



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Friday, February 17, 2012

Sabres crumple when pressed, give up seven straight goals to Flyers

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 17, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- It's 10 days until the NHL trade deadline. It's worth keeping an eye or two on the Sabres. The roster they have simply isn't working.

Buffalo's latest debacle came Thursday night when it crumpled in Philadelphia. The Sabres scored twice in the opening 9:30 and went into the first intermission with a 2-0 lead. From there, they fell apart.

The Flyers scored four times in the second and added three more in the third to storm past the Sabres and win, 7-2. The collapse brought the phrase "rock bottom" to mind.

"This time of year, it's unacceptable to get a lead like that and blow it away the way we did," captain Jason Pominville said. "To give up seven unanswered goals at this time of year, that's just not going to cut it."

It was the third straight loss for Buffalo, which hosts Montreal tonight in First Niagara Center. The Sabres are 6-10-2 in their last 18 games.

"That's about as bad as you can play defensively," coach Lindy Ruff said.

The Sabres have blamed most of this season's woes on injuries. With an almost-full lineup, that excuse is long gone. They have to look at the players on the ice, not the ones who have spent time off it.

"It got away from us, and it got away from us big," defenseman Jordan Leopold said. "I've been through plenty of trade deadlines. It's something that's completely out of your control as a player. The only thing you can control is how you play."

Thursday night, they played like a team that is 27th in the 30-team league. They are only four points away from 29th.

The Sabres couldn't have asked for a better beginning. They had a two-goal lead on tallies by Pominville and Thomas Vanek. They had the Wells Fargo Center crowd of 19,725 riding goaltender Ilya Bryzgalov. They couldn't maintain it.

After taking 12 shots in the first period, Buffalo took just two in the opening 17 minutes of the second. The Flyers, meanwhile, peppered both Jhonas Enroth and Ryan Miller.

The comeback started almost immediately. The Flyers buzzed the Sabres from the drop of the puck to start the second, pinning Buffalo in its own zone. With 54 seconds gone, Maxime Talbot tipped Braydon Coburn's shot to cut the Sabres' lead to 2-1.

The Flyers tied the game with the first of two power-play goals by Wayne Simmonds. Claude Giroux's shot hit Simmonds in front, and he put the carom past Enroth with 3:32 gone.

The next Philadelphia power play came when the Sabres inexplicably took a penalty for too many men on the ice during their own man-advantage.

"That's a mental mistake," Leopold said. "Those are the plays in the game that you definitely don't need to take."

When the four-on-four ended, it was almost *deja vu*, except Simmonds avoided getting plunked. Scott Hartnell's shot reached Enroth, and Simmonds turned to deposit the rebound with 6:49 off the clock.

That was it for Enroth, who was making his first start since Jan. 18. Ruff called a timeout and laid into his team, which responded by giving up another goal with 6:12 remaining. Wide-open Erik Gustafsson accepted a pass in the slot and beat Miller on the stick side for his first NHL goal.

The Flyers took 13 of the first 15 shots in the second.

"We didn't respond at all," Enroth said.

Miller stayed in net for the third. There was no benefit as his stats tumbled. He was alone on an island and finished with 13 saves on 17 shots.

It was the most goals allowed by the Sabres since their 8-3 loss to Pittsburgh on Dec. 17.

"Mentally, we have to do a better job of not just talking about it but then putting it into action and executing what we're talking about out there," defenseman Robyn Regehr said. "For some reason, that didn't happen."

jvogl@buffnews.com

Briere surprised at Leino's struggles

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 17, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- As soon as Danny Briere learned Ville Leino was headed to Buffalo, the former Sabres captain foresaw huge things. Briere, a linemate of Leino for two seasons in Philadelphia, figured Leino's offensive skills would mesh well with the Sabres' system and talent.

Briere is shocked there's been so little production.

"I'm very, very surprised with that, especially with the amount of offensive guys they have on that team," Briere said Thursday before the Sabres' 7-2 loss to the Flyers in Wells Fargo Center. "I thought it would have clicked with a few of their players at least. I always felt that myself and Ville were kind of on the same page as far as the way we saw the game offensively when we were on the ice. I know when I was in Buffalo I had some great years as well playing with [Jason] Pominville and Jochen Hecht, so I thought for sure at least those two guys would click well with him.

"But chemistry is a funny thing," said Briere, who played just one period before leaving with an upper-body injury. "You just never know, and you never know from year to year just how things are going to come back. It's one of those things you can't take for granted."

Leino entered Thursday's game with just four goals and 15 points in 45 games. He got blanked in his first game back in Philly.

He was excited to be back.

"It's always a good crowd in here. It's got this special vibe," Leino said. "It gives you a lot of energy. It's easy every night to come to play here. It's easy to get excited and ready to play because you're always in a loud building and fans will always be hard on both teams, so you kind of have to be [ready], even if you're the home team. It's just a special crowd out here, and it's definitely a fun place to play."

Although he loved his time in Philadelphia and had success, he's not ready to regret leaving.

"So far it was the best time of my career, but I'm still five years in Buffalo," said Leino, who signed a six-year, \$27 million deal last summer. "I'm not going to look that far. It was fun here, but I'm enjoying my time in Buffalo. Obviously, we've been struggling a little bit, but we have a good team here and we could be a lot better. Hopefully, we'll get things going here."

Leino admits the big payday added pressure, but he wouldn't pin his scoring troubles on the contract.

"There's always more pressure if you've got a good contract and people are looking at you to contribute," he said. "It's always more pressure and a little harder, but I don't think that would be the reason. It's just been hard to get things going team-wise.

"I think I finally feel a lot more comfortable in the system and playing my own game. The last five, six games, I've been feeling good and been playing my own game pretty much the first time this year. I'm pretty excited every time I go on the ice now and looking forward to the games."

* * *

The Sabres conclude their 16th set of back-to-back games tonight when they host Montreal in First Niagara Center. Buffalo is 5-7-3 in the second games so far.

The first of three visits by the Canadiens will feature the return of head coach Randy Cunneyworth and assistant Larry Carriere. Cunneyworth, a former Sabres player and coach of the Rochester Americans, took over as interim bench boss of the Canadiens on Dec. 17. Carrier, a former Buffalo player and executive, joined him.

Cunneyworth, whose inability to speak French became a big issue in Quebec, is 10-13-3 in his first NHL head coaching job. Montreal is 4-2 in its last six.

"Obviously, it's been a tough situation," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said, "but I think they've turned this around and played well, pushed themselves back in the picture. They've done a good job."

jvogl@buffnews.com

Flyers net seven straight goals to bury Sabres

Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

February 16, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- Flyers forward [Wayne Simmonds](#) didn't take his first shift Thursday until 3:46 into the game.

Better late than never.

The Philadelphia forward, who was hit in the face by a puck during warm-ups, scored two of the Flyers' four second-period goals, including the game-winner, as Philadelphia routed the visiting [Buffalo Sabres](#) 7-2.

It was the second two-goal game of the season for Simmonds, who entered having just one in his first three seasons. He scored twice Feb. 2 against Nashville.

Simmonds played Thursday wearing a full cage to protect his injured face. The Flyers said Simmonds received 25 total stitches in his upper and lower lips, and his mouth was too swollen and sore for him to talk after the game.

