



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Sunday, February 19, 2012

Ruff plots to blunt Pens' assault on goalies

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 19, 2012

The Pittsburgh Penguins know how to embarrass opponents, especially goaltenders. They tortured two Saturday, going through Sergei Bobrovsky and Ilya Bryzgalov during a 6-4 victory in Philadelphia.

Of course, no one needs to tell the Sabres about Pittsburgh's firepower.

The Pens lit up the Buffalo goaltending duo of Ryan Miller and Jhonas Enroth during the teams' last meeting, an 8-3 setback for the Sabres on Dec. 17. Owner Terry Pegula mocked his team's goalies after watching Miller start, get pulled, return for an ineffective Enroth, then get pulled again in Pittsburgh.

Obviously, the Sabres are hoping for a better effort when the Pens visit First Niagara Center at 12:30 this afternoon.

"A couple goals went in that we didn't like, but obviously as a team then we just sort of became unraveled," Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff said Saturday. "It's just staying with it and knowing that we're going to have our hands full."

The Sabres' toughest chore figures to be slowing Evgeni Malkin. The Pittsburgh superstar has 17 goals and 27 points in his last 19 games, including an assist Saturday. He leads the league with 70 points, including 32 goals, in 51 games.

Malkin had three goals and five points during the big win against Buffalo. Ruff hopes the home-ice advantage of determining line matchups helps today.

"That will definitely help," Ruff said. "He's a tough man to handle. We're going to have to go with a little dual coverage, make sure that each guy has a little support with it, but he's really been on a run. I think getting that last change will give me the opportunity to set up what we need."

"I don't think you can totally take away all his chances, but we can definitely limit them."

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The Sabres' penalty-kill unit limps into the game on a three-outing slide. It went just 7 for 12 against New Jersey, Philadelphia and Montreal. That dismal 58.3 percent success rate was only one second from dropping to 50 percent. The Canadiens, who went 1 for 2, connected just as Thomas Vanek's penalty expired.

"As a group, we've got to do a better job on the PK," Sabres right wing Patrick Kaleta said. "It's something we've got to take pride in. I hate getting scored on. I don't like that at all.

"We've got to learn and see what's going on here because we've got to pick it up."

Pittsburgh went 0 for 3 against the Flyers but are 6 for 19 (31.6 percent) in their last seven games.

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The Sabres' Tailgate Tent Party in the plaza of First Niagara Center will be kid-friendly this afternoon. The Sabres will provide face painting, hockey puck shooting practice, bubble hockey and trivia with prizes. The team's mascot, Sabretooth, will also make an appearance.

The tent opens at 10:30 a.m., and children 12-under will get in free. Tickets for adults are \$10, plus \$4.50 in convenience fees and surcharges, at Sabres.com and include one beverage.

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The Sabres have announced their final "Road Crew Tour Stop" will take place March 26 in Washington. Ruff, his coaching staff and Sabres broadcasters Rick Jeanneret, Harry Neale and Kevin Sylvester will meet with fans at Grand Central, located at 2447 18th St. NW.

The event will include food and drink specials, trivia, a Sabres Road Crew credential and lanyard. Tickets are available as a \$10 donation to the Sabres' foundation on the team's website or by calling Lauren Yurko at 855-4468.

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Vanek falls with Sabres

Slump, bad penalties reflect drop to 15th

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 19, 2012

He's not alone, but Thomas Vanek certainly didn't see this coming.

"How can you?" he said Saturday after the Sabres concluded practice as the last-place team in the Eastern Conference. "You look at this team, and it's a good team. We played like it at the start of the year and slowly fell apart."

The slide toward oblivion has sped up for Buffalo, which hosts Pittsburgh in a rare 12:30 matinee today. The Sabres are winless in their last four games and have fallen to 15th in the East.

Vanek, meanwhile, has fallen off his scorching offensive pace. The Sabres' perennial goal-scoring leader has just two goals and four points in his last 15 games.

"A lot of it is obviously confidence," he said in First Niagara Center. "I'm just trying to focus on playing the game hard, get pucks deep and keep grinding it out. I'm sure [confidence is down], especially when you're not winning. Like I said, you try and just work hard, get to the net, get rebounds and tips, and try to find your game again."

