



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Saturday, February 11, 2012

Sabres upstage Stars with late heroics

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2012

It wouldn't have been a surprise if Derek Roy missed his chance to be the star. It's happened often this season. The Sabres' center is on pace to have the worst statistical year of his career, and the head-shaking moments have been plentiful.

But finally, with at least one precious point on the line Friday, Roy connected.

Roy scored with just 39.3 seconds left in regulation, lifting hard-charging Buffalo into a 2-2 tie with Dallas. Nathan Gerbe sealed the Sabres' rally from a two-goal, third-period deficit, scoring in the fifth round of the shootout to give the Sabres a 3-2 victory.

"You need to come back in some games," Roy said. "You need character wins like that throughout the season. That's a big two points for us. We've just got to keep this thing going."

The Sabres ran their unbeaten streak to six games (5-0-1) and continued to win in First Niagara Center, improving to 6-0-4 in the last 10. They'll be back on home ice tonight when they host the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Buffalo appeared to be in big trouble when Dallas scored with 15:43 left, increasing its lead to 2-0. The Stars, though, began to feel the effects of back-to-back games. The Sabres applied steady pressure in the final period with 13 of their 29 shots in regulation coming in the final 20 minutes.

"We knew they had back-to-backs, and we know how it feels," said Roy, whose team has been among the league leaders in back-to-back games for three seasons. "We wanted to go out in the third period and set the tone and really play well. I thought we did that."

Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek started the rally with 14:53 to play, connecting on a power-play goal. Pominville skated to the top of the right circle and sent a hard pass to the slot. Vanek's 20th of the season, on a deflection, finally showed that Stars goaltender Kari Lehtonen could be beaten.

The second time didn't come until the final seconds. The Sabres called a timeout with 43.4 ticks left. They won the faceoff in the Dallas zone to set up Tyler Myers for a point blast. His shot failed to get through traffic in front, but Roy took a whack at the loose puck at the top of the crease.

He caught just a piece, but it was enough to flutter past Lehtonen and bring the sellout crowd of 18,690 to its feet.

"I almost missed it," Roy said. "It almost bounced over my stick. I just got enough of it to get by."

The goal was just the third in 18 games for Roy, who is on pace for 15 goals and 40 points. The lowest full-season totals of his career came in 2005-06, when he scored 18 times and had 46 points in 70 games.

"Things have been going not so well, so it was nice," Roy said. "We need big goals like that to win games."

Gerbe scored in the fifth round of the shootout to give Buffalo a 2-1 lead in the breakaway challenge. Goalie Ryan Miller sent the crowd to the streets happy with a save on Michael Ryder.

"Huge win after going down two," said Gerbe, who got the loudest roar of the shootout when he stepped to center ice. "I love going out there. It's a fun part of the game, and to win that way is pretty cool."

For most of the game, it seemed Buffalo's seasonlong scoring troubles were back. They broke out for nine goals in the previous two games, but they returned to their tendencies of plunking posts and finding goaltender's pads and gloves.

Christian Ehrhoff, Drew Stafford, Ville Leino, Myers, Pominville and Vanek all skated away from Lehtonen feeling frustrated by their missed opportunities.

One fluttering shot by Roy with 39 seconds left changed everything.

"We got one in on a goalie who had a hell of a game at the other end," said Stafford, who watched Lehtonen stop all seven of his shots in a 30-save performance. "You've got to give him credit for playing well, but it was a really gutsy effort by us to crawl out of that with two points."

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Vanek returns to lineup with a bang

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2012

The Buffalo Sabres eased Thomas Vanek back into the lineup Friday night by starting him on the fourth line with Cody McCormick and Matt Ellis. But Vanek didn't ease himself in. He was instant impact, with his 20th goal of the season and two near-misses on game-winners in the Sabres' 3-2 shootout win over the Dallas Stars.

"It was good to be back," said Vanek, who had missed three games with an upper-body injury suffered Jan. 31 in Montreal. "I thought I played well and generated chances."

Sure did. Vanek had four shots on goal, second on the team, and scored with a power-play deflection at 5:07 of the third period. It's his seventh straight 20-goal season and ended Buffalo's 0-for-14 run with the man advantage.

"That gave us a lot of confidence to get us back within one with a lot of time left," he said. "It took until the last minute [until Derek Roy's tying goal] but we never stopped believing."

"He can be instant help on the power play," said coach Lindy Ruff. "And it just seems when he does come back, he gets himself on the scoresheet. He'll get better from playing."

Vanek moved to a line with Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford for the second half of the game and his goal was the 224th of his career, tying Miroslav Satan for seventh in club history.

No. 225 looked like a sure bet in the final two seconds of overtime until Kari Lehtonen's miraculous right pad save foiled Vanek after he took a back pass from Christian Ehrhoff on a 2-on-0 break.

"Right before the turnover, I looked up [at the clock] and saw there was three seconds left," Vanek said. "I wanted to get it off as quick as possible. I've just got to put it in."

"It was an incredible play. I thought it was in," said Ruff, who again sat in the press box due to his broken ribs. "I didn't jump but I was close to it. If Thomas gets it up, it's in but he didn't get it up and [Lehtonen] made a great save. To go out and win still in the shootout was important."

In the shootout, Vanek tried his "around-the-world" move where he circles the puck with his stick before firing. He had Lehtonen beat but rifled it off the crossbar.

"I did exactly what I wanted to do," Vanek said. "I got him to drop, had lots to shoot at and missed."

"He looked great, strong as always," said winger Nathan Gerbe. "He's a huge presence for us when he's out there. He creates so much and gets a lot of attention. He did a great job."

* * *

The Sabres scratched rookie Luke Adam to make room for Vanek. Adam is eighth in the NHL among rookies in both goals and points (20) but doesn't have a single point in his last 20 games. Ruff didn't disagree with the notion that he might need a refresher course in Rochester.