However, his teammates were more than happy to speak on his behalf.

"He's a warrior," said goalie [Ilya Bryzgalov](#), who returned from a three-game absence due to the flu to stop 27 of 29 shots. "He takes the hits by the puck every day in practice during the power play. He's an amazing kid and an amazing player. He pays the price in front of the net and that's why he was rewarded with the goals."

"Tells you what kind of character he has," added [Brayden Schenn](#). "I sit beside him in the dressing room and he can't even talk. You can't even hear what comes out of his mouth because it's so swelled up (but) he was there for us tonight and he had an outstanding performance."

Simmonds wasn't the only Flyer to have an outstanding night. [Claude Giroux](#) set a new career-high with five assists, [Scott Hartnell](#) had a goal and three assists, and [Maxime Talbot](#) had his second two-goal game of the season as the Flyers rallied from a 2-0 first-period deficit to win for just the second time in their last seven games.

Giroux is the second player this season to have a five-assist game; Oilers rookie Ryan Nugent-Hopkins had five against the Blackhawks on Nov. 19, 2011. He's the first Flyer to have five assists in a game since Alexandre Picard on Feb. 1, 2007.

"I guess everything that I was chipping was going into the net," said Giroux, who moved within one assist of League-leader Henrik Sedin and within two points of League scoring leader Evgeni Malkin. "All the boys played great. I think we need a full team effort like we had tonight more often."

The win was even more impressive as the Flyers, already missing top forwards [Jaromir Jagr](#) due to the flu and [James van Riemsdyk](#) with a concussion, played most of the final two periods without two other forwards. [Danny Briere](#) left the game after the first period due to an upper-body injury during the first period, while [Tom Sestito](#) left the game early in the second with a lower-body injury.

"It's a character win," said Talbot. "It's a win that guys just tried to grind out. They were not all pretty goals, but guys put a lot of traffic in front of the net and guys crashed the net and it was about hard work and resiliency. It's a big win for us."

[Jason Pominville](#) and [Thomas Vanek](#) scored for the Sabres, who lost for the third straight game and saw their three-game road win streak snapped. Goalie [Jhonas Enroth](#), playing for the first time in nearly a month, was pulled in the second after allowing three goals on 18 shots. His replacement, [Ryan Miller](#), fared no better, allowing four goals on 17 shots.

"That's about as bad as you can play defensively," said Sabres coach Lindy Ruff.

The Sabres were strong in the first period, peppering Bryzgalov with 12 shots and taking an early two-goal lead. Pominville opened the scoring, tapping in a cross-crease pass by [Tyler Myers](#) for his 22nd of the season at 5:15, extending his goal-scoring streak to three games and his point-scoring streak to six.

Vanek made it 2-0 when his shot from the right circle grazed the stick of Flyers defenseman [Matt Carle](#) and got past Bryzgalov.

"In the first I think we had control," said Pominville. "We were doing some good things. We were generating chances. ... The momentum just changed sides and they took over from that point on. That's when we have to lock in and be smart and be better and we can't play the way we did."

While the Sabres were happy with how they played in the first 20 minutes, Flyers coach Peter Laviolette wasn't shy about letting his team know he didn't like the opening effort.

"It's good that he came in here and let us know," said Schenn. "He wasn't calm, that's for sure. He voiced his opinion on how he thinks not only we were playing that game but as of late. It was

good for us."

As was the response, as the Flyers scored the game's next seven goals, starting with Talbot's re-direction of a [Braydon Coburn](#) point shot just 54 seconds into the second.

"We weren't happy with the first period and Max's line when out there and had a great shift, got a goal," said Giroux. "Got all the boys going."

Ruff blamed poor execution by his defensemen for the defeat.

"I think you look at the start of the second ... you can look at four or five of the goals and it's just our defensive coverage," said Ruff. "The point shot, if [Tyler Myers](#) boxes out Talbot there's no goal. The rebound opportunities, and on the power play same thing. We're just a half a second short on them."

Simmonds camped in front of Enroth to score his two goals, both on the power play, just 3:17 apart. [Erik Gustafsson](#) capped the four-goal second by snapping a shot over Miller's blocker at 13:48 for his first NHL goal.

Talbot and Jakub Voracek scored 31 seconds apart early in the third to blow the game open, and Hartnell scored his 27th of the season at 9:25 to close the scoring.

Now 14th in the Eastern Conference and 10 points out of a playoff spot, the Sabres need to regroup for a game Friday at home against Montreal, the team right ahead of them in the standings.

"They sting," Vanek said of the losses. "All three of them hurt, that's for sure. It's not getting any easier from here, but as hard and disappointing as this one is, you just have to think of what you can do better and show up tomorrow to win again."

Contact Adam Kimelman at akimelman@nhl.com. Follow him on Twitter: [@NHLAdamK](https://twitter.com/NHLAdamK)

Ruff feeling better, Sabres happy to have him back

Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

February 16, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- About the only thing that's been in Western New York longer than [Lindy Ruff](#) is Niagara Falls.

So it was a bit of a strange sight for the [Buffalo Sabres](#) players to look toward their team's bench the last week and not see Ruff, who has been coaching the team since 1997.

"Definitely was different," right wing [Drew Stafford](#) told NHL.com. "He was still around, but to not have him on bench, even during practice a couple times, he wasn't on the ice because he couldn't go on the ice. It was a little different having that feeling."

Ruff ended up with three broken ribs in a collision with defenseman [Jordan Leopold](#) in a practice Feb. 6. Leopold lost his footing during a puck-retrieval drill and slid into Ruff, who was looking the other way. The force of the blow took Ruff's legs out from under him, and the coach, who turns 52 on Friday, hit the ice hard.

"He got it pretty bad but he could have gotten it a lot worse," Sabres captain [Jason Pominville](#) told NHL.com. Pominville is one of 15 Sabres whose only NHL coach has been Ruff. "If he hits his head (on the ice) at the speed those guys were going when they hit him, he could have had some pretty big damage to his head. ... As he was falling he tucked his head so it didn't hit the ice."

The injuries kept Ruff off the bench for three games, with assistant coaches [James Patrick](#), [Kevyn Adams](#) and [Teppo Numminen](#) running the bench in Ruff's absence.

The Sabres won two of the three games before Ruff returned Wednesday against the [New Jersey Devils](#).

"It's good to have him back on the bench, back to normal," said Stafford. "The rest of the coaching staff did a great job on the bench in his absence. They did a great job, made it comfortable for us, made it easy for us. At the same time, to have Lindy back, it's nice."

Pominville, now in his eighth season playing for Ruff, said little changed in the coach's absence.

"Maybe the first meeting," he said. "You're so used to having Lindy control the meeting. Hearing somebody else was a little different."

"The only difference was the voice, a different voice speaking in the room. The message was the same. They (Ruff and the assistant coaches) were constantly in communication with each other. The message was absolutely the same, just someone else delivering it to us."

Ruff is back to being able to deliver the message himself, but he said he's far from 100 percent.

His injuries prevent him from raising his voice to yell out instructions, he's wearing a flak jacket on the bench and he's not yet able to get on the ice for practice yet.

