.

"I got an earful there," Ruff said. "He's an excitable guy up there. He scared me a couple times."

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Sabres could have Vanek back against Stars

Brian Compton

NHL.com

February 10, 2012

STARS (28-23-2) at SABRES (23-24-6)

TV: FS-SW+, MSG-B

Last 10: Dallas 4-5-1; Buffalo 4-5-1.

Season Series: This is the lone meeting between the teams. They haven't faced each other since Oct. 30, 2010, when the Stars earned a 4-0 victory at the American Airlines Center.

Big Story: If Buffalo has any hopes of surging up the standings and clinching a playoff spot, it will need the services of [Thomas Vanek](#).

The Sabres believe their sniper may be back in the lineup as early as Friday night. Vanek has missed the last three games with an upper-body injury.

"We put him through a battery of extra tests after practice (Thursday). We'll see how he's feeling in the morning," Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff told the team's official website. "He's the only one who knows whether he can go or not. If he says he's ready to go, and doesn't have any ill effects from what happened (Thursday), then he'll be back in."

Team Scope:

Stars: Dallas pulled back to the .500 mark on the road (13-13-0) with Thursday's 4-2 win against the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena. It's been quite some time since they earned back-to-back victories away from the American Airlines Center -- three months to be exact -- so the Stars know they'll need a 60-minute effort if they hope to pull out a win at the First Niagara Center.

More importantly, they'll need to be more consistent on the road if they have any plans of remaining in the Western Conference playoff race.

"It's going to be tough. Every year is, those last 30 games of the year," said defenseman [Alex Goligoski](#), who had a goal and an assist for the Stars on Thursday night. "Everybody's fighting for position. And you've got other teams fighting for other reasons, for jobs and whatnot."

Sabres: Buffalo is coming off arguably its most impressive win of the season -- a 6-0 shutout

against the Boston Bruins at the First Niagara Center on Wednesday night. Sabres captain [Jason Pominville](#) scored twice, while [Ryan Miller](#) stopped all 36 shots he faced, including 17 in the third period.

Buffalo is 4-0-1 in its last five games, outscoring its opponents 15-6 during that span.

"It's huge. It shows we're ready to play and we're not going to get pushed over," forward [Patrick Kaleta](#) said. "The past little while, our mentality has been going in there and getting the battles done and going out and competing. I thought we did a great job of that tonight."

Who's Hot: Dallas forward [Jamie Benn](#) has 7 goals and 7 assists over his last 11 games. ... Pominville has 3 points (2 goals, 1 assist) in his last two contests.

Injury Report: Stars captain [Brenden Morrow](#) (upper body) is on injured reserve. He is expected to miss at least a few more days. ... Buffalo is expected to be without [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) and [Colin Stuart](#) (knee).

Stat Pack: Buffalo is 5-0-5 in its last 10 home games, its longest such streak since January of 2010. The Sabres haven't lost a home game in regulation since Dec. 10.

Puck Drop: "There's going to be no easy games; we know that. I think our work ethic was a lot better tonight. That was good to see." -- *Stars defenseman* [Alex Goligoski](#) *after Thursday's 4-2 win at Columbus*

Dallas (28-23-2) at Buffalo (23-24-6)

Nicolino DiBenedetto

STATS

February 10, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) are surging, and possibly getting one of their top scorers back may help them continue their strong play and prevent the [Dallas Stars](#) from winning back-to-back road games for the first time in almost two months.

The Sabres may get a lift from [Thomas Vanek's](#) expected return when they try to continue their home success against the Stars on Friday night.

Buffalo (23-24-6) may be toward the bottom of the Eastern Conference standings, but it has won four of five after enduring a 1-7-1 stretch that included a five-game slide.

The Sabres are outscoring opponents 15-6 over the last five games, including a 6-0 win over Boston on Wednesday for their best offensive display of the season.

They may be in for another offensive boost with Vanek likely to be back from an upper-body injury that has forced him to miss three games.

“We put him through a battery of extra tests after practice (Thursday). We’ll see how he’s feeling in the morning,” coach Lindy Ruff told the team’s official website. “He’s the only one who knows whether he can go or not. If he says he’s ready to go, and doesn’t have any ill effects from what happened (Thursday), then he’ll be back in.”

Vanek is tied with [Jason Pominville](#) with a team-leading 19 goals and his 41 points are second to his fellow forward’s 50. The left wing, however, managed just one assist during a 10-game goal drought prior to getting hurt, and it’s unclear which line he’ll be inserted into.

It appears Ruff won’t be joining Vanek on the bench, as he continues to nurse several broken ribs after being upended by defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) in an on-ice collision during practice Monday. Ruff spent Wednesday’s game in the press box while assistant James Patrick coached the team.

[Ryan Miller](#) figures to be in net after making 36 saves against the Bruins to improve to 4-0-1 with a 0.95 goals-against average and two shutouts in his last five starts. He’s won all three of his career starts against the Stars (28-23-2) but hasn’t faced them since a 5-3 home win March 10, 2010.

Buffalo lost the only matchup last season, falling 4-0 in Dallas to end its five-game winning streak in the series. The Sabres have five wins and a tie in their last six home games against the Stars dating to a 4-2 loss Oct. 7, 1997.