"It's a thought just to get him going, get him back on the scoresheet," Ruff said. "He's definitely had his struggles but it isn't something we've discussed yet."

* * *

The Stars were 16-0-0 this year when leading after two periods -- and 57-0-5 in a streak that dated to Oct. 31, 2009 but the Sabres overcame those numbers. Buffalo was just 2-20-1 when trailing after two.

"Confidence has helped. We're desperate too," said goaltender Ryan Miller. "It's a mixture of a lot of things but you do see some growth in a lot of the guys and that's a good sign."

Miller improved to 5-0-1 in the last six games with a 1.11 goals-against average and .962 save percentage. He's 3-1 in shootouts this year and stopped both Mike Ribeiro and Tomas Vincour on shots that would have given Dallas a win.

* * *

McCormick left the game after the first period with an upper-body injury. Ruff said he had no update but expected the Sabres' enforcer to miss some time. ... The Sabres have played four shootouts in their last six games and won three of them. They are 5-3 in shootouts this season.

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A feel-good story masks lingering flaws

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2012

So this is how things are going to unfold for the foreseeable future, huh? The Sabres are going to tease you the way they have many times in the past. They're going to make a triumphant run up the standings, restore hope and have you convinced the first 50 games were a mirage, as Darcy Regier suggested.

Bet the house, the kids and all the beer in the fridge that the Sabres will keep things interesting for a while, but where is it all going? Perhaps they will put together another dramatic run into the postseason like they did last year. Or maybe they'll march into eighth place, empty their collective tank and slip back into 11th.

Who knows?

The Sabres had people thinking that they can stay with the best teams in the league when they dropped the hammer on the Stanley Cup-winning Bruins on Wednesday with a spirited 6-0 victory. They were all but cooked Friday before coming back in the third period and beating Dallas, 3-2, in a shootout in First Niagara Center.

Of course, it took a two-goal deficit to arouse them from two sleepy periods, a goal from Derek Roy with 39 seconds remaining and two extra shooters before Nathan Gerbe scored the shootout winner with a backhander just inside the post. It was a much-needed win. The Sabres have won five of six games and taken 11 of 12 possible points.

In truth, if they keep playing the way they did for the first 40 minutes against the Stars, they aren't very far. Dallas was playing on tired legs after winning in Columbus the previous night. The Stars have the third-lowest payroll in the NHL, spending about \$16 million less than Buffalo will this year.

You couldn't tell the difference after watching the Sabres in shackles for much of the game Friday.

Buffalo has failed to score two or more goals in regulation for the 28th time this season, or more than half of their games. Kari Lehtonen played well for the Stars and positively robbed Thomas Vanek in overtime, but the Sabres are back to having the same issues that plagued them for most of the season.

Vanek scored on a pass from Jason Pominville. Drew Stafford had seven shots on goal and failed to score. The Sabres were sloppy for much of the game.

This is hardly an anomaly.

Regier earlier this week said he took comfort in the fact that this was an unusual year. For starters, he shouldn't be taking comfort in anything when his team is near the bottom of the conference. But he made it sound like the season was an aberration, you know, like the weather this year in Buffalo.

In our town, when it snows, we clear the driveway and keep plowing forward. Regier's shovel is still in the shed while he clings to hope there isn't going to be a storm.

The one thing Regier can control is his roster, and he hasn't improved the situation despite flaws that have been evident for months. That's why, with 28 games remaining, it still appears they had a snowball's chance in hell of reaching the postseason. Their 16-4-4 finish looks more absurd than anything that's happened this year.

Look, I'm not here to dissect every word that comes from the general manager's mouth. If everybody took that approach, we'd all be in trouble. What he says doesn't matter nearly as much as what he does. In past years, he's done very little to rectify obvious problems that crop up during a given season.

Regier has made one in-season trade before Jan. 1, shipping Daniel Paille to Boston two years ago, since he sent Jason Woolley to the Red Wings in 2002. He hasn't made a swap for a forward who had an impact since Chris Drury in 2003.

It's all become so monotonous, so repetitive.

Buffalo has played much better in the past three weeks than it did in the previous three months, but they need help from their general manager at the trade deadline and the teams around them if they're going to make the playoffs.

For all that work, the Sabres will wake up Saturday morning eight points behind eighth-place Toronto. Saturday night, they'll play an intense showdown against Tampa Bay in what could erupt into a classic battle for 11th -- or worse.

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Sabres rally to beat Stars 3-2 in shootout

NHL.com

February 10, 2012

Don't look now, but the [Buffalo Sabres](#) are stalking the rest of the Eastern Conference.

Following a blowout win over Boston on Wednesday, the Sabres proved they could win the close ones as well by erasing a two-goal, third-period deficit to beat Dallas 3-2 in a shootout for their third straight victory.

With the win, Buffalo (24-24-6) leapfrogged Montreal and Tampa Bay for sole possession of 11th place, eight points shy of the final playoff slot. [Thomas Vanek](#) and [Derek Roy](#) scored for Buffalo and [Ryan Miller](#) stopped 24 shots.

"We played well, played sound," said [Nathan Gerbe](#), who converted the shootout winner. "We didn't have our legs right away, but Millsy came up big and kept us in the game. It shows we can play, it shows what kind of team we are and we're ready to make a big run and make the playoffs."

Dallas (28-23-3) moved within a point of eighth-place Phoenix in the West but failed in its bid to win a regular-season game in Buffalo for the first time since Oct. 7, 1997. Dallas dropped to 0-5-2 in its past trips to Buffalo.

When [Tomas Vincour](#) gave Dallas a 2-0 lead at 4:17 of the third period, some Sabre faithful headed for the First Niagara Center exits. Before they reached the door, Buffalo struck back on the power play.

Vanek, playing his first game since missing three with an upper-body injury, scored his team-leading 20th goal by deflecting [Jason Pominville](#)'s right-circle blast past [Kari Lehtonen](#) at 5:07.