Since missing four games with an upper-body injury in mid-January, Vanek has been trying to find his game on nearly every line. He started at right wing alongside center Tyler Ennis and left wing Matt Ellis during Friday's shootout loss to Montreal. He was the right winger for Ennis and Nathan Gerbe on Thursday in Philadelphia.

Most of Vanek's success this season came at left wing with captain Jason Pominville. The duo was back together Saturday, flanking center Derek Roy.

"It's been a little while," Pominville said, "but hopefully it will come back and click and go in the right direction because there'd be no better time than now to get it going."

Coach Lindy Ruff put the trio together during the closing stages of the loss to the Canadiens.

"It comes down to a commitment for each guy," Ruff said. "I don't care who you play together. They all know what position they are, and it's a commitment to playing in their own end."

The reunion came two periods after Vanek got benched. The left winger took a cross-checking penalty midway through the first. He didn't play again until the second.

"Penalties are something we don't want to take," Vanek said. "Obviously, it was a bad one. I feel like the guy went down pretty easily, but that doesn't matter. They called it. It's on me."

"You can't get frustrated about stuff like that," he said of the benching. "Obviously, you're not happy about that, but you can't show it. You take it. You're upbeat, you cheer your teammates on and you hope to get another chance. When you do get it, play hard."

Vanek leads the Sabres with 23 minor penalties. It's been a topic of discussion, Ruff said, which is why repercussions have become necessary. Gerbe sat for half of the second period Friday after a hooking call.

"We've ramped up a little more structure for that off ice for undisciplined penalties, so we're going to deal with that internally," Ruff said. "There's going to be ramifications for those type of situations."

Ruff is hesitant to say Vanek learned the lesson.

"I don't know," the coach said. "You can only tell over time. I've had meetings. The message wasn't received the previous meetings. I thought after the St. Louis game [Jan. 21] it's been cleaned up for a period of time, but to take that penalty [Friday] night again, it's a selfish penalty and a total lack of discipline."

Vanek, despite the slump, remains second on the Sabres with 21 goals, one behind Pominville. Of course, that's like being the First Mate on the Titanic. The third-place guy is Roy, who has just 11.

With only 24 games to play, the Sabres will need Vanek's offense to return if they want to avoid the indignity of finishing last.

"Guys still believe," Vanek said. "They really do. We know it's going to be a tough task, but again, you've got to take it game by game and chip away."

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Everyone deserves blame for Sabres' poor season

Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

February 19, 2012

The Sabres have had so many problems this season that it's difficult to determine where to begin and where to end. Obviously, they're broken and need to be fixed. There is no magic trade that can turn them around before the Feb. 27 deadline.

When comparing expectations to results, this season will likely go down as the worst in franchise history.

Buffalo's injuries cannot be ignored, but they're not a valid excuse, either. Injuries might have prevented them from contending in the division or made a difference between fourth and eighth in the conference. Fifteen skaters have appeared in 44 games or more this year. To blame injuries for having the NHL's 28th-best record is ludicrous.

OK, so is it the players? Broken down, you can find no fewer than seven who were having the worst seasons of their careers in one form or another going into the weekend. It's not a good sign when two forwards, Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek, accounted for nearly 31 percent of their scoring through 57 games.

Derek Roy was on pace for 16 goals and 40 points, both career lows since the lockout. Drew Stafford was headed toward 13 goals, a career-low for a full season. Paul Gaustad was on pace for 21 points. Ryan Miller was staring down the barrel of his first losing record, his worst goals-against average (2.82) and second-worst save percentage (.906).

Ville Leino was on pace for six goals and 22 points, one fewer goal and one fewer point than he had in 19 playoff games in 2009-10. Brad Boyes, a three-time 25-goal scorer, was on pace for four goals and 19 points. He had never averaged worse than 0.512 points per game in his career before averaging .295 ppg this year.

Do we really need to reach deep down the list and find Cody McCormick with no goals in 38 games or Matt Ellis with six points in 47 games or Mike Weber's team-worst minus-14 in 31 games played this season? Tyler Myers missed 20 games with injuries, but he's been less productive in the games he played than in his first two years.

It's not an anomaly, you know, like the weather. It's a pattern.

Is that the players or coaching?

Several players mentioned how it was odd not hearing Lindy Ruff, when he watched from the press box, screaming during games. It made me wonder if they've grown tired of listening to their coach's bark. At times this season, the Sabres looked stale and uninterested in playing for him.