The Stars, 13-13-0 on the road, are trying to build on Thursday's 4-2 win over NHL-worst Columbus. They last won back-to-back games as the visitor during a season-high three-game road winning streak Oct. 25-Nov. 8.

Continued success away from home could help improve their tenuous playoff position. They're two points behind Phoenix for the final postseason spot in the Western Conference.

"It's going to be tough. Every year is, those last 30 games of the year," said defenseman [Alex Goligoski](#), who had a goal and an assist against the Blue Jackets. "Everybody's fighting for position. And you've got other teams fighting for other reasons, for jobs and whatnot."

[Jamie Benn](#) is providing some scoring punch on the road, totaling seven goals and seven assists in the last 11 games after scoring twice Thursday. The All-Star left wing scored a goal while setting up another in his only visit to Buffalo on March 10, 2010.

VANEK TARGETS FRIDAY RETURN

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

February 9, 2012

[Thomas Vanek](#) missed his third straight game with an upper body injury last night, but that streak should come to an end tomorrow when the Dallas Stars come to First Niagara Center. Vanek practiced with the team again today, and said afterwards that he's ready to go.

"I'm hoping to, we'll see how it reacts today," he explained. "But that's my goal. We'll see."

Lindy Ruff will be more than happy to write Vanek's name on the lineup sheet again, but he'll leave the final decision on his return up to Vanek himself.

"We put him through a battery of extra tests after practice. We'll see how he's feeling in the morning," said Ruff. "He's the only one who knows whether he can go or not. If he says he's ready to go, and doesn't have any ill effects from what happened today, then he'll be back in."

But figuring out exactly who Vanek will play with when he returns is the \$64,000 question. Vanek practiced on a line with [Brad Boyes](#) and [Patrick Kaleta](#) today, but that was only due to [Paul Gaustad](#)'s "maintenance day" off.

And with [Ville Leino](#) quickly developing a chemistry over the last few games with [Jason Pominville](#) and [Derek Roy](#), it's not a given at this point that Vanek will be slotted in his usual spot on the left side of the top team's top line.

Vanek understands that could be the case.

"Life goes on," Vanek said with a smile. "The line's been playing well. In the three games I missed, the team's played great. For me, it's try to find a spot in the lineup and work myself up again ... I know what I have to do to produce. To me it doesn't matter. I'm just hoping to be back in, contribute and play well."

Ruff said [Jochen Hecht](#) is starting to feel better, after suffering post-concussion symptoms two weeks ago in New Jersey following a hit from TJ Oshie in St. Louis on January 21.

"They've done some further examination. I think right now they're going to do a (non-surgical) procedure on his neck, where maybe some of that pain has been coming from. So a little bit of a different evaluation with him."

If the procedure is successful, Ruff wouldn't rule out Hecht returning to the lineup this season.

Random Thoughts from the Past Week

Kevin Sylvester

Sabres.com

February 9, 2012

I hope that all of you who were down on [Ryan Miller](#) are back to reality now that his game is back to where it belongs. He's still an elite goaltender. The reasons for his struggles this season are pretty obvious to me. He sustained two head injuries in less than nine months time. I'm not breaking any news here. Miller admitted he was dinged from a slap shot (I believe off the stick of Dion Phaneuf) late last season and missed four games due to it. We all remember this season's incident with Milan Lucic of the Boston Bruins, which caused him to miss eight straight starts. Whether they were full blown concussions, neck injuries, or a combination of both doesn't matter to me. He wasn't right and his game was off because of it. Miller looks right now. He's 4-0-1 in his last five starts with two shutouts, allowing a total of five goals against. In the least, we all can enjoy his work. At the most, and hopefully, the start of another run.

I respect Claude Julien as a coach, and he's excellent with the media during interviews. He gives thoughtful and insightful answers to questions on strategy and match ups. However, I had to chuckle when NBC's Pierre McGuire asked Julien what the Sabres were doing to frustrate his team during Buffalo's eventual 6-0 win. Julien said, and this may not be exact, 'Nothing. It's what we're not doing. We could be a lot better.' Of course they could, but the reason was what the Sabres were doing to prevent that! In Claude's defense, every coach gives that answer when getting thumped during a game so forgive me for picking on him.

The game of hockey brings people together. From the grass roots level of youth hockey, to the big events like this weekend's Labatt Pond (street this year) Tournament, people form bonds that become quickly cemented. That also happened this year with the Buffalo Sabres trip to Europe to start the season. Specifically, the first three days spent practicing in Mannheim, and the final exhibition match up against Adler Mannheim. The fans in Mannheim were nothing short of fantastic. The tribute they paid to hometown hero [Jochen Hecht](#) prior to the game was something I'm sure he'll never forget, because I sure won't. They sang in chorus, "Jochen, Jochen" as he took warm ups and was the last to leave the ice, still recovering from a training camp concussion. The local fans weren't finished there. They sang and chanted the entire game, paid another great tribute to the retiring Rene Corbet, and finished things off chanting 'Let's Go Buffalo.' It was the best atmosphere for a non-playoff game that I've ever witnessed. But that's not all.