"I said this morning that I think (Vanek) can be instant help with the power play," said coach Lindy Ruff. "And it seems when he does come back he gets on the scoresheet."

From there, Buffalo peppered Lehtonen, outshooting the Stars 13-3 in the final period. Until the final minute, however, it looked as if Lehtonen would shut the door. But with 39 seconds left, [Tyler Myers](#)' straightaway blast from just inside the blue line bounced off [Drew Stafford](#) to Lehtonen's right, where Roy was waiting to swat the puck home for his 11th of the season.

Buffalo continued to test Lehtonen in overtime, and he made perhaps his best save with just seconds to go in the extra period. A turnover in the Dallas zone gave the puck to [Christian Ehrhoff](#), who skated in on a two-on-zero with Vanek trailing. Ehrhoff slipped the puck back

through his legs, but Lehtonen used an outstretched right blocker to deflect Vanek's one-timer.

"He's been a big part of the team all year," said winger [Michael Ryder](#). "When we look at him to make the big saves, he makes them. He's a big, agile goaltender and he's a big reason we're in the playoff hunt."

In the shootout, Buffalo's [Brad Boyes](#) and Dallas' [Jamie Benn](#) traded goals before Gerbe sealed it when he whipped a backhand off the left post and in.

"I think going for my last shootout attempt, I went low blocker," Gerbe said. "So I wanted to switch it up from last time since goalies check the tapes and see what works and what doesn't work."

The Stars got three of four points on a two-night swing through Columbus and Buffalo -- but felt they should have had all four.

"I thought we did a pretty good job of managing our game, but they got a good bounce," said Dallas coach Glen Gulutzan, referring to Roy's game-tying goal.

The Stars started well and grabbed the lead on Ryder's 20th of the season at 17:53 of the first. With [Cody McCormick](#) off for roughing, Ryder redirected an [Alex Goligoski](#) point shot past Miller.

Vincour made it 2-0 off a nice feed from Benn, but it was all Sabres from that point forward.

Buffalo puts its winning streak on the line Saturday at home to Tampa Bay, one of many Eastern teams looking for a late surge.

"To go out and win it in a shootout still was important," said Ruff, who again spent the game in the press box after breaking three ribs at practice earlier in the week. "That's an important point for us with the games we have in hand."

Material from team media and wire services was used in this report

Sabres and Lightning try to stay hot

Mike G. Morreale

NHL.com

February 11, 2012

LIGHTNING (23-24-6) at SABRES (24-24-6)

TV: SUN (HD), MSG-Buffalo, WGRZ

LAST 10: Tampa Bay 6-2-2, Buffalo 5-4-1

Season Series: It's the third of four meetings this season. The Lightning won the first two contests by a combined 7-3 score, taking a home-and-home series against the Sabres back in October. The clubs will next meet March 19 in Tampa Bay.

Big Story: Two teams expected to be battling for Eastern Conference supremacy this season are instead battling for their playoff lives. The Sabres, who lost Game 7 to the Philadelphia Flyers in the conference quarterfinals last spring, are currently 11th in the East. The Lightning, one season removed from taking the defending Stanley Cup champion Boston Bruins to seven games in the conference final, are in 13th place.

However, Buffalo enters the match on a six-game point streak (5-0-1), its longest since finishing last season on an identical 5-0-1 run. The Sabres are also seeking their first four-game win streak since winning four straight from Nov. 4-11.

Team Scope:

Lightning: The Lightning grabbed a 3-2 lead over the New York Rangers through two periods on the strength of goals from [Steven Stamkos](#), [Vincent Lecavalier](#) and [Bruno Gervais](#), but ultimately dropped a 4-3 overtime decision on Thursday. Each of the last seven meetings between the Rangers and Lightning have been decided by two goals or less, including five that were separated by one goal and four that required extra time.

After falling to last place in the East, the Lightning have chipped away at the deficit, which stands at 10 points entering Saturday's action.

"We've only lost one regulation game in the past nine, so we have to keep on going," coach Guy Boucher said. "We're playing well, we're making it hard [for opponents] and our guys are finding ways to get points."

Sabres: Like the Lightning, the Sabres continue to dig out of a hole. [Nathan Gerbe](#) scored in the fifth round of a shootout and [Ryan Miller](#) made it stand when he forced Michael Ryder to shoot wide of the net to lead the Sabres to their third straight victory -- a 3-2 shootout decision over the Dallas Stars on Friday. Gerbe's winner came off a backhand shot that struck the post and caromed in off Kari Lehtonen. Miller finished with 24 saves in regulation and overtime before stopping Loui Eriksson, Mike Ribeiro and Tomas Vincour in the shootout. The Sabres rallied

from a 2-0 deficit on a pair of third-period goals by [Thomas Vanek](#) and [Derek Roy](#) -- Roy's goal came with just 39 seconds left in regulation.

Who's Hot: Stamkos has 20 goals and 10 assists in his last 24 games. He's on a five-game point streak and has 60 points for the season, two behind League leader Evgeni Malkin of the Penguins. ... Miller is on the best six-game stretch of his career, going 5-0-1 with two shutouts.

Injury Report: The Sabres are without forwards [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) and [Colin Stuart](#) (knee). [Cody McCormick](#) left Friday's game with what the team called an upper-body injury. ... The Lightning are missing defenseman [Mattias Ohlund](#) (knees) and [Dana Tyrell](#) (knee). Forward [Ryan Malone](#) (upper body) is questionable.

Stat Pack: With a League-high 36 goals in the Lightning's first 53 games, Stamkos is on pace to finish the season with 56 goals. If he reaches 50, he'll be just the sixth player to have two 50-goal seasons prior to his 23rd birthday.

Puck Drop : The Sabres have points in their last 10 home games (6-0-4) -- their last regulation loss on home ice coming Dec. 10. It's the team's longest such streak since 2009-10, when they went 9-0-3 in 12 home games from Dec. 9 to Jan. 29.