"I don't feel good enough yet, but it feels better," he said. He added that flying Wednesday from Buffalo to Philadelphia was uncomfortable.

"I traveled OK," said Ruff. "I don't think it was ideal, but I traveled OK."

His players are happy he's able to be with them in any shape or form.

"The (assistant coaches) did a good job, but at the same time, Lindy's our guy," said Pominville. "He's the voice that needs to be heard, he's the leader of this whole boat. ... He's the one that gets us going and finds different ways. Just his presence is nice."

Contact Adam Kimelman at akimelman@nhl.com. Follow him on Twitter: @NHLAdamK

Sabres to host Willie O'Ree Skills Weekend

Davis Harper

NHL.com

February 16, 2012

It's that time of year again: Hockey Weekend Across America, the annual celebration of the sport in arenas around the continent. But for more than 50 youngsters who will descend on western New York, it signifies something much more important -- a chance to grow as hockey players and individuals.

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) organization, in cooperation with Hasek's Heroes, will host the 2012 [Willie O'Ree](#) Skills Weekend, bringing youth hockey standouts from organizations throughout North America together to test their skills, make new friends and prove once again that hockey is for everyone.

The players -- who will be recognized for their achievements on the ice, in the classroom and in the community -- include Kaseir Archie, who at 15 has been playing hockey for three years. The Philadelphia resident told NHL.com he "signed up for fun" at the prodding of a coach at local recreation center, but has since grown to love the game.

"At first I didn't understand the game of hockey, but as I kept playing I fell in love with it," said Archie, a winger and [Claude Giroux](#) fan. "Hockey has helped me stay focused in school. It has helped me get up early -- every practice is so early in the morning that you have to learn how to get up early."

He'll be joined by friend and fellow Ed Snider Youth Hockey Foundation participant CJ Diaz, a Camden, N.J., resident who was persuaded by a cousin to try hockey two years ago. Diaz said he was "all-around" excited for the weekend festivities.

"I'm excited about being there with a friend and just meeting new people," the 16-year-old said. "The most exciting thing for me is going on a plane. It'll probably be a little scary at first, but it'll probably be pretty fun at the same time."

Once the plane lands, a full weekend of activities awaits Archie, Diaz and the others. The skaters will hone their skills through on-ice skills clinics led by Sabres alumni and demonstrations from USA Hockey and NCAA Division I representatives. They will also have a chance to show off during a skills showcase.

But John Marshall -- son of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice and hockey aficionado Thurgood Marshall -- cautioned that the weekend was, first and foremost, about helping mold participants into strong, intelligent individuals. Marshall, whose love of the game began as a boy in

Washington, D.C., will address the youngsters during the weekend.

"Certainly hockey is a great game, but No. 1, there's a focus on education," said Marshall, who is a volunteer coach with the President's Club, a Hockey is for Everyone affiliate in the nation's capital. "And a lot of what you learn in hockey obviously helps you in that – the hard work, dedication – but ultimately the focus has to be on education. That's the key to unlocking their dreams."

Buffalo mayor Byron Brown and Rep. Brian Higgins – the Congressional Hockey Caucus co-chair – will also address the participants. Also floating around will be official Hockey is for Everyone ambassador [Willie O'Ree](#), for whom the weekend is named.

O'Ree, who became the first black player to take part in an NHL game in 1958, told NHL.com that these events are invaluable for youngsters both on and off the ice.

"We're going to treat these boys and girls just like NHL hockey players," O'Ree said. "They're going to have some of the finest coaches in the world on the ice with him. And not only are they going to learn hockey skills, they're going to learn life skills as well."

Flyers roll to 7-2 win over Sabres

Dan Gelston

Associated Press

February 16, 2012

PHILADELPHIA (AP)—[Wayne Simmonds](#) looked as if he went a few rounds in a heavyweight fight.

His mouth busted open because of an errant puck in warmups, Simmonds needed 25 stitches in his upper and lower lips. He was bloodied, a couple of teeth were knocked around, and he felt numb. He even played with a full face shield for extra protection.

His numbers sure looked pretty, though.

Simmonds scored two goals after he was blasted in the face with a puck, and [Max Talbot](#) also scored twice, leading the [Philadelphia Flyers](#) to a 7-2 victory over the [Buffalo Sabres](#) on Thursday night.

Simmonds had no comment after one of his best games of the season.

He wasn't being rude—Simmonds was too swollen and stitched up to speak.

His teammates were proud of the way he gutted it out after taking the puck to the face in the pregame skate.

“He’s a warrior,” goalie [Ilya Bryzgalov](#) said.

Simmonds scored twice and [Erik Gustafsson](#) scored his first career NHL goal as part of a four-goal second period for the Flyers. That surge bailed out goalie Bryzgalov, who allowed two goals in the first.

[Jakub Voracek](#) and [Scott Hartnell](#) added goals in the third for the Flyers to turn this one into a rout. [Claude Giroux](#) had five assists and Hartnell had three.

Simmonds was hit in warmups and joined the bench minutes into the first period.

Simmonds, who already has a career high in goals, scored consecutive goals in the second for a 3-2 lead. Sabres goalie [Jhonas Enroth](#) was yanked after allowing three straight goals. [Ryan Miller](#) allowed one to Gustafsson, giving the Flyers four goals on their first 10 shots of the period.

The Flyers snapped a two-game losing streak and won for only the second time in the last seven games, a rough patch that had dropped them 10 points behind the [New York Rangers](#) in the Atlantic Division.

Usually one of the top home teams in the NHL, the Flyers improved to only 14-9-5 in Philadelphia.

“We’re a hard team to play against when we’re moving north and skating hard,” coach Peter Laviolette said.

The Flyers won without [Jaromir Jagr](#) (flu), [James van Riemsdyk](#) (concussion), [Zac Rinaldo](#) (suspension), and they lost center [Danny Briere](#) (upper-body injury) and winger [Tom Sestito](#) (lower-body injury) during the game. There was no immediate word if any of those injured players would return Saturday against Pittsburgh. Rinaldo served the first of a two-game suspension for launching to hit [Detroit Red Wings](#) defenseman [Jonathan Ericsson](#).

They almost lost Simmonds after the freak pregame hit. Simmonds, who has 20 goals, gave the Flyers the scoring punch they needed to hold off Buffalo.

Bryzgalov, who has been very mediocre in his first season in Philly, allowed fast goals in the first to [Jason Pominville](#) and [Thomas Vanek](#) for the 2-0 lead. Pominville scored off a nice cross-ice pass from [Tyler Myers](#) and Vanek’s slapper whizzed past Bryzgalov.

It was a rare dose of instant offense for a Sabres team that had scored only 132 goals, 26th in the NHL.

Bryzgalov was booed after letting in Vanek’s goal and the Flyers were jeered off the ice into the first intermission.

That was the end of the fun for Buffalo.

“This time of year, it’s unacceptable to get a lead like that and blow it,” Pominville said. “In the first, we had control, we generated chances and didn’t give up much. Then the momentum changed sides. That’s when you have to lock in and play better.”

Talbot made it 2-1 when he redirected [Braydon Coburn’s](#) shot only 54 seconds into the period. Simmonds scored off a rebound for a power-play goal to tie the game, then put them ahead with his 20th.