Some fans from Mannheim became fast friends (hockey bond) with a group of fans from Buffalo that made the trip to Germany to see the Sabres. They discussed visiting Buffalo to see Hecht play and visit our wonderful city. The fans acted fast, organizing a trip to visit our city for a long weekend of hockey and fun. That group is in town now, with roughly 60-70 Germans making the trip over. If you were at the Bruins game, you noticed them, or will when the Sabres host the Stars and Lightning this weekend. Unfortunately, they will not see their hero Hecht play as he is still battling concussion symptoms. But that didn't stop Hecht from being a great host to his fellow countrymen. He made arrangements (with the help of the team) for this group to get the Blue and Gold treatment. Finally, Dave Andreychuk is the featured speaker at the Friday's Power Play Luncheon. It begs me to ask one rhetorical question. How is he not in the Hockey Hall of Fame? The case is simple: 1639 games played, 640 goals, 698 assists, all time leader in pp goals with 274, and captained Tampa Bay to the Stanley Cup at age 40.

Sabres' Leino staying positive, finally finding groove on wing

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 10, 2012

BUFFALO — On the toughest days, when the slump turned from weeks into months and the cries the Sabres had overpaid for a free agent bust grew louder, Ville Leino laughed and smiled.

Staying loose is Leino's style. He's not one to pout. The likable winger remained positive throughout a trying half a season or so. That's just his personality, something he gets from his mother.

"I like being around people who are always in a good mood, fun to be around," Leino said Thursday inside the First Niagara Center. "... Everybody around the room is dealing with a lot of pressure, so ... it doesn't really help you to be in a bad mood."

The Finn's adjustment to the Sabres after signing a six-year, \$27 million contract in July has admittedly been difficult. In 42 games, he has only four goals, 15 points and a minus-5 rating. He's switched from center to the wing and back a few times.

But now, with a goal, five points and a plus-4 in the last four contests heading into tonight's home tilt against the Dallas Stars, it appears Leino's turning a corner. He's showcasing strong chemistry playing left wing beside Derek Roy and Jason Pominville in Thomas Vanek's absence.

In the Sabres' 6-0 win Wednesday over Boston, Leino dazzled, setting up two Pominville goals, one with a nifty spin-o-rama. Leino was also a plus-3.

"(It's) the most fun I've had and the best I've felt," Leino said about his recent run.

It's been a long time coming, though.

"It hasn't been easy this season, definitely frustrating," Leino admitted. "But I always try to be happy and not think about that so much. ... It's not going to ease up until you get your confidence back. I was working on my game and trying to do that."

While Leino didn't say it affected his play, he found the Sabres "way too serious" as they struggled mightily much of the season. That's changed during the team's current 4-0-1 run.

"You got to have fun but you got to be serious," Leino said. "That's the balance we got to find a little better. I feel like because now we're having fun, if you watch us on the ice, watch us in practice, we go hard, we work hard – but we're still having fun, we're still playing with a swagger. Sometimes you need that swagger to get going."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said months ago Leino's acclimation could take time, a line he repeated Thursday. Leino, a winger in Philadelphia, switched to center under the pressure of a huge contract. There were also new teammates and team dynamics to understand.

Ruff compared Leino to Jaroslav Spacek, who struggled in his first season five years ago. Spacek eventually got comfortable and became the Sabres' best defenseman for two years.

"He's starting to fit in better, which shows up on the ice," Ruff said about Leino.

It showed on his first assist Wednesday, when Leino zoomed to the bottom of the left circle and found Pominville with a no-look backhand as he raced to the net.

"He made the defenseman look pretty silly on that one," Roy said.

He added: "To play his game (Leino) has to be loose. To make plays and be confident with the puck at all times of the game you have to be loose. ... I feel him gaining confidence, skating better."

With Vanek, half of a dynamic wing tandem all season with Pominville, possibly returning tonight (upper body), can Ruff really take Leino off the top line?

"Short-term, it's going to be tough to bust up any line," Ruff said.

In just three games together, Leino and Pominville already know the other's instincts.

"I'm more of a playmaker," Leino said. "I need to have a guy who knows kind of how I'm thinking, where I'm thinking of putting the puck so I don't always have to look first and make the play. I can just play on the instincts. He is a great goal scorer. He knows where I'm going and I feel like I know where he's going even though I don't look."

That's a sign of comfort.

"I've been having fun the last (few) games working hard, making plays, enjoying hockey, enjoying playing, enjoying trying to win the games," Leino said. "Obviously, there's more confidence to it."

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Ruff, who broke three ribs during practice Monday, stayed inside and let his five assistants run Thursday's session. Ruff had toyed with sitting on the bench. He'll be in the press box again tonight as James Patrick runs the bench.

He thought his staff did a terrific job Wednesday.

"The true test is what went on last night when guys had to step in," Ruff said. "You want them to be ready and I thought they were."

Ruff got an “earful” sitting next to excitable goalie coach Jim Corsi upstairs.

“He scared me a couple times,” Ruff joked.

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Sabres center Jochen Hecht, out the last five games after suffering his third concussion in 10 months, is doing “better” and will undergo a neck procedure that could alleviate some pain, Ruff said.