Gerbe caps Sabres' 3-2 shootout win over Stars

John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 10, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—[Nathan Gerbe](#) scored the decisive shootout goal in the fifth round and the [Buffalo Sabres](#) rallied from a two-goal third-period deficit to beat the [Dallas Stars](#) 3-2 on Friday night.

[Derek Roy](#) forced overtime by scoring with 39 seconds left, and [Thomas Vanek](#) also scored to help the Sabres improve to 5-0-1 in their last six games. [Ryan Miller](#) made 24 saves in helping the Sabres (24-24-6) jump ahead of three teams and into 11th place in the Eastern Conference.

[Michael Ryder](#) and [Tomas Vincour](#) scored for the Stars.

Gerbe sealed the win in the fifth shootout round by backhanding a shot that struck the post and caromed in off [Kari Lehtonen](#).

After Buffalo's [Brad Boyes](#) and Dallas' [Jamie Benn](#) traded shootout goals, Gerbe sealed the win in the fifth shootout round by backhanding a shot that struck the post and then caromed in off goalie Kari Lehtonen.

Ryder then had a chance to tie it, but shot high and wide while driving in from the left side.

It was a game that featured a wild finish in the Stars' bid to win in Buffalo for the first time in more than 14 years. Dallas dropped to 5-0-2, including a tie, in its past seven trips to Buffalo, with the team's last regular-season win coming on Oct. 7, 1997.

Vanek, playing in his first game after missing three because of an upper-body injury, cut the Stars' lead to 2-1 with a power-play goal 5:07 into the third period. The goal came 50 seconds after Vincour put Dallas up 2-0.

Roy forced overtime by scoring his 11th goal of the season and only his third in 18 games. [Paul Gaustad](#) won a faceoff to the right of the Stars' net and drew the puck back to [Tyler Myers](#), who slapped a hard low shot from just inside the blue line. Lehtonen made the initial save, but couldn't control the rebound, as the puck bounced off Buffalo's [Drew Stafford](#) in front and skipped to Roy, who swept it in the open right side.

The Sabres controlled the third period, in which they scored twice to rally from two goals down, and outshot the Stars 13-3.

Vanek squandered a tremendous opportunity to win the game in the final seconds of overtime when he trailed [Christian Ehrhoff](#) in driving to the net following a Dallas giveaway inside its blue line. Ehrhoff cut across to the right side of the net and dropped the puck back to Vanek, who was then robbed by Lehtonen, who stuck out his right pad to block the shot.

Coming off a 4-2 win at Columbus, the Stars blew a chance to win consecutive road games for the first time since a three-game streak in mid-December.

Lehtonen had a strong game in stopping 34 shots through overtime, showing no signs of an illness that had been bothering him this week and while playing on consecutive nights. His best series of stops came during a Buffalo power play 2 1/2 minutes into the second period.

Lehtonen first got a piece of Stafford's shot from in close, and then had to be sharp after a defender's clearing attempt struck a player in front and bounced directly back toward the net. With Lehtonen unable to control the second rebound, Stafford drove to the net and lifted a shot toward the open right side, only to have it gloved by the outstretched goalie.

NOTES: Sabres C McCormick did not return for the start of the second period with what the team called an upper-body injury. ... Stars' D [Sheldon Souray](#) did not play after being struck by a shot in the foot in a 4-2 win at Columbus on Thursday night. ... The Stars' regular-season winless drought at Buffalo does not include Dallas winning two of three games at Buffalo in the 1999 Stanley Cup finals, including a 2-1 triple-overtime win the title in Game 6. ... Sabres assistant coach James Patrick was behind the bench and head coach Lindy Ruff in the press box for a second straight game. Ruff is recuperating after breaking three ribs during a collision in practice Monday. ... Benn played his 200th NHL game.

FALLING STARS

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

February 10, 2012

Three weeks ago, the Buffalo Sabres couldn't buy a break. Now they can't seem to find a way to lose.

[Derek Roy](#) scored the tying goal with 39 seconds left in the game, and [Nathan Gerbe](#) fired the game-deciding goal, as the Sabres edged the Dallas Stars 3-2 in a shootout at First Niagara Center. It was the second time in the past three games where the Sabres won a game when they entered the third period trailing the opposition.

The Sabres are now 5-0-1 in their past six games, matching their longest point streak since ending last season on a 5-0-1 run. The shootout win also extended Buffalo's home point streak to 6-0-5, their longest streak since going 9-0-3 from Dec. 9/09 to Jan. 29/10. Buffalo hasn't lost a home game in regulation since December 10.

"I thought as the game went on we kept turning it up, playing better and we just played until the last second. In the end, we deserved two points," said [Thomas Vanek](#). "Obviously, that gave us a lot of confidence that we're within one with a lot of time left. It took until the last minute, but we never stopped believing. This game is all about confidence. Right now, the guys are feeling good about themselves. Like tonight, we were down 2-0, we just kept playing, playing our system, playing it hard. We got back into it."

Vanek returned to the Sabres lineup after missing three games with an upper body injury suffered January 31 in Montreal, and he had an immediate impact. Vanek scored Buffalo's first goal of the game in the third period, giving him 20 on the season – and a seventh-straight 20-goal season. It was also Buffalo's first power play goal since January 21 in St. Louis, snapping an 0-for-14 drought with the man advantage.

It turned out that Vanek was just the power play spark that Lindy Ruff had hoped he would be.

"He had a couple good opportunities, great deflection on the power play goal," said Ruff. "I said this morning I think he can be instant help on the power play. It just seems when he does come back, he gets himself on the scoresheet. He'll get better from playing tonight and he'll be better tomorrow night."

The shootout loss was the first blemish on the Stars' record, as they entered the game with a perfect mark of 16-0-0 when leading after two periods. It also extended Dallas' futility in Buffalo, as they have not won a game here since October 7, 1997 – their longest span of time between wins in any NHL city.

Buffalo gets right back at it, hosting Tampa Bay on Saturday. Game time is 7 p.m.