Ruff can't score goals from behind the bench but he's partly responsible for the listless efforts and poor defense that have become common this year. He's also the one who needs to get players in positions to succeed.

Luke Adam had five goals and 13 points in his first 16 games while playing mostly on the top line. The rookie's production, and likely his confidence, took a dive when he was demoted for an extended period. He skated into the weekend without a point in 20 games, or since Dec. 17, and was still fifth among forwards in scoring with 20 points. He's back in Rochester.

Boyes' success earlier in his career came while playing wing and bombing one-timers from the left circle. He has played center out of necessity for much of his time here. Leino was signed with the idea he could play center. The experiment failed, and Ruff has been unable to find him consistent linemates without breaking up Vanek and Pominville.

So is that the coaching or the poor personnel?

GM Darcy Regier made no changes even when it was obvious his team was headed in the wrong direction. Nearly six weeks ago, Sabres President Ted Black suggested they had reached a crossroads and insisted Regier was doing his job. If his job was doing nothing to address flaws and watch his team slide down the standings, he succeeded.

Regier has the trade deadline ahead with little hope of reaching the postseason. He was given an open checkbook for the first time in his career. The Sabres are spending more and getting worse results.

Owner Terry Pegula and his upper-management team have insisted Regier isn't getting fired, which at best sounds like accepting mediocrity for a team that supposedly was serious about winning it all.

The answer to the questions, of course, is all of the above.

Let's work backward for the solution, one you've read numerous times. Change the general manager, have the incoming GM decide on the coach, clear cap space, address his roster and make sure he has enough depth to overcome injuries.

Kane for Miller?

Jeremy Roenick caused quite a stir, particularly in Chicago and Buffalo, last week when he suggested the Blackhawks needed to consider trading away Patrick Kane in an effort to upgrade their goaltending.

"I love Patrick Kane," Roenick said on ESPN radio in Chicago. "He is one of the most talented and one of the best players in the NHL. But if you really want a top-end goaltender you're going to have to give up somebody."

With the 'Hawks looking for better goaltending and the Sabres in need of more scoring, some wondered if a deal for Ryan Miller might be in the works. It might have made sense, but it wouldn't be an ideal move for either side.

Kane is one of the most popular athletes in Chicago and will forever have a place in its sports history after scoring the Stanley Cup winner in 2009-10. Kane has 13 goals and 48 points in 59 games, putting him on pace for the worst year of his career, but trading him anywhere would be a tough sell.

It also wouldn't be fair to him or the Sabres if he wound up in Buffalo, a small town that can be suffocating for all players. Just ask Miller. It would be considerably more difficult for the South Buffalo native, whose every move would be analyzed. The best scenario for him would be staying in Chicago.

Nash ponders future

The Columbus Dispatch listed six teams believed to be suitable for winger Rick Nash to lift his no-trade clause with the Blue Jackets. It included the Rangers, Boston, San Jose, Los Angeles, Vancouver and Toronto.

New York appeared to have the inside track, but Columbus is looking for a starting goaltender. It brings deals more into play with Boston (Tuukka Rask) and Vancouver (Cory Schneider). Los Angeles has Jonathan Bernier, but the Kings are reluctant to take Nash's long-term contract and \$7.8 million cap hit.

Toronto has young players it can move, starting with defenseman Luke Schenn, but it didn't appear likely it would include a goaltender that can meet Columbus' needs. The Leafs could look into the asking price for Jeff Carter, however, with the idea they could fix him with coach Ron Wilson and GM Brian Burke.

Another option is, well, nothing.

GM Scott Howson has a reputation for being extremely careful and could wait until after the season to make a deal, assuming he's still in charge. Teams will have a better idea where they stand with personnel and the salary cap this summer. Nash would still need to approve any deal.

Zidlicky wants out

Minnesota's decision to scratch healthy defenseman Marek Zidlicky against Winnipeg last week fueled speculation that a trade was imminent, but it was actually coach Mike Yeo making the call. Yeo didn't want the veteran playing without knowing whether he was committed to helping them win.

"I'm making an assumption that his head would not be in the right place to play," Yeo told reporters. "I don't know what's going on, and that's speaking honestly. I don't know what's going to happen."