“He does what he does best,” Giroux said. “In front of the net, no one can move him.”

Bryzgalov toughened up and made 27 saves.

Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff’s decision to give Miller a rare rest backfired. Not only did he need to use his star goalie, but Miller got roughed up.

Voracek’s sweet drop pass to Gustafsson for the goal made it 4-2 and those boos had turned into a roaring ovation from another packed house.

Talbot scored again in the third, and the public address announcer was still talking about the goal when Voracek scored.

Hartnell scored his team-high 27th goal and the rout was in full blast. Ruff shook his head in disgust and rubbed his eyes. He was back behind the bench for the second since breaking three ribs during a collision with a player in practice.

He must have wished he sat this one out.

“That’s about as bad as you can play defensively,” he said.

Notes: The Flyers acquired Swedish defenseman [Nicklas Grossman](#) from Dallas in exchange for a 2012 second-round pick and a 2013 third-round pick. Grossman, 6-foot-4 and 230 pounds, has five assists in 52 games this season. ... Flyers GM Paul Holmgren said there is no timetable for van Riemsdyk’s return. He has been out a month with a concussion. “I think now it just comes down to how James is feeling and when he feels ready,” Holmgren said.

NO LOVE IN PHILLY

Kevin Snow

Sabres.com

February 16, 2012

PHILADELPHIA – The second period has been Buffalo’s nemesis all season long, and it reared its ugly head again on Thursday.

The Philadelphia Flyers scored seven unanswered goals over the final two periods as they trampled the Buffalo Sabres 7-2 at Wells Fargo Center. Wayne Simmonds and Max Talbot each scored twice for the Flyers, and Claude Giroux picked up a career-high five assists in the win. The loss was Buffalo’s third in a row, and brought an abrupt halt to their three-game road winning streak.

Buffalo now has a record of 24-27-6, and they are in 14th spot in the tightly-contested Eastern Conference – 10 points out of the eighth and final playoff position currently occupied by Toronto.

After taking a promising 2-0 lead in the first period on goals by [Jason Pominville](#) and [Thomas Vanek](#), the Sabres quickly fell behind 4-2 in the second after the Flyers scored four times in the opening 13:48. Buffalo has now been outscored 61-42 in the second period this season, with the minus-19 goal differential being their worst of any period. Philadelphia added three more in the third to cap off their night.

“At this time of year it’s unacceptable to get a lead like that and blow it the way we did,” said Pominville. “To give up seven unanswered goals at this time of year, it’s just not going to cut it.” His coach didn’t disagree.

“That’s about as bad as you can play defensively,” said a frustrated Lindy Ruff, using that statement to bring an end to his 90-second post-game press conference.

Ruff was encouraged by the team’s start, but blamed poor defensive coverages on their eventual collapse. Even when Buffalo fell behind in the second, Ruff said they became their own worst enemy when trying to catch up.

“I thought we’d play well for a couple of minutes and get a couple of great opportunities,” he explained. “We start the third period, get a great opportunity and it goes off the post. Then we go down the other way, make a crap play and let them score.”

[Jhonas Enroth](#) started for Buffalo, but was replaced by [Ryan Miller](#) after giving up Philadelphia’s first three goals on seven shots in the second period. Even though Enroth understood that he couldn’t be faulted for any of the goals he allowed, and was likely pulled to try and spark the team, he was at a loss for words when asked to describe what happened in that fateful second period.

“I don’t know. They came out really hard and we didn’t respond at all.”

Buffalo finished the night scoreless on seven power plays, while the Flyers converted on two of their three man advantage situations. The Sabres have now given up four power play goals in their past two games, and have scored just twice in 27 power plays over their last 10 games.

Tonight's game opened up Buffalo's 16th of a league-high 21 sets of back-to-back games. They are now 9-7-0 in the first game, and head into Friday with a record of 5-7-3 in the second game.

The Sabres continue their stretch of three games in four nights when they return home to face Montreal on Friday at 7:30 p.m. That's followed by their only afternoon home game of the season on Sunday against Pittsburgh at 12:30 p.m.

FIRST PERIOD

1-0 BUF: Myers wires a pass from the corner to Pominville all alone in front. (5:15)- ... 2-0 BUF: Ennis fed Vanek just inside the blueline, and he blasted a shot past Bryzgalov.(9:30)... Shots: BUF-12, PHIL-11

SECOND PERIOD

2-1: Talbot gets the Flyers on the board when he tips Coburn's point shot in front. (:54)... 2-2: With Myers off for tripping, Simmonds bangs home a rebound in front. (3:32, PP)... 3-2: In almost identical fashion to his first goal, Simmonds spins in front and puts back the rebound (6:49, PP)... 4-2 PHIL: Voracek drops to Gustafsson and he one times the shot past Miller for his first NHL goal (13:48)... Shots: PHIL-12, BUF-6

THIRD PERIOD

5-2: Talbot is left all alone at the side of the net and he blasts home Wellwood's pass from the corner. (3:58)... 6-2: Voracek grabs the loose puck in front and dekes Miller for his 10th of the year (4:29)... 7-2: Hartnell streaks in from the left side to tap home Read's saucer pass (9:25)... Shots: PHIL-12, BUF-11

SABRES NOTES: With his goal in the first period, [Thomas Vanek](#) moved past Miroslav Satan for sole possession of seventh spot on the franchise goal scoring list with 235... [Jason Pominville](#) extended his point streak to six games with a goal in the first period... [Cody McCormick](#) (upper body) and [Marc-Andre Gragnani](#) (healthy) were Buffalo's scratches... McCormick has now missed three games, and has not practiced since being injured against Dallas last Friday.

Three star selections

1st: CLAUDE GIROUX
2nd: MAXIME TALBOT
3rd: WAYNE SIMMONDS

Winning Goaltender

Ilya Bryzgalov

Losing Goaltender

Jhonas Enroth

AROUND THE NHL

Brian Duff of SabresTV looks at what's happening around the league

Brian Duff

Sabres.com

February 16, 2012

For those who follow such things, 2011 was all about the royal wedding.

For fans of the NHL, and specifically goaltenders, 2012 is about to be remembered as the year The King had his coronation.

It was about five years ago when my then two year old daughter and I were leafing through the sports pages. We were reading headlines and looking at pictures, as I tried to put an early emphasis on hockey as she learned letters and words. With the Rangers in town, we came across an action photo of Henrik Lundqvist. No, she didn't melt at his mere presence. (Give it a couple more years when perhaps Bieber-mania will have subsided).

Rather, she – having already fallen under the Disney spell to love all Princesses – was excited to learn that his nickname was “The King.” For the next couple years, at a moments notice, I could mention Henrik Lundqvist and she was right there to belt out “The King”!

He has that lasting impression upon people.

But even through his unlikely emergence as the Rangers number one goalie in 2005-06 (based on being selected 205th in 2000), his good to great play could never lift the Rangers beyond the second round, or earn “Hank” any individual postseason honors through his first six seasons.

Six seasons I might add, that each produced 30 wins or more.

That will change in 2012.

Since the lockout, the Vezina Trophy winners have been Miikka Kiprusoff, Martin Brodeur (twice), Tim Thomas (twice) and [Ryan Miller](#).