FIRST PERIOD

DAL 1-0: Ryder tips Goligoski's point shot for his 20th of the season. (17:53) ...Shots: DAL-10, BUF-7

SECOND PERIOD

No scoring... Shots: DAL-12, BUF-9

THIRD PERIOD

DAL 2-0: Vincour drives the slot and one times Jamie Benn's pass from behind the net. (4:17) ...
DAL 2-1: Vanek parks himself in front of Lehtonen, and deftly redirects Pominville's pass from the right boards. (5:07, PP)... 2-2: With Miller off for the extra attacker, Roy taps in the bouncing rebound from Myers' point shot (19:21)... Shots: BUF-13, DAL-3

OVERTIME

Vanek had the best chance in overtime, but his shot with one second left in the extra period hit Lehtonen's right pad just on the edge of the goalline ...Shots: BUF-3, DAL-1

SABRES NOTES: The Sabres are now 9-7-0 in the first game of back-to-back sets. They head into Saturday with a record of 5-6-3 in the second game... [Cody McCormick](#) left the game in the second period with an upper body injury, and did not return. Lindy Ruff did not have an update on his condition after the game [Luke Adam](#) (healthy) and [Marc-Andre Gragnani](#) (healthy) were Buffalo's scratches. This was the second game that Adam has missed this season, while Gragnani has been a healthy scratch for the past four games.

Three star selections

1st: NATHAN GERBE
2nd: JASON POMINVILLE
3rd: ALEX GOLIGOSKI

Winning Goaltender

Ryan Miller

Losing Goaltender

Kari Lehtonen

Surging Sabres rally, beat Dallas for fifth win in sixth tries

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 11, 2012

BUFFALO — If they had fallen behind a couple of goals in the third period just a few weeks ago, the Sabres would've lost. Heck, they might've gotten blown out.

But they're a different, much better team today. The Sabres have quickly forged a shocking turnaround. Take notice. Things are getting interesting, folks.

Down 2-0 to the Dallas Stars 44 minutes in Friday, the Sabres roared back, getting two clutch scores during a wildly entertaining final 20 minutes or so.

First, Thomas Vanek tallied on the power play at 5:07. Then, with goalie Ryan Miller off for an extra attacker, Derek Roy tied it with 39 seconds left in regulation.

In the shootout, Nathan Gerbe's fifth-round backhander clinched the 3-2 triumph inside the First Niagara Center.

Incredibly, the same team that recently fell to the Eastern Conference basement is 5-0-1 in its last six, earning 11 of a possible 12 points. The Sabres (54 points) have vaulted up to 11th place, eight points behind eighth-place Toronto.

What's happened to a team most gave up in late January?

"Confidence has helped," Miller said. "We're desperate, too. I think it's a mixture of a lot of things. You do see some growth in a lot of the guys, and that's a good sign."

Today, there's a belief the Sabres will find a way to win. With most of their injured regulars back, they're becoming the team— one with great goaltending and clutch scoring — many expected.

"There's definitely a good feeling in the room right now," Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers said. "We're putting together a really good run. We still have a long way to go."

The Sabres get another chance to inch up the standings tonight when they host the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Who knows how much energy the Sabres might have left? They certainly exerted a lot late, wearing down a Stars team that won Thursday in Columbus.

The Stars were 16-0-0 when leading after two periods.

"If we start games the way we ended that one, we won't make it as close," Myers said.

Michael Ryder opened the scoring on the power play 17:53 into the game. Tomas Vincour made it 2-0 5:09 into the third period.

The Sabres generated little offense. Stars goalie Kari Lehtonen gobbled up whatever got on net.

“Early in the game we were living a little bit off that 6-0 (win Wednesday), didn’t want to shoot the puck, tried to make that extra play, hang on a little too long,” Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said.

Finally, Vanek tipped in Jason Pominville’s shot at 5:07.

The Sabres sorely missed the Austrian’s presence in front of the net during his three-game absence (upper body). The power play went zero of nine without him and was on a zero of 14 over six games.

Then Roy swept in Drew Stafford’s rebound near the crease, whipping what remained of the capacity crowd of 18,690 fans into a frenzy.

Roy has two goals in three games, as he had in the previous 21.

“We didn’t play our best the first two periods,” Roy said. “Third period, I thought we stepped up and skated a lot. We got some pucks toward the net. He made some good saves. We hit some posts. We missed some chances. But throughout the game I thought we got better and better.”

Lehtonen saved the game with one second left in overtime, making one of the most dynamic and clutch stops this season. As Christian Ehrhoff zoomed in on net alone, a sprawling Lehtonen went for the poke-check. But the defenseman dished back to Vanek, who appeared to have the winning score.

The Finn, who made 30 saves, got his right pad on the puck.

“I didn’t shoot it high enough,” Vanek said. “I shot it hard enough.”

Ruff added: “It was an incredible play. I thought it was in.”

Miller matched him, though, stopping four Stars in the shootout. He entered the game enjoying the best five-game streak – 0.95 goals-against average, .969 save percentage and two shutouts – of his career. He looked sharp again, making 24 saves.

Incredibly, the Stars haven’t won a regular-season game in Buffalo since Oct. 7, 1997, Ruff’s *first* game as Sabres coach. Don’t forget, however, the Stars won the 1999 Stanley Cup here.

Sabres' McCormick not timing goal drought

Tough guy out tonight after leaving shootout win early

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 11, 2012

BUFFALO — Cody McCormick said he hasn't "put a stopwatch" on his marathon goal drought, which reached 60 games Friday in the Sabres' 3-2 shootout win over the Dallas Stars. The gritty winger wasn't aware he had reached a career-long dry spell.

Of course, McCormick, the Sabres' top fighter, isn't a big scorer. He potted a career-high eight last season, though, and he possesses good hands and the ability to play with anyone.