Zidlicky has made it clear that he wants to be moved and would waive his no-trade clause if it meant playing for the Devils. GM Cliff Fletcher hinted that he might keep him until the summer, when he would have more options. Yeo last week wasn't sure when, or if, Zidlicky would get back in the lineup.

"He would have to prove, just like every one of our players, that he's all in to what we want to do," Yeo said. "If you do that, and if you go out and show that night in and night out, then absolutely. Anybody who's here, we will treat them as part of the team."

Quotable

Senators center Jason Spezza on his team going 5-0-1 all-time when their fathers travel with them for road trips: "I guess it's the fear of the fathers."

Around the boards

* Bolts GM Steve Yzerman is looking to stock up with prospects and draft choices as he continues rebuilding efforts. Defenseman Pavel Kubina will remain off the ice, even for practice, while Stevie Y tries to work out a deal for him. Kubina was asked for a list of five teams to which he would waive his limited no-trade clause.

* Eric Staal Watch: The Hurricanes center had seven goals and 20 points and was minus-22 in his first 38 games this season. In his next 19 games, with the Hurricanes out of contention, he had seven goals and 24 points and was plus-4. He's an example of how much easier the game can become when playing under less pressure.

* The Senators watched three drafts fall into place last week in a 6-2 win over Florida when 2007 first-round pick Jim O'Brien scored his first NHL goal from 2006 first-round pick Nick Foligno and 2005 first-round pick Brian Lee.

* Boston, Chicago, Nashville, Detroit and the Rangers inquired about Ryan Smyth before he and the Oilers agreed they weren't interested in trading him away as a rental. Smyth, who has a no-trade clause in his contract, is looking for an extension in the \$6.5 million range over two years.

* Don't be shocked if Nikolai Khabibulin lands back in Chicago before the deadline. The Blackhawks need a goaltender they can trust in the playoffs. The Bulin Wall spent four years with them before signing with Edmonton in 2009-10, the year Chicago won the Stanley Cup with then-rookie Antti Niemi.

Surging Penguins visit struggling Sabres

Davis Harper

NHL.com

February 18, 2012

PENGUINS (33-20-5) at SABRES (24-27-7)

TV: NBC (HD)

LAST 10 : Pittsburgh 6-3-1; Buffalo 5-3-2

Season Series: This is the third of four meetings this season, and the first in Buffalo's First Niagara Center. The Sabres scored three goals in each of the first two games, but met very different fates. They won 3-2 on Oct. 15, but the Penguins hammered them in the most recent encounter, an 8-3 thrashing on Dec. 17.

Big Story: After starting the weekend with a 6-4 defeat of rival Philadelphia, Pittsburgh will look to replace the Flyers in the fourth position in the Eastern Conference with a win in Buffalo. The Sabres are trying to escape the conference's basement.

Team Scope:

Penguins: With wins in three of their last four - including a 6-4 victory against the Flyers in a hostile Wells Fargo Center on Saturday - the Penguins have firmed up their place among the Eastern Conference elite with 71 points. But with the New York Rangers looking untouchable atop the Atlantic Division, eight points clear of Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, fourth place may prove invaluable. With a win Sunday, Pittsburgh will become the sole occupant.

On Saturday, the prolific top line of [Evgeni Malkin](#), [James Neal](#) and [Chris Kunitz](#) was held relatively quiet, combining for just a goal. But the rest of the team picked up the slack -- especially [Matt Cooke](#), who had a pair of goals, including the first 3-on-5 goal in the NHL this season.

"Our penalty-killing was huge," said Penguins coach Dan Bylsma, whose team scored a pair of shorthanded goals during the same penalty. "To come out of special teams a plus-1 with a couple shorthanded goals was a big part."

Sabres: Not so long ago, Buffalo was threatening to make a second-half playoff run. A 5-0-1 record following the All-Star break - including a 6-0 gem against mighty Boston - launched them into the playoff conversation. Just as quickly, four straight losses have all but guaranteed an early summer. A 4-3 shootout loss at home on Friday to fellow strugglers Montreal may have been the final straw. [Tyler Ennis'](#) fifth of the season with under nine minutes to go knotted the game at 3-3, but Buffalo couldn't get the extra point in the shootout.