Kiprusoff almost won Calgary the Cup in 2004, and came out of the work stoppage with 42 wins. Brodeur trumped that in back-to-back seasons with 48 and 45 win campaigns. Thomas shocked everyone in 2009 with a GAA of 2.10 and save % of .933. Miller followed with career highs in wins (41) and save % (.929). Thomas then reclaimed his spot with arguably the greatest season ever in modern-day play, posting a 2.00 GAA, and a record-setting save % of .938

But the run of three straight American-born Vezina winners ends June 20 in Las Vegas.

The question at the moment is: by how much will Lundqvist be obliterating some of these recent numbers?

His GAA is currently a paltry 1.77, and his save percentage is .941! And, while you probably recognize me as someone who uses numbers extensively as part of a thorough evaluation process, for me it's not even close to being just about the numbers.

Two weeks ago at First Niagara Center, [Brad Boyes](#) had Lundqvist beat with his go-to shootout move, one that I haven't seen stopped. Yet Lundqvist found a way, en route to a 1-0 triumph over the nearly-perfect Miller that night.

A few days ago, Philly's Claude Giroux tried the same Boyes move during regular game play and was also thwarted. But because it wasn't on a penalty shot or in a shootout situation, and because there was no defense present to remove him from the area, Giroux kept jamming at the outstretched left arm of Lundqvist and eventually put it home.

Tuesday night, amidst a mad scramble and while lying down with his back to the slot area, he stopped a Zdeno Chara shot right off the nameplate on his jersey. Can you say Dominik Hasek?

When I read the numbers and see the plays, and then think back to a sit down interview that I did with Lundqvist in New York in the fall of 2009, I have no doubt in my mind that he is now at the place that he always expected himself to be: best in his class.

On that September day, Lundqvist talked about how much he can't stand losing, and how it drives him to be the absolute best. The words may ring hollow on a piece of paper, or on a computer screen, but to hear him say it – and the way he said it – it was impossible not to believe just how deep rooted his disdain for losing was.

Combine the numbers, the passion, the God-given looks and charisma with which he is blessed, how can one not think of him as something close to hockey royalty?

Last year it was about Will and Kate. This year, through his will on skates, "The King" will be crowned Vezina Trophy winner on June 20 in Las Vegas. What we don't know is whether he'll have been doused in champagne cologne about a week earlier.

Sabres Embarrassed in Philadelphia 7-2

Dan Cave

WGR 550

February 16, 2012

Wayne Simmonds and Maxime Talbot each scored twice and Claude Giroux racked up 5 points as the Flyers steamrolled the Sabres on Thursday 7-2.

The Sabres stormed out to a 2-0 lead in the first half of the opening period thanks to goals from their top two scorers. Jason Pominville found the net first when he snapped a one-timer past Ilya Bryzgalov. Derek Roy got the scoring play started when he fed Tyler Myers down low. The defenseman sent a pass from one faceoff circle to the other where Pominville was able to convert. Just a few minutes later, Thomas Vanek sent a laser toward the net that snuck through Bryzgalov's stick and right pad to put Buffalo ahead by two.

It was a lead, however, that would unravel in the 2nd period. Maxime Talbot cut the Flyers deficit in half just 54 seconds in with his 15th goal of the season by redirecting a Braydon Coburn shot past Jhonas Enroth. About two and a half minutes later, with Myers in the penalty box, Wayne Simmonds scored the first of his two power play goals to make the score 2-2. Camped in front of the Buffalo crease, Simmonds stuffed a Claude Giroux rebound into the net to the the game.

Simmonds' second goal looked very similar to his first and once again came with the Flyers enjoying the man advantage. Once again parked in front of Enroth, he slammed home a Scott Hartnell rebound to put Philadelphia up 3-2, chasing Enroth in the process. The Flyers made it a two-goal lead when Erik Gustafsson notched his first career NHL goal later in the period. Gustafsson ripped a shot into the upper corner of the net, beating Ryan Miller after taking a drop pass from Jakub Voracek.

The onslaught continued in the 3rd period when Talbot picked up his 2nd goal of the evening and Voracek followed that up with his 10th to make it 6-2 Philadelphia. Scott Hartnell finished things off for the final Philadelphia goal.

One injury note during this game -- Danny Briere left early for the Flyers with an upper-body injury. The Sabres are back in action on Friday night against the Montreal Canadiens at the First Niagara Center.

1st period

Goals

5:15 - (BUF) Jason Pominville (22) (Tyler Myers, Derek Roy)

9:30 - (BUF) Thomas Vanek (21) (Tyler Ennis, Nathan Gerbe)

Penalties

10:35 - (PHI) Maxime Talbot (2 min., tripping)

13:30 - (PHI) Danny Briere (2 min., slashing)

17:50 - (BUF) Thomas Vanek (2 min., interference)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 12, PHI - 11

2nd period

Goals

0:54 - (PHI) Maxime Talbot (15) (Braydon Coburn)

3:32 - (PHI) Wayne Simmonds (19) (PPG) (Claude Giroux, Scott Hartnell)
6:49 - (PHI) Wayne Simmonds (20) (PPG) (Scott Hartnell, Claude Giroux)
13:48 - (PHI) Erik Gustafsson (1) (Jakub Voracek, Claude Giroux)

Penalties

2:54 - (PHI) Tom Sestito (5 min. major., fighting)
2:54 - (BUF) Zack Kassian (5 min. major, fighting)
3:22 - (BUF) Tyler Myers (2 min., tripping)
4:08 - (PHI) Scott Hartnell (2 min., high-sticking)
5:27 - (BUF) Bench penalty (2 min., too many men on the ice)
10:48 - (PHI) Braydon Coburn (2 min., hooking)

Shots On Goal

BUF - 5, PHI - 12

3rd period

Goals

3:58 - (PHI) Maxime Talbot (16) (Eric Wellwood, Sean Couturier)
4:29 - (PHI) Jakub Voracek (10) (Scott Hartnell, Claude Giroux)
9:25 - (PHI) Scott Hartnell (27) (Matt Read, Claude Giroux)

Penalties

13:26 - (PHI) Andreas Lilja (2 min., hooking)
17:06 - (PHI) Wayne Simmonds (2 min., cross checking)
18:21 - (BUF) Nathan Gerbe (2 min., roughing)
18:21 - (BUF) Maxime Talbot (2 min., roughing)

Shots On Goal

BUF - 11, PHI - 12

Power Play

Buffalo - 0 of 6
Philadelphia - 2 of 3

Goaltending

Buffalo - Jhonas Enroth - 15 saves on 18 shots
Buffalo - Ryan Miller - 13 saves on 17 shots
New Jersey - Ilya Bryzgalov 27 saves on 29 shots

Three Stars

1) (PHI) Claude Giroux
2) (PHI) Maxime Talbot
3) (PHI) Wayne Simmonds

No regrets for struggling Leino

Randy Miller

Cherry Hill Courier-Post

February 17, 2012

PHILADELPHIA — His paycheck is fat, his game is flat.

That's life these days for former Flyers forward Ville Leino, who made the piece-of-cake decision last summer to leave a good thing in Philadelphia to get rich playing for the Buffalo Sabres.

Leino made \$800,000 scoring career-highs 19 goals and 53 points for the Flyers last season.