The procedure is similar to one winger Patrick Kaleta had. Hecht saw a chiropractor when he was sidelined in October. He’s not out for the season, Ruff said.

Notes: Vanek, who practiced with Kaleta and Brad Boyes on Thursday, on possibly not playing with Pominville: “Geez, life goes on.” ... Forward Paul Gaustad sat practice for a maintenance day and will play tonight.

Sabres Vanek likely to be back Friday

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 9, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Thomas Vanek did some competing drills on Thursday and proclaimed himself ready for action on Friday. The winger said, "I felt real good out there, a few battle drills so it's encouraging."

As far as if we'll see him Friday Vanek said, "I'm hoping to yes. We'll see how it reacts today, but that's my goal."

Vanek was in his first prolonged slump of the season when he got hurt in Montreal. He's had chemistry with Jason Pominville all season, but the captain is now doing very well with Ville Leino on the LW. Vanek doesn't care where Lindy Ruff puts him, "The line's been playing well. The three games I've missed the team played great so for it's just try to find a spot in the lineup and work myself up again." I'd probably slide him into Drew Stafford's spot with Nathan Gerbe and Tyler Ennis. Vanek said he can play anywhere, "I know what I have to do to produce so for me it doesn't matter. I'm just hoping to be back in and contribute and play well."

Lindy Ruff likes what he's seen from Leino lately, as he's posted five points in six games. Ruff said, "He's struck a little chemistry with Derek and Pommer, hopefully he can keep that going. I think he's skating better than he did earlier in the year so that helps and I think getting on the board and scoring and making a few plays you start to feel good about your game." As far as if he'll break up the line for Vanek Ruff said, "Short term it's going to be tough to bust up any line. The Gaustad line has done such a nice job and have gotten on the scoreboard and I thought that Ennis, Gerbe and Stafford have played well so when he's ready, we'll just have to evaluate it. Obviously we know he can make a big difference on the power play, but we want to be sure he's ready too. He's the only one that knows if he can really go or not and if he says he's ready to go and doesn't have any ill effects from what happened today, he'll be back in."

Paul Gaustad missed practice. Ruff said, "It's just a maintenance day for Paul, he'll be fine."

Sabres Hecht to have procedure

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 9, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jochen Hecht may still be back this season. The winger suffered his third concussion in 11 months in St. Louis. Lindy Ruff said, "He's better, they've done some further evaluation and they're going to do a procedure on his neck where some of that pain has been coming from so it's a little bit of a different evaluation."

When I asked if Hecht's season is done Ruff said, "No, I don't believe so, I think it's similar to what Patty had done with his, but I can't really go into detail."

Rochester Amerks find physical presence in Marcus Foligno

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 10, 2012

Marcus Foligno admits that those little on-ice fire ants, the guys that zip around at 40 mph and have Houdini hands, are fun to watch.

Well, fun to watch and to be. He knows that scoring tons of goals and dancing past defenders would be a blast.

But that doesn't mean Foligno has any regrets that he grew into a 6-foot-3, 227-pound frame and now doubles as a snowplow.

"It's one of the best jobs ever," he said with a big smile.

No doubt folks in the Buffalo Sabres' hockey department are smiling, too. A fourth-round draft pick (104th overall) in 2009, Foligno is very much on the expressway to the NHL.

The rookie left winger leads the Rochester Americans in scoring (12 goals, 17 assists and 29 points in 46 games) and plus/minus (plus-15). He'll take a five-game point streak (seven assists) into tonight's 7:35 home game against the Texas Stars, and has been playing at a near point-a-game pace since Dec. 21 (3-14-17 in 19 games).

"Every game he's a dominating force with his physicality with and without the puck," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said.

Foligno's willingness — eagerness, really — to play the body is why his point production has picked up.

"He'll finish on you every time," assistant coach Chris Taylor said. "He's finishing his checks everywhere."

It also doesn't hurt that he's now on a line with center Phil Varone and center-turned-winger Paul Szczechura.

Varone, also a rookie, has been hot too, with 7-14-21 in his past 24 games. Szczechura, meanwhile, is the veteran who can score and guide the youngsters. "He's an NHL player," Foligno said.

This is no chicken-or-the-egg question, however. Foligno wasn't just given a spot on a scoring line; through his improved play he earned the increase in ice time and status as a top-6 forward.

"He started off on the third line, and with confidence and maturity, he just took over," Taylor said. "He gets in on the puck, he takes the puck away from guys, he uses his strength to push

guys off the puck. He's just strong on the puck and when you can do those things, it creates a lot of space for his linemates."

What's most important: He likes what he does.

Not every big player uses his size to his advantage. There have been plenty of strong wingers who tried to play a finesse game. They didn't last long in the NHL.

"I love the physical side of the game," he said.

Every player enjoys scoring. But Foligno takes satisfaction in knowing his ability to blast a defenseman off the puck in the corner can lead to a turnover and goal for a linemate.

"In terms of making space, I guarantee a lot of players in that (dressing) room want to play with Marcus Foligno," Rolston said.

Said Foligno: "Even if you had a good shift and the next line scores, it feels just as good," he said.