"We went on a pretty good (5-0-1) run. We gave three back and now it's another overtime loss," he said. "This was a game we should've put away, but didn't. Those are points that cost you dearly."

Who's Hot: While Pittsburgh shouldn't be over-reliant on its top trio, Kunitz, Malkin and Neal will be key in determining the Pens' fate. Neal scored his 30th of the season on Saturday, Kunitz has eight points (two goals, six assists) in the past four games and Malkin had a hat trick and two assists in the last meeting with Buffalo.

Injury Report: Pittsburgh's [Tyler Kennedy](#) will miss 4-6 weeks with a high ankle sprain, while [Sidney Crosby](#) is still out indefinitely with a concussion and soft-tissue damage in his neck. ... [Cody McCormick](#) is questionable for Buffalo with an upper-body injury. [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion), TJ Brennan (flu-like symptoms) and Corey Tropp (upper body) are all on injured reserve.

Stat Pack: Sunday will pit one of the NHL's full-strength attacks against one its most anemic goaltending duos, but the deciding factor could be special teams. Buffalo has conceded five power-play goals on 12 chances over the past three games, and Pittsburgh feeds off man-advantage situations. Their 20 percent conversion rate is good for sixth in the League. And, as witnessed Saturday, their penalty kill is even better - Pittsburgh scored two shorthanded goals while killing five of six Philadelphia penalties.

Puck Drop: Pittsburgh's [Pascal Dupuis](#) reflected on Saturday's "huge" victory.

"That's huge," Dupuis said. "They were ahead of us in the standings, and you want to catch teams, especially down the stretch like that. It was a big win for us."

Pittsburgh (33-20-5) at Buffalo (24-27-7)

Matt Beardmore

STATS

February 18, 2012

The [Pittsburgh Penguins](#) have been working their way up the Eastern Conference standings since their worst losing streak in six years.

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) have fallen fast following their best run of the season.

Pittsburgh looks to take sole possession of second place in the Atlantic Division on Sunday when the host Sabres try to avoid a season high-tying fifth consecutive loss.

Since dropping six in a row from Dec. 29-Jan. 11 - the team's longest skid since a seven-game slide in [Sidney Crosby's](#) 2005-06 rookie season - the Penguins (33-20-5) have gone 12-3-1. They moved into a second-place divisional tie with Philadelphia on Saturday with a 6-4 road win over the Flyers.

Pittsburgh killed five of six penalties and scored twice while shorthanded, including [Matt Cooke's](#) score in the second period with the team down two men.

"Our penalty-killing was huge," said coach Dan Bylsma, whose club has surrendered one power-play goal in 23 chances in February. "To come out of special teams a plus-1 with a couple shorthanded goals was a big part."

The play of [Marc-Andre Fleury](#) has also played a major part in the Penguins' month long run. He has won 11 of his last 14 starts after his 27-save effort against the Flyers helped him reach the 30-win plateau for the fourth consecutive season.

Fleury has turned aside 41 of 47 shots as the Penguins and Sabres (24-27-7) have split two games - both in Pittsburgh - this season. He made 16 saves in an 8-3 victory on Dec. 17 after Buffalo ended a six-game skid in this series with a 3-2 win on Oct. 15.

The Sabres will try to avoid their first four-game home losing streak since an 0-3-1 slide from Feb. 13-20, 2011.

Since a 5-0-1 surge from Jan. 24-Feb. 10 moved the club within eight points of the eighth spot in the East, Buffalo has gone winless to drop into a tie with Carolina with a conference-worst 55 points.

"Obviously, I'm very disappointed, embarrassed," coach Lindy Ruff said following Friday's 4-3 shootout loss to Montreal.

Ruff was disappointed with penalties taken by [Thomas Vanek](#) and [Nathan Gerbe](#) on Friday - sitting both for extended stretches - but Vanek will likely move up to the top line with [Derek Roy](#) and [Jason Pominville](#) on Sunday. Vanek has two goals and four points in his last 15 games.

“We’ve just got to do a better job of converting,” Ruff said following Saturday’s practice.

That could help goaltender [Ryan Miller](#), who has a 2.35 goal-support average. The former Vezina Trophy winner is 0-4-1 with a 4.67 goals-against average in his last seven starts against the Penguins after yielding a season high-tying five goals on Dec. 17.