This season, the 28-year-old Fin has 4 goals and 15 points in 46 games while making \$6 million in the first season of a six-year, \$27-million deal for the Sabres, a sub-.500 team that is 17 points behind the Flyers in the Eastern Conference.

"We had a real good thing going here," said Flyers All-Star left wing Scott Hartnell, who spent the tail end of 2009-10 and all of last season playing on a productive line that had Danny Briere at center and Leino on the right side.

"You always hear that saying, 'The grass isn't always greener on the other side,' and though the money was great, I'm not sure how much less he'd take to come back with us."

Leino smiled before going scoreless again Thursday night in the Flyers' 7-2 win over his Sabres. He has no regrets ... so far.

"I had a lot of fun here (in Philadelphia and) it was so far the best part of my career, but I still have five years in Buffalo (after 2011-12), so I'm not going to look back," said Leino, who has one goal over his last 19 games. "We've been struggling a little bit, but we have a good team here and could be a lot better."

Back in Philadelphia for the first time since leaving, Leino listed excuse after excuse for his struggles:

- His team has been hit hard with injuries.
- He began the season playing center after flourishing with the Flyers as a winger.
- He's had to adapt to a new system.
- There's pressure having to live up to a big contract.
- Finding chemistry with new linemates is taking time.

“There’s always more pressure if you get a good contract. People are looking for you to contribute and it’s always a little harder,” Leino said. “But I don’t think that would be the reason (for the struggles). It’s just been hard to get things going teamwise.”

Leino learned how important chemistry can be when he went from being an unheralded Red Wings rookie to a major contributor on the Flyers following a February 2010 trade.

Leino began his career scoring 11 goals and 20 points over two seasons with the Red Wings, then had 23 goals and 68 points in 94 games with the Flyers, most of them with Briere and Hartnell at his side.

“We were just playing with instincts and having fun out there,” Leino said. “Sometimes when you have to think and see where the guys are, you’re playing too slow. It was just a great fit, great chemistry.”

The Flyers wanted Leino back last summer when unrestricted free agency was approaching, but management learned his asking price would be sky-high and no hometown discounts would be given.

They were right. On July 1, the first day of free agency, Leino landed a contract that shocked the hockey world.

The Flyers quickly countered by signing future Hall of Famer Jaromir Jagr to replace him.

Jagr has performed very well when healthy, but Leino has been a major bust thus far.

“I’m very, very surprised, especially with the amount of offensive guys (the Sabres) have on that team,” Briere said. “I thought it would have clicked with a few of their players at least.

Chemistry is a funny thing. You just never know. It was fun for the last two years playing with him, but at some point you have to move on. I still wish him the best.”

Leino has struggled in Buffalo right from the outset, first after beginning the season centering the Sabres’ top line, which included star wingers Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek. He’s moved around a lot since, and Thursday was switched again, this time as the top-line left wing with Derek Roy at center and Pominville at right wing.

“I think it’s a more comfortable spot for me to be a winger,” Leino said. “It’s been an adjustment (playing in Buffalo), but I’ve been feeling more and more comfortable.

“I think I finally feel more comfortable in the system and my own game the last five, six games. I’m pretty excited every time I go on the ice now.”

Flyers Notebook: Leino might be quietly pining for the old days

Rob Parent

Delco Times

February 17, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- Ville Leino is far removed from his short but successful stop in Philadelphia, one he cashed in for a very nice financial future. But right now, Leino is concerned with his hockey fortunes, which have taken a drastic downward turn since he departed.

Leino, a big part of the Flyers' run to the Stanley Cup finals in 2010 after pairing with Danny Briere and Scott Hartnell early in the playoffs, signed a six-year, \$27 million free agent contract with the Sabres last summer.

He commanded that money by virtue of the offensive growth he'd exhibited in his two Philadelphia seasons, though the Flyers didn't seem to be the slightest bit interested in bringing him back at that kind of price. Right now, that looks like a smart decision -- coming into play at Wells Fargo Center Thursday night, Leino had all of four goals and 11 assists, with a minus-6 rating in 45 games.

"There's always more pressure if you've got a good contract," Leino said. "People are looking for you to contribute. It's a little harder. But I don't think that's the reason. It's just been harder to get things going team-wise, and I think I finally feel more comfortable with the system and in my own game. The last five games it's been going pretty good."

Leino had three assists over those last five games -- pointless in the last three. He hadn't scored a goal since Jan. 31, though he was looking forward to being re-teamed with center Derek Roy and winger Jason Pominville against the Flyers.

Pominville and Thomas Vanek are the only two Sabres with more than 20 goals. Both of them scored first-period goals for the Sabres Thursday night.

So while things were looking up a bit for the Sabres -- they had lost their last two games but won five of six, the other being an overtime loss, before then -- they know they have a long way to go to start entertaining thoughts of the playoffs.

"It's been a little bit of chemistry, and everybody's had a hard time this year," Leino said. "We've had a lot of injuries and we haven't been winning as many games as we've wanted. Everybody's been struggling and it shows on my side, too."

That likely has made it difficult for Leino not to dwell on his Flyers days, which he called, "so far the best time of my career."

"But it's still fun in Buffalo," Leino said. "We've been struggling a little bit, but we have a good team here and it can get better."

NOTES: Jaromir Jagr did not play as he spent the day at home trying to get over his flu symptoms. ... Jakub Voracek returned from his upper body injury, but defenseman Andrej Meszaros was out, with no real details as to why. ... Young fighter Tom Sestito, all 6-foot-5 of him, talked Thursday about his older brother, who he says is about 5-10 or so. "He looks just my mother and I look just like my father," Sestito said. "It's kind of weird." Sestito said his dad is about 6-4, but didn't take to big-time hockey: "He played football," he added. ... Wayne Simmonds played with a full facial shield after getting hit in the face with a puck during warmups.

Sabres host tailgate party for kids

Buffalo Business First

February 17, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) will host a pregame party for kids in the tent outside [First Niagara Center](#) prior to Sunday's matinee against the [Pittsburgh Penguins](#) .

The tent, which is located in the plaza outside of First Niagara Center, will open at 10:30 a.m. and the party will continue until face off at 12:30 p.m. The game will be broadcast regionally on NBC, part of the Hockey Weekend Across America promotion that begins Friday, Feb. 17.

The Sabres event is aimed at kids 12 years of age and under. They will be admitted free and can enjoy face painting, hockey puck shooting practice, bubble hockey, Sabres trivia with prizes and the team's mascot, Sabretooth, will also make an appearance. Food and beverages will be available for purchase inside the tent.

Tickets for fans that are 12 years and older are available for \$10 and can be purchased at www.sabres.com, or by calling 1-888-GO-SABRES. The ticket includes admission to the tent and a free beverage inside.

'Linsanity' May Help Get Buffalo Sabres Games Back on Time Warner Cable

Athan Kampos

WGRZ

February 16, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. - As strange as it sounds, "Linsanity" may be the key to getting Buffalo Sabres hockey games back on Time Warner Cable.

[The New York Post reports](#) that negotiations between the two sides resumed earlier this week. It marks the first meeting between Time Warner Cable and MSG since the channel was pulled off Time Warner Cable on January 1, 2012.