The most important thing for Foligno will be the ability to be consistent. The past six weeks or so have been a good step in that direction. But the organization is convinced his role is well-defined as a power forward.

"He's got to play that way," Rolston said. "He has to play physical, be finishing checks, be difficult to play against."

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The Mannheim fans land in Buffalo

Andrew Kulyk

Artvoice

February 9, 2012

In last week's print edition of Artvoice, [we reported on some very special visitors who were planning a visit to Buffalo](#). A group of 65 or so hockey crazed fans from Mannheim, Germany, were headed to see the Sabres play right here in town. This tour all came about as a result of the Sabres' exhibition game played in Mannheim back on October 4. The Adler Mannheim supporters are especially proud of their own favorite son Jochen Hecht, who found fame and fortune in the NHL with the Sabres, and many locals in Mannheim follow and cheer for the Sabres from afar.

So what was the evening like? A smash hit, judging by the smiles and excitement and reaction of many of the Germans as they left the First Niagara Center after last night's game.

As the night began, the group assembled in the atrium of their headquarters hotel the Hyatt, with Adler press officer Mathias Fries and his assistant checking names off their list and passing out tickets. All wore Adler jerseys, hats, scarves, you couldn't help but notice them they would stand out in any crowd. After a group photo, the fans headed to the arena. No special bus or shuttle, just a short walk to the Metrorail Fountain Plaza station. "How much are tickets for the train?", a couple fans asked. Hey, downtown is a fare free zone...welcome to Buffalo! In due time, the train arrived, and the fans boarded, and the songs and chants started right in the rail car as they headed down to the front door of the arena.

Waiting just inside the doors of the pavilion were none other than Suzanne K. Taylor and Cindy Barrett, both of whom took part in the Sabres fan tour to Germany last fall, and were instrumental in getting the ball rolling for this Mannheim invasion to Buffalo. They held up their signature "Danke Mannheim" sign, and a number of the Germans stopped to greet them and have their pictures taken. Our visitors wasted no time, many headed right to the team store, looking for Sabres gear and souvenirs, and anything, just anything, with the name "Hecht" on it. One woman remarked, "I came with a long shopping list from home, not just for me, but my two grandchildren. They asked for a Hecht team shirt." Our contact and newfound friend Stefan Schaefer had earlier shared that when the Sabres visited Mannheim back in October, the front office severely misjudged the demand for Sabres paraphernalia and apparel, and the merchandise stands at SAP Arena quickly sold out of everything. "Tell your people to keep the shelves stocked, especially with Hecht merchandise. Our people will be buying," said Schaefer.

But there would be more surprises in store for our visitors, courtesy of the Buffalo Sabres team management, who knew in advance of the contingent's arrival, and went the extra mile to make our visitors feel welcome and special. Most of their group was perched high atop sec 323, and weren't they surprised to see a special welcome message on the HD Board during a media timeout, complete with a taped greeting by Hecht spoken in German. They let out a loud cheer. It got better. The visitors were taken down to the locker room area during the intermission, and invited to participate on the special "rope line", where the Sabres players pass right by enroute from the team clubhouse onto the ice.

As for the game? Talk about the “Mannheim Karma”! Countryman Christian Ehrhoff got things started, giving the Sabres an early 1-0 lead. There were fights galore, the Sabres played with a zeal and passion that has been far too absent this year at the First Niagara Center. It just got louder and louder as the team built a 4-0 cushion after two, coasting to a 6-0 shutout, and Patrick Kaleta showing bad boy Milan Lucic a thing or two. By the third period, Sabretooth had made his way to sec 323 with drum in hand, and the Germans were doing what they do best, chanting, helping to start the wave and joining in on the fun. After such disappointment this season against the Bruins, including what was arguably the seminal season changing event when Lucic decked Ryan Miller in Boston back in November, Sabres fans ate up every bit of last night’s game. And fortunately, being an NBCSports telecast, everyone back home got to view it.

But back to the Germans – one more treat was in store. The Sabres ushered the group down to a hospitality area next to the locker room following the game. After a few minutes their hero, Jochen Hecht, emerged to greet his fans, and got a great ovation. The visitors broke out in an impromptu song “*Jochen Hecht ist einer von uns!*” (Jochen Hecht is one of us). Hecht stayed as long as he was wanted, talking to every fan, posing for pictures and signing for autographs. Speaking to Hecht after the meet and greet was over, Hecht responded, “I am so humbled and thankful that these fans would travel so far just to come and see me, and see my team play. This was very special to me.” Hecht was unable to play in the exhibition game in fall due to after effects from his concussion, and as it turns out, is sidelined again and did not dress for last night’s game. “That’s how it goes sometimes, I would have like to be able to play in front of my friends and neighbors. I just hope to be better and get out there soon and help my team out.”

There was one more stop to make this evening complete... a visit to a local eatery for some post game brews and food. Stefan Schaefer and his posse gladly obliged, and we headed to a sports bar on the Chippewa strip. We sort of cringed as we ordered the pitchers of cold Labatts Blue. Hey, nothing wrong with the local stuff, but after sampling some of the amazing pilseners available in the Mannheim-Heidelberg region, let’s just say that one serves up a Genny Cream or OM Light to a German with great trepidation. Nonetheless the beer went down well, two heaping plates of wings were scarfed down in no time, and sharing some great stories and road trip adventures from these people who were still a buzz about the evening that was.