[Jhonas Enroth](#) stopped 29 Pittsburgh shots on Oct. 15.

Penguins center [Evgeni Malkin](#) recorded his seventh career hat trick and matched a personal best with five points the last time these teams met. It was the first time he faced Buffalo since a hit from Sabres defenseman [Tyler Myers](#) on Feb. 4, 2011, resulted in a torn knee ligament and ended Malkin’s season.

Malkin scored his NHL-leading 70th point on Saturday by setting up [James Neal’s](#) 30th goal of the season.

[Jordan Staal](#) scored and set up a goal in that contest, giving him six goals and eight points in nine games. However, he was also fined \$2,500 by the league on Saturday afternoon for boarding Flyers defenseman [Braydon Coburn](#).

Pittsburgh is 7-2-0 in its last nine games in western New York.

SATURDAY UPDATE

Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 18, 2012

With Friday's shootout loss already in the rearview mirror, the Buffalo Sabres practiced at First Niagara Center today in preparation for Sunday afternoon's 12:30 p.m. (NBC) tilt with the Pittsburgh Penguins. The only player not on the ice was [Cody McCormick](#), who remains sidelined with an upper body injury suffered February 10 against Dallas. Lindy Ruff once again watched from the bench, with his assistants handling all the on-ice instructions.

Today's lines

Vanek-Roy-Pominville

Leino-Ennis-Stafford

Gerbe-Gaustad-Kaleta

Ellis-Boyes-Kassian

Special teams units

PP #1: Vanek-Boyes-Pominville, Leopold-Roy

PP #2: Stafford-Ennis-Kassian, Myers-Ehrhoff

PK #1: Gaustad-Leino or Kaleta, Regehr-Weber

PK #2: Ellis-Gerbe, Gragnani-Sekera

Sabres power play woes continue

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 19, 2012

BUFFALO — Take the NHL's No. 9 power play in 2010-11, and add Christian Ehrhoff, an elite point presence who possesses a lethal shot, and Brad Boyes, a forward proficient at pulling the trigger down low.

What do the Sabres have?

One of the league's worst power plays.

Entering this afternoon's tilt against the Pittsburgh Penguins at the First Niagara Center, the Sabres are four of the last 50 in 20 games since Jan. 3. That's eight percent. They scored four power-play goals in one game on Nov. 8.

For the season, the Sabres rank 20th on the man advantage at 16.2 percent (31 of 192). They operated at 19.4 percent last season.

Of course, Ehrhoff and Boyes, who have three combined power-play goals, shouldn't shoulder more than a fraction of the blame. It's been a team failure.

But it was reasonable to expect a team usually strong on the power play – the Sabres finished No. 7 three years ago – would be good again, especially with two proven assets joining the mix.

The Sabres should rank among the league leaders, right?

“Absolutely we should,” Sabres winger Drew Stafford said Saturday inside the FNC. “We have the personnel. We have the talent. We have had success this year. But it just hasn't been consistent enough.”

What's gone wrong? Inevitably, that query leads to technical answers.

“It's a hard question to answer,” Stafford said. “There's numerous things you could look at – execution with the puck, net presence ... the breakout.”

The Sabres started the season well, operating at a 20.3 percent clip as late as Thanksgiving.

“We were moving the puck around a little quicker, getting pucks through,” Stafford said. “We had great net presence. Our breakouts were solid. Basically, that's the key to it. I think the most

important thing is not letting the penalty killers outwork you. It starts there.”

Recently, the power play’s been killing the Sabres. They’re zero of the last 12, one of the 27 and two of 32.

In Thursday’s awful 7-2 loss in Philadelphia, a game in which the power play went zero of six, Stafford took a too-many-men penalty during a man advantage. The Flyers scored the go-ahead goal just over a minute later.

In Friday’s 4-3 shootout loss to Montreal, the Sabres botched their third and final chance to close overtime.

“We were going pretty good (earlier),” said Sabres coach Lindy Ruff, who’s been tinkering with his units. “The stretch in there when we had some key personnel (missing), that hurt us. But now the personnel’s back. ... When you’re struggling on it, the tendency is to get a little quick. We haven’t converted. I think we got to keep the number of chances up.”

Some scant opportunities haven’t helped, either. The Sabres had zero power plays Jan. 10 in Toronto. They’ve enjoyed two or fewer chances 12 times during their awful run.