But McCormick hasn't scored a regular-season goal since Feb. 25 (he did tally once in the postseason). The goal-starved Sabres desperately need some offense from the 28-year-old, who once went 57 games without scoring.

"You're never happy not to have a goal," McCormick said Friday morning inside the First Niagara Center. "... I think when I get one I'll get a couple more and confidence will be there."

He added: "It's like I'm sitting around here moping about it. You can't do that."

Hours later, McCormick left the game early in the second period (upper body), his second injury this season. Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said McCormick's out tonight against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

The early-season concussion that cost McCormick 10 games has slowed him a bit.

"I'm surprised," Ruff said about McCormick having zero goals in 38 contests this season. "Part of it was getting a little dinged up earlier in the year. But he's got good hands. I think we've seen that where he can move the puck and make good plays. He can finish. I think he'll get some. He hasn't.

"His struggles have been along the lines of some of our other players."

McCormick, who has two assists and is a minus-7, has struggled in other areas, however. He even sat six times as healthy scratch in January, something he believes helped him.

He's been better since returning, Ruff said. His ice time has gone from around five minutes a game to about nine recently.

"I think it's just play away from the puck," McCormick said. "A couple of us are playing good away from the puck."

In the Sabres' huge 6-0 triumph over Boston on Wednesday, McCormick fought tough guy Shawn Thornton early, setting a tone for the rough-and-tumble affair.

"I just think he's skating a lot better, his compete is good," Ruff said. "Him going after Thornton was a big move, sent a big message. It just sent a message we're here to play at all costs. Hanging onto pucks and doing a good job with the puck has probably been a stronger point for him."

On Friday, McCormick's first-period roughing penalty led to Michael Ryder's goal. McCormick played right wing with Matt Ellis and Thomas Vanek, who returned from a three-game absence (upper body).

Vanek played on other trios later. Ville Leino remained in Vanek's old spot with Derek Roy and Jason Pominville.

With Vanek back, the Sabres scratched struggling rookie Luke Adam, who's battling an epic slump.

Adam's pointless in his last 20 games and has just a single goal and point in 25 contests. He has 10 goals and 20 points overall.

Could Adam be sent to Rochester?

"I think it's a thought just to get him going, get him back on the score sheet," Ruff said. "He's definitely had his struggles. But it isn't something we've discussed yet."

xxx

The Sabres have sent Colin Stuart back to Rochester. The winger has been recovering from a torn MCL.

Sabres Rally for 3-2 Shootout Win Over Dallas

Dan Cave

WGR 550

February 10, 2012

Thomas Vanek and Derek Roy scored 3rd period goals as the Sabres came back from a 2-0 deficit to beat the Dallas Stars 3-2 in a shootout. Buffalo has now not lost in regulation at the First Niagara Center in 12 straight games, dating back to December 10th.

With nearly two minutes remaining in the opening period, Dallas got out to a 1-0 lead on the power play when an Alex Goligoski slapshot was deflected into the top corner of the net by Michael Ryder. Buffalo headed to the dressing room trailing by a goal despite putting together some decent scoring chances on Kari Lehtonen.

The Stars netminder continued his solid play into the 2nd period, particularly during an early Buffalo man advantage. Drew Stafford, trying to tie up the game for the Sabres, was denied point-blank by Lehtonen twice on the same play. Stafford was again turned away by Lehtonen later in the period. Entering the Dallas zone, Tyler Ennis sent a nifty backhand spin pass to Stafford, who ripped a shot that trickled through Lehtonen's pads, but just wide of the net.

Dallas took a 2-0 lead a little over four minutes into the final frame on Tomas Vincour's 2nd goal of the season. Jamie Benn dug a loose puck out from the behind the Buffalo net and flipped in front for Vincour, who wristed it by Ryan Miller. The Sabres struck back almost immediately on the power play with their first goal of the night. Less than a minute after Vincour's goal, Vanek redirected a Jason Pominville shot into the Stars' net to make it a 2-1 game.

Vanek's goal seemed to motivate the Sabres, who spent much of the rest of the period buzzing around the Dallas crease, coming up with several quality scoring chances. With less than a minute to play in regulation Roy finally beat Lehtonen, shoveling a loose puck past the sprawling Stars goaltender and into the net. Tyler Myers got the play started with a blueline blast that squirted free of Lehtonen and eventually found its way onto the stick of Roy, who converted for his 2nd goal in 3 games.

In overtime, Vanek had a chance to win it for Buffalo in the final seconds, but failed to finish off a quick 2-on-0 break with Christian Ehrhoff. The Sabres' defenseman stole the puck and dropped a pass back in front of the crease, however Vanek fired it directly into Lehtonen's right pad.

Buffalo jumped out to the early advantage in the ensuing shootout when Brad Boyes' opening shot found the back of the net, however Jamie Benn pulled the Stars even a few shooters later when he cut wide and beat Miller. Vanek put a move on Lehtonen, but rang the next Sabres opportunity off the crossbar. Dallas failed to capitalize as both Mike Ribeiro and Vincour were kept out of the Buffalo net by Miller. After Vincour was stopped, Gerbe finally rattled one home and Michael Ryder shot his attempt wide to seal the 3-2 victory for the Sabres.

Buffalo has now picked up 11 out of a possible 12 points in its last 6 games (5-0-1) and leapfrogged from 13th to 11th place in the Eastern Conference, still 8 points back of 8th place

Toronto. The Sabres are right back at it on Saturday, hosting the Tampa Bay Lightning at 7:00 p.m. Hear the call with Rick Jeanneret and Harry Neale on WGR SportsRadio 550.

First Period:

Goals

17:53 - (DAL) Michael Ryder (20) (PPG) (Alex Goligoski, Loui Eriksson)

Penalties

17:15 - (BUF) Cody McCormick (roughing - 2 min.)

Second Period:

Goals

None

Penalties

0:42 - (DAL) Alex Goligoski (hooking - 2 min.)

10:25 - (BUF) Jordan Leopold (high-sticking - 2 min.)