Today there will be trips to Niagara Falls, to the malls, some random sightseeing. Tomorrow they do it all over again at the Sabres-Stars game at First Niagara Center, before leaving for Toronto for yet more hockey and a visit to the Hall of Fame. Thanks to the Sabres front office, and thanks to the efforts of some very special people, our visitors from Mannheim, Germany will leave Buffalo with great stories to tell back home, and memories of their visit here that will last a lifetime.

Stars-Sabres Preview

Mark Stepneski

ESPN

February 10, 2012

Dallas Stars at Buffalo Sabres

Friday February 10

6:30 p.m.

TV: Fox Sports Southwest Plus

Radio: KTCK-1310 (AM)

About the Stars

The Stars (28-23-2) are coming off a 4-2 at Columbus Thursday. The Stars scored two goals in the first 4:21 of the game and added a third at 1:05 of the second to build a 3-0 lead in the game.

“It was a big start tonight. Those two goals were huge. Getting some momentum on the road for our team is big. We definitely want that in the first period,” said Stars center Jamie Benn, who scored two goals. “We battled a lot harder. We won some battles. There are still things we can clean up. Our second period wasn’t very good. We know that. It was because of bad penalties and turnovers that they got their chances. We need to clean that up.”

The Stars are 4-2-0 in their last six games.

The Stars are 0-8-1 in the second game of back-to-backs this season.

Richard Bachman will get the start in goal for the Stars on Friday.

Injuries: D Sheldon Souray (foot) is questionable. LW Brenden Morrow (neck/shoulder) is out.

About the Sabres

The Sabres (23-24-6) ran their points streak to five games (4-0-1) with a 6-0 victory over Boston in Buffalo Wednesday night. The game featured 90 minutes in penalties and three fights.

“We’re not going to back down,” Sabres forward Jason Pominville said. “Guys stepped in. Some of them played out of character. Everybody did different things to help us win. And that’s what a team is all about.”

Buffalo goalie Ryan Miller stopped 36 shots for his second shutout in the past three games.

Buffalo is 5-0-4 in its last nine home games.

Injuries: F Jochen Hecht (concussion), D T.J. Brennan (lower body) and F Colin Stuart (lower body) are out.

Series notes

*This is the first and only meeting between the two teams this season.

*The Stars won last season's only meeting, shutting out Buffalo 4-0 in Dallas.

*The Stars are 41-52-18 all-time against the Sabres.

Statistical Matchup

Statistical matchup between the Dallas Stars and Buffalo Sabres

Category	Stars	Sabres
Record	28-23-2	23-24-6
Points	58	52
Points%	.547	.491
Home	15-10-2	12-9-6
Away	13-13-0	11-15-0
Last 10	4-5-1	4-5-1
Streak	Won 1	Won 2
Goals For	2.58 (17th)	2.42 (24th)
Goals Against	2.79 (19th)	2.85 (21st)
5-on-5 GF/GA	0.96 (16th)	0.94 (19th)
Power Play	14.3 (25th)	16.8 (19th)
Penalty Kill	81.8 (18th)	81.8 (17th)

Category	Stars	Sabres
Shots For	28.3 (22nd)	29.0 (19th)
Shots Against	31.2 (25th)	31.5 (27th)
Faceoffs	49.3 (19th)	49.2 (22nd)

Team Leaders	Stars	Sabres
Goals	Ryder: 19	Pominville, Vanek: 19
Assists	Benn: 31	Pominville: 30
Points	Benn: 48	Pominville: 50
Goaltenders	Lehtonen: 20-12-1, 2.42, .920	Miller: 15-15-3, 2.79, .908
	Bachman: 6-3-1, 2.72, .912	Enroth: 8-9-3, 2.59, .919
	Raycroft: 2-8-0, 3.52, .898	MacIntyre: 0-0-0, 1.40, .944

Jamie Benn's two goals lead Stars to 4-2 win over Blue Jackets

Staff Report

Dallas Morning News

February 10, 2012

[COLUMBUS](#) , [Ohio](#) -- There are no pushovers at this point in an [NHL](#) season - even with a three-goal lead on the road.

[Jamie Benn](#) scored twice and [Kari Lehtonen](#) had 26 saves to make an early lead stand up in the Dallas Stars' 4-2 victory over the [Columbus Blue Jackets](#) on Thursday night.

But it was a struggle for a team in the middle of the playoff race against another club headed nowhere.

"It's going to be tough. Every year is, those last 30 games of the year," said [Alex Goligoski](#), who had a goal and an assist for the Stars. "Everybody's fighting for position. And you've got other teams fighting for other reasons, for jobs and whatnot."

[Stephane Robidas](#) also had a goal and an assist, and [Mike Ribeiro](#) added two assists for the Stars, who began the night 12th in the [Western Conference](#) but just two points behind eighth-place [Minnesota](#).

Up 3-0 barely 21 minutes in, it was still a battle as the Blue Jackets scored two power-play goals in the second period and then threatened to score several times down the stretch.