Eventually, the law of averages might help the Sabres.

“It comes in streaks, I guess,” Sabres defenseman Jordan Leopold said. “We need to catch a hot streak and be a difference. The only way you’re going to get those opportunities are by shooting the puck and outworking your opponent.”

Shooting the puck is Ehrhoff’s forte. But teams have mostly nullified his wicked one-timer. While the German pumped six shots on net Friday, he had zero in consecutive games last week.

Ehrhoff, who’s been moved to the second unit, has one goal and eight points on the power play this season. He averaged six tallies and 25 points in the previous three years.

“He gets keyed on,” Ruff said. “A lot of times the penalty killing will rotate and leave an open guy. They’re not rotating away from him, which puts the puck in our other defenseman or that high forward on the roll.”

Meanwhile, Boyes, who joined the Sabres almost a year ago, tallied 16 goals and 35 points on the power play in 2008-09. He has two goals and eight points this year.

Boyes simply can’t finish.

“Brad has probably had more opportunities to finish and good looks that anybody,” Ruff said.

...

For now on, Ruff said, there are “going to be ramifications” for taking careless penalties.

On Friday, Ruff benched Nathan Gerbe and Thomas Vanek after taking minors. Both infractions bit the Sabres.

“That little part helps,” Ruff said. “I think we’ve ramped up a little bit more structure for that off ice, undisciplined penalties. We’re going to deal with that internally.”

Vanek has 46 penalty minutes, a high number for a skill player known more for finesse. Ruff’s had meetings with Vanek about the penalties in the past.

Did the message get through?

“I don’t know,” Ruff said. “You can only tell over time. ... The message wasn’t received the previous meetings. I thought after the St. Louis game (Jan. 21) it’s been cleaned up a period of time. But to take that penalty (Friday) again, it’s a selfish penalty, and it’s a total lack of discipline.”

Vanek said: “Obviously, it was a bad one. I feel like the guy went down pretty easily. But it doesn’t matter. They called it. It’s on me.”

The Austrian practiced with Jason Pominville again Saturday, his linemate most of the season. The two have skated apart recently.

Sabres Vanek dealing with his benching

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 18, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Against Montreal Thomas Vanek took an offensive zone cross checking penalty at 9:25 of the first period. The Canadiens scored one second after the penalty expired.

Nathan Gerbe turned around a deked one of the Habs at center taking a penalty at 17:47. One second before his penalty ended, Montreal scored.

Both players were bench for half periods. For Vanek this has become a regular habit and Lindy Ruff said, "This is something that has gone on for three straight games. Ruff said, "I'm surprised yes and the inopportune times to take those penalties, especially leading the last couple of games was something we had taken a lot of pride in and I think the frustration with players has led to lack of discipline."

It also sounds like possible fines could be happening too, "We've ramped up a little more of that structure off ice on undisciplined penalties so we're going to deal with that internally. There are going to be ramifications for those types of situations."

Vanek said he just made the best of the situation, "I took it, I don't think it was the greatest call, but the call was made and they scored a goal on it so you just take the benching, try to stay focused, stay upbeat, keep your teammates encouraged and whenever you get out there again, play hard." The winger added, "You can't get frustrated about stuff like that. Obviously you're not happy about it, but you can't show that."

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame show on Sunday at 11:30am when he'll be joined by Lindy Ruff, James Patrick and Thomas Vanek.

Sabres Patrick liked running the game

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 18, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- James Patrick got to run the bench and act as head coach for three games as Lindy Ruff recovered from broken ribs.

Patrick led the team to a 6-0 win over Boston, a 3-2 shootout win over Dallas and a 2-1 loss to Tampa Bay.

Ruff would set up a game plan and meet with Patrick and the other coaches and talk in between periods, but during play, it was Patrick's bench. The assistant coach said, "I loved the opportunity, I enjoyed it while it lasted. Things happen real quick when you're running the four lines and trying to match up and if you lose a player or if someone's not going as good, you've got to change things."

James went from being a player to Lindy Ruff's staff. He's been preparing for this for awhile, "I've thought about it for years, from the time I was a player to being an assistant you put yourself in those scenarios as to what you would do, but when you're actually doing it, things really do happen quick."