19:12 - (BUF) Derek Roy (tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

Goals

4:17 - (DAL) Tomas Vincour (2) (Jamie Benn, Steve Ott)

5:07 - (BUF) Thomas Vanek (20) (PPG) (Jason Pominville, Christian Ehrhoff)

19:21 - (BUF) Derek Roy (11) (Drew Stafford, Tyler Myers)

Penalties

4:44 - (DAL) Radek Dvorak (holding - 2 min.)

8:33 - (BUF) Ville Leino (holding - 2 min.)

Shootout

BUF - Brad Boyes - GOAL

DAL - Loui Eriksson - MISS

BUF - Jason Pominville - MISS

DAL - Jamie Benn - GOAL

BUF - Thomas Vanek - MISS

DAL - Mike Ribeiro - MISS

BUF - Tyler Ennis - MISS

DAL - Tomas Vincour - MISS

BUF - Nathan Gerbe - GOAL

DAL - Michael Ryder - MISS

Goaltenders

Ryan Miller - (BUF) - 24 saves, 26 shots

Kari Lehtonen - (DAL) - 28 saves, 30 shots

Power Play

BUF - 1 for 2

DAL - 1 for 4

Three Stars

1. Nathan Gerbe

2. Jason Pominville

3. Alex Goligoski

Rochester Amerks defeat Texas Stars

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 11, 2012

For every player on every team, there is an NHL scouting file detailing their assets and liabilities.

Updates are made when necessary.

With his play in recent weeks, Travis Turnbull is forcing scouts to create an amendment to their previous entries.

Turnbull has always been known as a high-energy pest, a guy who can win faceoffs, will imitate a gnat, will run over anyone. He isn't afraid to fight in his own defense or in defense of a teammate.

But those hands can do a lot more than just throw a punch, as he showed again on Friday night in helping the Rochester Americans rout the Texas Stars 9-4.

Turnbull scored two goals, assisted on a third and finished a plus-4 in the game. He has a five-game point streak with four goals, 3 assists and 7 points in that span.

"I think he's worked a lot on that, he has worked hard after practice on finishing plays off," Amerks coach Ron Rolston said. "I think he's growing year to year and putting ownership on his game."

Now in his third American Hockey League season, Turnbull is much more than the center on the checking line. He gets some power-play time, largely because he is fearless in the deep slot. If there's a loose puck, he's going to barge through the defensemen to get it and not worry about the cross-check or slash he's bound to receive.

"I think every player in this (dressing) room wants to score every game," said Turnbull, whose father, Perry, played 608 NHL games with the St. Louis Blues, Montreal Canadiens and Winnipeg Jets. "I'm just trying to work hard and do the simple things."

The line of Turnbull and wingers Corey Tropp and Max Legault produced four goals and also kept the Stars off the board during their time on the ice.

"I had no problem with them playing against their top two lines," Rolston said. "They're on the puck all the time, they're winning puck battles."

The Amerks did that well against the Stars, which is why they scored a season-high nine goals.

"Considering every one of our games is 3-2, or a shootout or overtime, it's kind of a different feeling," center Mark Voakes said.

A five-goal second period turned a 2-2 tie into a blowout and 14 of the 18 skaters earned points.

"It's great for the team for confidence," Turnbull said.

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Bolts still struggling to gain ground

Erik Erlendsson

The Tampa Tribune

February 11, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. --

BUFFALO, N.Y. The Lightning are on a roll, relatively speaking.

With a 6-1-2 record in the past nine games, Tampa Bay is enjoying its best stretch of the season as it plays the Sabres tonight. But even with just one regulation loss in the past nine games, gaining any ground in the playoff chance has been a difficult task.

With 29 games left in the season, Tampa Bay finds itself tied with Buffalo for 12th place in the Eastern Conference standings, nine points behind the Southeast Division lead and 10 points out of the eighth and final playoff spot.

According to sportsclubstats.com, the chance of Tampa Bay earning a playoff spot is 4.8 percent, giving the Lightning just a sliver of hope.

"We have to keep on winning and winning, but I think what we don't want to do is focus on other teams, period," Lightning head coach Guy Boucher said. "We can't control what other teams do. ... We have to be even keel about what it is that we are doing."

During their nine-game run, the Lightning have gained only four points in the standings.

But there is a ray of hope. All the Lightning have to do look across the Gandy Bridge at their counterparts from Major League baseball to know even a sliver of a chance means there is a chance.

On Sept. 3, the Tampa Bay Rays were nine games behind the Boston Red Sox for the wildcard spot. The Rays put together a 17-8 run and overcame a 7-0 deficit in the final game of the season to clinch a playoff spot.

"We set a short-term goal, because we didn't want to get ahead of ourselves," said Rays outfielder Matt Joyce, a Tampa native who is a frequent fan at Lightning games.

"We figured if we could pick up a game a week, we'd be OK. It gave us a focus. It gave us something to shoot for, but it wasn't something where we're trying to make up nine games in nine games. I think that was pretty important. We didn't get ahead of ourselves. We didn't try to do something too crazy."

Inconsistent for most of the season, the Lightning have not been above the .500 mark since Nov. 28 and had not won more than three in a row until a five-game winning streak from Jan. 17-31.

The Rays were in a similar situation, starting the season on a six-game losing streak before putting together a run in May only to find themselves double-digits games behind by the end of July.

The team held a meeting in Seattle to talk about what it would take to climb back in the race. Manager Joe Maddon told the story of the 1995 season with the Anaheim Angels, which held an 11-½ game lead over Seattle on Aug. 16 only to be caught and lose a one-game playoff.

"Just be ourselves, be the same team we were all year, that's what Joe preached," Rays infielder Sean Rodriguez said. "That's the philosophy we all followed – stay loose, be ourselves, stay relaxed and we could make it happen."

The Rays took on the same mentality Boucher has preached – be a rock climber and stay level by not looking up or down.