Columbus had several chances to get the tying goal in the final period. With 6 minutes left, [Jeff Carter](#) , who had goals in his last two games, hit the post on a hard shot from the right hash. [Fedor Tyutin](#) was just wide with another big slap shot with just over a minute remaining and Lehtonen smothered [R.J. Umberger's](#) redirect attempt with 29 seconds left.

"I thought he was real good," Stars coach Glen Galutzan said of Lehtonen. "He cleaned a lot of our stuff up. Most of our stuff was self-inflicted."

The Stars hung on to win their fourth in the last six games. The Blue Jackets failed to win their third in a row - something they haven't accomplished all season.

Dallas wasted little time in taking control, scoring twice in the opening 4 1/2 minutes.

After a giveaway by Columbus' [Samuel Pahlsson](#) handed him the puck in the high slot, Benn wheeled and flicked a rising forehand shot into the top right corner for his 16th of the season.

Then the Blue Jackets lost a player and allowed a goal on the same play.

The Stars were swarming when [Tomas Vincour's](#) hard slap shot hit Columbus defenseman [Marc Methot](#) on the side of his face. The puck dropped almost straight down - where Goligoski was waiting to jam in the rebound.

Bleeding profusely, Methot skated away unaided, pressing a towel to his face to stem the flow. He did not return.

After the game, a team spokesman said Methot sustained a broken jaw.

The bad news didn't end there. Forward [Jared Boll](#) also broke his foot and will be sidelined for an extensive period.

"It was a great start, getting those two goals was huge," Benn said. "Getting some momentum for our team on the road is big. We definitely want that in the first period."

Still on the power play to start the second period, the Stars pushed the lead to three when Robidas' high-velocity shot from the right point got past goalie [Curtis Sanford](#), who couldn't see the puck due to congestion in front of the net.

Vinny Prospal and [Rick Nash](#) scored, and Tyutin and [Derick Brassard](#) had two assists apiece for Columbus. The Blue Jackets, 24th in the NHL with a man advantage, scored twice in the second period - both on power plays.

"I liked the way we battled back," Blue Jackets interim coach Todd Richards said. "I liked the way we fought all the way to the end. The problem was, we weren't ready at the start. We dug ourselves a 2-0 hole and we just couldn't overcome that deficit."

Benn closed the scoring on an empty-net goal with less than a second left.

"There's going to be no easy games. We know that," Goligoski said. "I think our work ethic was a lot better tonight. That was good to see."

NOTES: NHL Commissioner [Gary Bettman](#) was at the game, coming in hours after the official announcement of the 2013 Winter Classic between Detroit and [Toronto](#) at the [University of Michigan's](#) "Big House" ... Just 18 days before the trade deadline, scouts from [Tampa Bay](#), St. Louis, Chicago, Vancouver, [Montreal](#), [New Jersey](#), Detroit, [Ottawa](#), Nashville and San Jose were at the game. ... The Stars improved to 16-0-0 when leading after two periods, tied for first in the league. The last time they lost a game in regulation when leading going into the third was Oct. 31, 2009. Since then they are 57-0-5. ... Sanford finished with 31 saves.

Stars Seek Similar Second-Half Production from Eriksson

Steve Hunt

Stars.NHL.com

February 8, 2012

In the first half of the season, [Loui Eriksson](#) was a true model of consistency for the Dallas Stars. Through 48 games, the 26-year-old Swedish-born winger had 44 points (17-27-44) and was an impressive plus-12.

The longest the 2011 NHL All-Star went without registering at least a point was the five-game stretch between Dec. 1 and Dec. 13, 2011. But other than that, Eriksson was contributing goals and assists on a very regular basis. He is one of four Stars to have not missed a game so far this season, a trend he'd like to see continue.

Now as he and his teammates are set to embark on the second half of the season and a stretch run they hope will end in the club's first playoff berth in over three years, having Eriksson display similar form in the final 34 games will be crucial for Dallas.

"Yeah, no question there was that stint there early that Loui, Bennie and Ryder had a great start," Stars head coach Glen Gulutzan said. "Then, we went through a little bit of a dry spell there and then they came on strong again. We hope we get right off to that. That's why we had a mini training camp-to get guys back and refocused on what their jobs were. We've got everyone healthy and we're ready to see what this month brings."

Comparing Eriksson's first-half numbers to those of last season, when he was an NHL All-Star for the first time and it looks like he is on a similar pace. Through 49 games last year, the Swedish forward had 42 points (15-27-42) and finished the year with 73 points (27-46-73), which was a new career high.

But for much of the last two seasons, he skated alongside Brad Richards, a fellow 2011 All-Star who is now with the New York Rangers. So, at least heading into this season there were some questions about how Eriksson would do without Richards getting him the puck. However, he quietly put any such concerns to bed with a strong start to this season.

"Yeah, he kind of picked up where he left off last year. There may have been a little bit of question how he'd produce without (Richards) around and I think he answered that the first week of the season and just carried it on," Stars captain [Brenden Morrow](#) said. "The things that don't end up on the scoreboard that the hockey people recognize and see he does that every game. They're invaluable things to our team and we need him to keep doing more of the same."