According to Time Warner, "there's been no meaningful movement or progress," said Joli Plucknette-Farmen, Communications Manager.

2 On Your Side spoke with MSG General Manager Dan Ronayne, he said "the knicks ratings with Jeremy Lin are soaring. In fact last night's (Wednesday) rating was our highest rated game since Carmello Anthony's debuted."

The two sides failed to reach a new contract. Time Warner Cable claims MSG is asking for a 53% increase. MSG denies that, "it's just flat out incorrect, said Ronayne.

The resumption of negotiations comes as the New York Knicks are on a winning streak thanks to the remarkable [performance](#) from Jeremy Lin. In New York City, fans are calling the rookie performance - "Linsanity."

The dispute between MSG and Time Warner Cable has resulted in Buffalo Sabres games being taken off cable in the Western New York area. In New York City, fans with Time Warner Cable are no longer able to see Knicks [basketball](#) as well as New York Rangers, New York Islanders and New Jersey Devils hockey games.

Thanks to Lin's play and the Knicks winning streak, MSG's ratings are on the rise and there is more pressure on Time Warner Cable to carry the network.

2 On Your Side has calls into both Time Warner Cable and MSG Network to see if any progress has been made.

To date, Sabres fans with Time Warner Cable have missed 14 games because of the contract dispute with MSG.

When asked if more talks were scheduled, Ronayne said "I don't have a comment on that."

WGRZ/ New York Post

Luke Adam looks to find his game with the Rochester Amerks

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 17, 2012

For much of the year, Luke Adam was living the dream.

While the organizational depth chart was never written with a Sharpie, the majority of scenarios had Adam spending much of the season with the Rochester Americans.

Except then came injuries, as well as his own terrific training-camp performance, and all of a sudden Adam found himself at center between the Sabres' best offensive players, left winger Thomas Vanek and right winger Jason Pominville.

The line clicked early and often. Adam produced 4 goals, 7 assists and 11 points in the first 11 games. Through 27 games, he had scored 9-10-19.

And then it slowly began to slip away. He wasn't as productive with the puck and wasn't as strong on the man or in the defensive zone without the puck.

When injured veterans like Jochen Hecht and Ville Leino got healthy, Adam was bumped down the depth chart to a fourth-line role. Then he wasn't even in the lineup.

And on Saturday, he found himself on the New York State Thruway, making the drive to Rochester to play for the Amerks.

It wasn't a good day. Try as he might to cope with the startling jolt of reality, Adam didn't adjust quickly enough. His debut as an Amerk, his first game in the American Hockey League since May, didn't go well.

No points, two minor penalties that led to power-play goals for the San Antonio Rampage, and an ordinary-at-best overall performance.

He knows it, too. That's why the second-year forward says he'll be better this weekend, when the Amerks play three times: Lake Erie at 7:35 Friday night in downtown Rochester, against the Monsters Saturday night in Cleveland, then back home to play the Hamilton Bulldogs at 5 p.m. on Sunday.

"I had a couple days off to mentally refocus and put myself in the right place mentally," he said. "I'm looking forward to the challenge."

The challenge got the best of him on Saturday. Even though he was a healthy scratch last Friday night against Dallas and also on Jan. 31 at Montreal, he wasn't expecting news of a demotion.

“You play 52 NHL games and then one morning you’re in the (coach’s) office talking with Lindy (Ruff, the head coach) and Darcy (Regier, the general manager),” Adam said. “All of a sudden you’re on a different team in a different league, in a different city.

“You can imagine how tough it is to refocus.”

Even so, he knows he needed to be better.

“It’s not about me, the most important thing is the team and we didn’t win,” said Adam, last year’s AHL Rookie of the Year with the Portland Pirates. “And that’s what’s disappointing.”

He spent his time in practice Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday getting accustomed to new teammates — and in some cases reacquainted with the guys he played with a year ago in Portland — and also working on his own development.

When asked what he needed to work on most, he said, “Everything. There isn’t a hockey player out there that’s perfect.

“It’s disappointing to get sent down but at the same time it’s a learning curve. I’m 21. I have a lot of hockey left.”

KEVINO@DemocratandChronicle.com

Montreal Canadiens' Carey Price still believes playoffs are possible

Dave Stubbs

The Gazette

February 17, 2012

MONTREAL - If there's a circumferentially challenged singer of the female persuasion in the building, the Canadiens have yet to see her.

The season is not yet over, the Habs maintain, no matter the steep climb to a playoff berth that continues Friday night in Buffalo vs. the Sabres (7:30 p.m., RDS, TSN 990 Radio).

"We feel like we're a long ways from (elimination)," goaltender Carey Price said Wednesday following a gentle practice in Brossard.

"Right up until it does happen, we're going to fight right to the end here. That's just the mentality you must have at this point of the season."

Across the dressing room came agreement from defenceman Yannick Weber, cleared for contact that never came in practice and hoping to make his return against the Sabres after four games on the sidelines with a lower-body injury.

"We know it's tight, but a couple wins and all of a sudden you're closer (to eighth place)," Weber said. "We'll never stop believing until it's really over. We're still confident. We still know it's possible."

"It's been a strange year – injuries, trades, firings (of coaches). It's been a little bit different, but the core of players is still the same. We have a good group of guys that's put up with distractions here and there."

While Weber wasn't certain he'd be in the lineup against the Sabres – "Come to Buffalo and we'll see!" he told a couple of curious reporters – he did say that his patience is a virtue in letting his injury fully heal.

A handful of Canadiens were conspicuous by their absence from practice, but all were aboard the afternoon charter to Buffalo. Taking therapy days were defencemen Josh Gorges, Hal Gill, P.K. Subban and Raphael Diaz, and forwards Mathieu Darche and Erik Cole.

"They're paid to rest as well," head coach Randy Cunneyworth joked, noting the rugged physical and mental demands of Wednesday's 4-3 shootout loss to the Boston Bruins.

"I suggested that (Tomas Plekanec) take the morning off, but some guys like to shake it out a little bit. It was nothing too intense."

Practice was so laid back, in fact, that assistant coach Randy Ladouceur didn't yell at anyone.

“You saw the excitement of the game (against Boston),” Cunneyworth said. “It was a pretty good one as far as the players were concerned.

“That’s the type of game we’re trying to play, where we’re not giving up for anything. We have to battle hard each and every shift. The one shift you take off might be the difference in the game.”

Cunneyworth did take a few moments to have a tête-à-tête with forwards Lars Eller and Louis Leblanc, Eller having played a by-far season low 5:48 against the Bruins.

“Sometimes that’s the way the game goes,” Cunneyworth said. “(Eller) has done a great job on the penalty-kill for us, and with Leblanc and (Ryan) White, I have other PK options.

“It’s a matter of using some other bodies at times and keeping them in the game. That’s my focus with guys I choose for the power-play and PK – involve as many guys as you can and keep them ready.”

Rehabbing defenceman Andrei Markov skated with some intensity with head athletic therapist Graham Rynbend before the practice, turning hard corners around strategically placed cones, but there is nothing new on a timeline for his return.