"You can't control what the other team is doing," Joyce said. "If the other team wins out, you tip your cap and say they had a great year. But, for us, we wanted to play our best baseball and control what we can control. That's what we did, and it seemed to work out for us."

Tampa Bay Lightning wing Ryan Malone seeks to return from latest injury

Damian Cristodero

Tampa Times

February 11, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. — For Ryan Malone, the critical moment of Friday's practice came when he and teammate Marc-Andre Bergeron skated toward the side boards after a puck.

"Battle, 'Bugsy,' battle!" Lightning head athletic trainer Tommy Mulligan yelled.

Malone and Bergeron shook the glass with their collision. Malone skated easily away, the best sign yet the left wing had overcome the upper-body injury that has sidelined him for six games.

"It feels good," Malone said later in the locker room. "We'll see how it feels (today) and play it by ear."

Music to Malone's ears would be getting the call for tonight's game with the Sabres at the First Niagara Center. It would make coach Guy Boucher happy, too.

"All I know is I'm a coach," Boucher said, "and when is he coming back?"

Coaches have asked that in each of Malone's four seasons with Tampa Bay. In only one, 2008-09, has he played 70 games. He can match that this season if he plays in the team's final 29.

The Lightning, precariously on the edge of the playoff race, could use him.

At 6 feet 4, 219 pounds, the Pittsburgh native, with 10 goals and 27 points in 41 games, brings a physical presence the team otherwise does not have. He plays on the power play and penalty kill, gets to the front of the net and bangs bodies.

But it is Malone's willingness to, as Boucher said, "bring the physicality," that exposes him to harm.

"It's really hard to put into words the kind of player he is, the sacrifices he can make for the team," teammate J.T. Wyman said. "He's willing to do the things that need to be done, sacrifice his body; a true leader."

Malone, 32, has missed 12 games this season. Hip and groin issues and a broken hand slowed him in 2008-09. A knee injury helped limit him to 69 games in 2009-10.

He played only 54 games last season because of groin injuries, and shoulder surgery last summer fixed an injury with which he played the 2011 playoffs.

His current injury might be the most frustrating, Malone said, because it stopped an eight-game stretch in which he had three goals and seven points.

"I thought I was finally playing well and healthy again," he said. "I kind of got going and had a setback. Everything happens for a reason. That's all I can say."

Malone never says much about his injuries. To keep playing, he wouldn't tell his parents he was sick. Once, he had mononucleosis, he said, once pneumonia.

When asked if his current injury is related to any he had previously, Malone said, "I think you can say yes because all the body ties together."

Seriously, though, "it just comes with playing and getting older with the game," he said. "Especially in the playoffs, it's like being in a car crash every night. That's the kind of toll it takes on your body."

Not that Malone would change the way he plays.

"I don't think I would have a job," he said. "Just make sure your body is in good support when you throw your weight around. Other than that, it's hockey. You've got to play hard. I don't know what else to do."

Damian Cristodero can be reached at cristodero@tampabay.com.

Tampa Bay Lightning defenseman Mattias Ohlund likely won't play this season

Damian Cristodero
Tampa Bay Times
February 10, 2012

NEW YORK — Nobody is saying it, but it seems clear **Mattias Ohlund** will not play this season.

The Lightning defenseman has not played a regular-season game because of two bum knees, is not skating, and GM **Steve Yzerman** acknowledged Thursday there is no timetable for him to do so.

Ohlund contributes, though, as an ad hoc assistant coach. Beginning with the Jan. 20-21 road trip to Dallas and Phoenix, Ohlund has watched games from the press box (with a special eye on the defense), taking notes and passing along what he observes to the coaching staff and players.

"He's a really bright hockey guy and well-respected," Yzerman said. "He's got a lot to offer to us in watching the games and watching our defensemen and being able to work with them, particularly the younger guys, about the finer points of playing the position."

"He's a good leader," coach **Guy Boucher** said. "So having him around is good for him and good for the team."

Ohlund, 35, who has four years left on a seven-year, \$25.25 million contract, had arthroscopic surgery on both knees over the summer to clean out what the team called "loose bodies." He has not skated since mid November and declined to comment.

I'M OUT: Next season's Winter Classic between the Wings and Leafs includes an alumni game at Detroit's Comerica Park. Yzerman, for 20 years the Detroit captain, said he will not play. "Because I'm retired. I also have a job."

DIFFERING OPINIONS: Rangers LW **Brandon Prust** believed D **Victor Hedman** slew-footed him in the first period of Thursday's game.

Hedman said, "I didn't even know what happened," and called Prust "one of those players who plays hard every night" and one who "you need on your team." Said Prust: "I just wanted to get the puck. And all of a sudden, my feet went out from underneath me. ... It was pretty dangerous."

MENDING: LW **Ryan Malone** participated in Thursday's morning skate and took contact for the first time since he was injured and might play Saturday at Buffalo. "We want to make sure everything is good to go and can last the rest of the season," he said.

Malone, hurt Jan. 21 against Phoenix, has missed six games with an upper-body injury. He has three goals and seven points in his previous eight games. "We need this guy in the lineup," Boucher said.

BAD MEMORY: Lightning RW **Marty St. Louis** survived the morning skate. During the skate before the Dec. 8 game against the Rangers in New York, he sustained facial fractures and eye damage when hit by a puck. The injury prevented him from playing his 500th consecutive game. "When it happened, I was just scared for him," Boucher said. "I didn't really think of hockey. I was thinking of the man. He's got a life outside hockey."

ODDS AND ENDS: Members of the Giants' offensive line, four days after winning the Super Bowl, were introduced to a standing ovation. ... Rangers G **Henrik Lundqvist** had started 26 straight games against the Lightning before sitting out. He was 14-7-5 with two shutouts and a 2.09 GAA in the streak that began Nov. 10, 2005. **Martin Biron** got the start. ... Tampa Bay D **Marc-Andre Bergeron** and RW **Adam Hall** were scratched.