So far this season, he has skated on a line with 2012 All-Star [Jamie Benn](#) and newcomer [Michael Ryder](#) and also alongside Dallas mainstays like Morrow and Ribeiro. But it doesn't matter who he's been lined up alongside, his production has been at a similar level.

"I've been playing with good guys here. Benner is a real good player. He was an All-Star and is a really good player to play with. It's the same with Ribs and Morrow. I've played with them

before,” Eriksson said. “I’m interested in trying to help the team as much as I can by scoring goals, creating chances and playing well.”

And he’s been especially durable this season, joining Ryder and fellow newcomers [Radek Dvorak](#) and [Vernon Fiddler](#) as the only Stars to not miss a single game this season. Eriksson missed just three games last year and skated in all 82 contests in both 2008-09 and 2009-10, so being durable is nothing new for him. But even he admits it’s always nice to stay healthy and be in a position to help his team each and every night.

“It’s probably a little luck too, but it’s always nice to stay healthy and not get any injuries. I’m feeling good right now, so I’m just going to keep working,” Eriksson said.

He got his last taste of playoff hockey in 2008 and in his 22 career postseason games, he has nine points (4-5-9). And as the Stars’ playoff drought currently sits at three years and counting, the postseason is clearly somewhere he wants to get back to, but not just for himself but for his teammates who have yet to experience playoff hockey.

“That’s our goal, to make it to the playoffs. I want everyone else to see how fun it is to play in those games,” Eriksson said. “It’s kind of a playoff mentality for us now. We have to win a lot of games to get a good position to make it to the playoffs. I think everyone is ready and these are like playoff games here.”

Should the Stars end that streak, it’s a safe bet that the continued strong play of [Loui Eriksson](#) will be a big reason why they do so.

Lehtonen Definitely Back to Old Self, Showing Strong Form

Steve Hunt

Stars.NHL.com

February 6, 2012

There's officially no doubt about it, [Kari Lehtonen](#) is definitely back to his old, pre-injury self. The Finnish-born goaltender heads into Tuesday's game with Phoenix fresh off a 34-save performance where he stopped all but one shot in a 2-1 win over the Wild on Saturday at American Airlines Center, but he also denied two of three Minnesota shootout attempts.

His latest victory means he now has won his last three starts, a successful run that came after he dropped four straight before putting that streak to an abrupt halt with his first shutout of the season in a 1-0 win over Anaheim on Jan. 24, Dallas' last game before the NHL All-Star break.

Lehtonen's recent run of good form puts his season record at 19-11-1 and gives him a goals-against-average of 2.38. And seeing his No. 1 netminder return to the stellar form he displayed before he missed 12 games with a groin injury earlier this season is definitely music to the ears of Stars first-year head coach Glen Gulutzan.

"I think it took him a couple games to get himself back. The last three or four games he played, he was real, real sharp, so I think he's back to where he needs to be," Gulutzan said. "I think everybody is."

Saturday's win over Minnesota, a team the Stars are battling with for a playoff spot in the Western Conference, was Lehtonen's third straight win in what was his 13th game after returning from the aforementioned injury, which he suffered on Nov. 26, 2011 at Phoenix. He didn't return to the net for Dallas until Dec. 29, 2011 against Columbus and right away, it was clear there was some rust to be worked through.

"I don't feel like I've played at the level I'm capable of (since my return)," Lehtonen said. "It was hard, the first few games getting used to playing again, trusting my body and getting more comfortable. But I think in the later part, I started feeling normal again and had some good games. "Overall I wasn't satisfied with the way things went. So now I'm really excited to play better."

He definitely delivered on that promise on Saturday night at the AAC. But it was his 33-save performance several nights earlier in a 6-2 win over Anaheim at the Honda Center that had he and his teammates seeing the benefits of being well-rested following the All-Star break.

"Yeah, it was nice to have a few days to not do anything. Now we're excited and ready to go again," Lehtonen said.

Now that he's put together a string of three consecutive strong performances in goal for the Stars, he hopes that's only the beginning as he and his teammates make a push toward ending a postseason dry spell that has now reached three straight years.

“I’ll have to put more of those good games in a row there. That’s what I’m trying to do,” Lehtonen said. “It’s going to be a little different game the first time after the break. Everybody’s trying to find themselves. Hopefully we can do it better than them.”

Dallas now has 31 games remaining in the regular season. Lehtonen started the Stars’ final 33 games of the regular season last year under then head coach Marc Crawford. But Stars General Manager Joe Nieuwendyk stated before the season that seeing a repeat of that this year would be highly unlikely. And now that Dallas has a consistent and solid No. 2 goaltender in the young but talented [Richard Bachman](#), this veteran between the pipes knows he figures to get his fair share of rest in the final stages of the regular season.

“We’ll see how it goes but I don’t think I will play that many games. I think everyone in this room and the coaching staff really feels good about Bachman,” Lehtonen said. “I’m sure he’s going to be out there and do a good job. We just both have to play really well to give this team a chance to make the playoffs.”

And there is already proof that things will be different this time around for the veteran goaltender as Bachman has already logged one start in the second half, getting the nod in last Thursday’s loss at San Jose on the second night of a back-to-back.