Note – Impending UFA Dominic Moore and a seventh-round draft pick were plucked Thursday evening from Tampa Bay by San Jose for a 2012 second-round pick. That seems to take Canadiens’ Travis Moen off the market in San Jose, one of the destinations strongly rumoured for him.

dstubbs@montrealgazette.com

Montreal Canadiens' Max Pacioretty exceeding all expectations

Dave Stubbs

The Gazette

February 16, 2012

MONTREAL - Five months ago, Max Pacioretty stood on a riser at Laval sur le Lac Golf Club, overlooking the 18th green. From there, he could see both his past and his future.

“I was doing pretty well just before I got hurt,” he was telling reporters, having scored 11 goals and six assists in the 20 games before he was critically injured last March 8 in a Bell Centre game against the Boston Bruins.

“The most important thing for me now is to build off last year and I know I’m capable of doing that.”

Surely not everyone to whom Pacioretty spoke at the Canadiens annual golf tournament that morning shared his resolute optimism.

There can be no one doubting him today.

In his 55 games played this season, the 23-year-old is tied for his team’s point-scoring lead with a career-high 24 goals (the club high) and 20 assists. In 58 games, linemate Erik Cole also has 44 points on 22 goals and as many assists.

Pacioretty has been the most inspiring story in the Canadiens’ stumble-footed season, returning from a severe concussion and broken vertebra suffered when he was ridden into a stanchion support between the Bell Centre players’ benches by Boston captain Zdeno Chara.

He is a lock to be the Habs nominee for the NHL’s Bill Masterton Trophy, awarded annually to the player voted by hockey media to have best displayed the qualities of perseverance, sportsmanship and dedication to the game.

On Thursday, following practice in Brossard, Pacioretty couldn’t resist gently needling a gaggle of reporters that pressed him for details on his remarkable season.

“My first couple years, I think you guys had a lot of stories about how I can’t score goals,” he said through a grin. “So I think that gave me the motivation to work hard and figure out how to do it.

“As I’ve learned, I see scoring as more of a mindset than a skill. That’s what I’ve kind of put in my head and worked on. (Wednesday) I missed a wide open net but made up for it with another goal. It’s the little things about being able to shake off missed opportunities and go to the right area of the ice.”

For Pacioretty, and for Cole, that area has been directly in the opposing goaltender's face. The veteran Cole has been a template for his wide-eyed linemate, playing on the other flank of centreman David Desharnais.

Pacioretty considers his fellow winger and elite power forward "a great mentor for the whole team, but especially for guys like Davey and me who have the opportunity to play with him every night. He's been huge in my development."

Pacioretty has scored 12 times and added four assists in his last 15 games. In the 16 before that, following a three-game suspension he was assessed for a check of Pittsburgh's Kris Letang, he had two goals and seven assists.

"I got away from my game during my slump," Pacioretty said. "Most of my goals are from going to the net. I've learned a lot from Colesy and watching other big forwards who score around the net. I have to make sure that's my game for all 82 games."

It's a delicate thing. Pacioretty was penalized for goaltender interference Wednesday as he flew mostly over Bruins goaltender Tim Thomas, referees still unable to clearly define the infraction.

"I have to go to the net to be successful," he said. "I can't get away from that and the rest is up to the referees."

Pacioretty's injury is so far behind him, it's difficult some nights to remember his being stretchered off Bell Centre ice 11 months ago. On Wednesday, Canadiens fans certainly recalled the event, cheering happily when Chara was knocked down and bloodied by a puck to the chin.

Pacioretty was on the bench when Chara was struck at the end of the first period, and he beat a hasty retreat to the Habs dressing room lest live television seek his immediate reaction.

"I didn't want to comment on it (Wednesday night), but one reporter seemed to be looking for something after the game, asking me twice. I got pretty fired up," he said. "I had rushed off the bench just to make sure nothing could be made into a controversy. Nothing good can come of that."

"I was upset to hear the cheers, but out of the corner of my eye I saw (Chara) getting up. Our fans aren't right to do that, but to defend them, for as many as were cheering, there probably would have been three times that many cheering had a Canadian been hit like that in Boston."

"I was just happy to see Chara come back out to play."

Pacioretty was happier still that he and his wife, Katia, could provide game tickets to brothers Julien and Nicolas Molina.

Julien was a patient at Montreal General Hospital last March, critically injured in an auto accident. He was not long out of a coma, watching the Canadiens game on TV with his father, the night Pacioretty was gravely injured.

The recovering Habs forward paid a quiet visit to the 19-year-old's room during his own hospital stay and the two have since forged a bond.

It's difficult to say it's a coincidence and not get goosebumps, Pacioretty said, that his first career NHL hat trick came last Thursday on Long Island, one year to the day that Molina nearly died.

"They told Julien he'd be in the hospital for two years," Pacioretty said. "And here he is now, walking around, doing great."

Molina's only previous Bell Centre game had been two seasons ago, a Canadiens-Pittsburgh playoff match screened on the arena scoreboard.

"He walked into the dressing room after (Wednesday's) game and I don't know how many times he said: 'Oh my God...'" Pacioretty said, clearly moved by the experience. "But it was rewarding for me, too. Katia and I hardly talked on the way home. Seeing Julien enjoy himself was the best feeling in the world.

"A couple teammates heard his story and said: 'I can't believe we complain about the food we get for lunch when people have to deal with stuff like that.' When you're as close as I was to having everything taken away from you, you look at life completely differently. I think I grew up there in the 48 hours I was in a hospital bed."

There's no telling how the rest of Pacioretty's season will play out. But this much is certain: the quality of his season, and many more to come, won't be judged by goals and assists.

"In the past, I've never really taken days one at a time," he said. "But when you have an experience like mine, you realize that every day is so important and every day could be your last.

"To be honest, last fall I didn't look this far into the future. Every day is a new day for me. If I ever start thinking about wanting to have this many goals or this many points, that's when I get away from my game. And from acting as a human being, as well."

dstubbs@montrealgazette.com

twitter.com/habsinsideout1

Scott Gomez gets into shouting match with Montreal Canadiens assistant coach

The Canadian Press
February 15, 2012

BROSSARD, QUE.—A shouting match erupted at a Montreal Canadiens practice today.

An argument between forward Scott Gomez and assistant coach Randy Ladouceur was so long and intense that some media observers thought it might turn into a fistfight.

The assistant coach was apparently upset at what he considered a lack of intensity during a drill, so he let Gomez have it.

The underperforming centre, who is among the league's highest-paid players but has only one goal this year, responded.

The spat continued for several minutes, first in front of other players before the men left to exchange words in a corner.

Head coach Randy Cunneyworth never intervened in the dispute; he said later, with a smile, that his assistant had the situation under control.

Gomez is also downplaying the incident; he says he simply messed up an exercise and the coach let him have it. He says things like that happen every day.

With the Habs struggling this year, this isn't the first tense moment at practice.

But veteran team observers say it's been many years since they've seen a spat like this, and compare it to a memorable 1996 argument between then-coach Mario Tremblay and enforcer Donald Brashear. That one got so bad that Brashear was sent to the dressing room, and was traded a few days later to the Vancouver Canucks.

Cunneyworth refused to say during a news conference after practice if Gomez might not play tomorrow night against the Boston Bruins, and he would also not confirm the presence of Andrei Kostitsyn in the lineup.