Patrick thought he was fully prepared by game time, "I had constant dialog with Lindy throughout the day and Kevyn, Teppo and I went over every possible scenario of what could happen during a game so we felt we were prepared."

Patrick has his routine on game day which he follows every game. When he was running the team, things changed a lot, "I usually will do one meeting on a game day, some postgame video meetings. Probably the biggest difference for me was on a normal game day as a head coach you probably address the team probably eight times and you have to have your thoughts together about what you want to say and what point you want to get across so with that I enjoyed the experience more than anything because I tried to put a lot of thought into what would be good examples for the players about other positive experiences by athletes who have overcome or bounced back, but at the same time it was mentally tiring. By the end of that Boston game I was so drained, but that was something that I never had the opportunity. As an assistant, you don't get that responsibility."

Once he got behind the bench Patrick said there was a big thing that he always kept going with. He said, "To be the Head Coach you have to have energy. You have to pass that on to the players, you have to try to keep them going. There are adjustments that you have to be yelling out, but my feeling is if you're totally dead or quiet back there and they're not feeling anything off you, maybe a real veteran team might be able to handle that, but I think most teams I've been around need to feel some direction and some energy coming from the head guy."

Patrick did say down the road it's something he'd like to do, but he may have to start his head coaching career in the AHL or Canadian Junior.

Hear more from James Patrick during Sunday's pregame show with Brian Koziol starting at 11:30am.

Lake Erie Monsters break the Rochester Americans' win streak

Staff Report

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 19, 2012

The Rochester Amerks fell behind by three goals after two periods and lost to Lake Erie for the first time this season, 3-1, on Saturday at Quicken Loans Arena.

The Monsters received a pair of goals from Stefan Elliot, who added an assist on Evan Brophey's goal.

Phil Varone tallied the lone goal with assists going to Travis Turnbull and goaltender David Leggio for Rochester, which had won the previous three meetings between the teams this year, including a 6-2 victory on Friday. Leggio also finished the night with 31 saves.

The Monsters got on the board first at the 12:18 mark of the first, as Elliot scored his fourth of the season. The 21-year-old fired a shot from center point that found its way through a screen and sneaked past Leggio.

Elliot buried his second goal less than two minutes later on a wrister from the high-slot to the top corner of the net.

The Monsters opened up a 3-0 advantage with a power-play tally at 8:56 of the second period, as Brophey jammed home a loose puck for his 14th of the season.

Varone converted his eighth of the season on a shorthanded breakaway at 11:25 of the third to cut the Rochester deficit to 3-1.

The Amerks return home for their third game in as many days to host Hamilton today at 5:05 p.m.

Rare 3-on-5 goal stirs pot in Penguins' 6-4 victory

Dave Molinari

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

February 19, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- Matt Cooke has played 863 regular-season games in the NHL.

Some have been pretty good.

A lot have been forgettable.

A few have been regrettable.

But it is unlikely that any of the others yielded a performance quite the equal of the one he turned in Saturday afternoon in the Penguins' 6-4 victory against Philadelphia at Wells Fargo Center.

Cooke scored two goals -- one of them the Penguins' first three-on-five goal in more than 24 years -- and assisted on another to complement the four shots and two hits he contributed.

If it was not the finest game of his career, it surely was a medalist.

"I've had a few games that have been good," Cooke said. "I've had a couple of two-goal games -- this is the second one this year -- but this is pretty sweet. Especially to have it happen against Philly."

The victory was the Penguins' first in three games against Philadelphia this season, and it hoisted them into a tie with the Flyers for fourth in the Eastern Conference.

The Flyers, meanwhile, again failed to win consecutive games, something they have not managed since Jan. 10-12.

Cooke's three-on-five goal -- the Penguins' first since Mario Lemieux scored one in Los Angeles Feb. 13, 1998 -- was the most remarkable moment in a second period that might go down as the wildest 20 minutes of the Penguins season.

And maybe of a lot of their seasons.

Referees Stephane Auger and Paul Devorski handed out 12 minutes in penalties in the middle period, including 10 to the Penguins, but the only special-teams goals scored then were a couple the Penguins got while short-handed.

"That second period was something different," Penguins forward Dustin Jeffrey said. "All the penalties, power plays and short-handed goals, you really don't see that kind of stuff too often."

That there would be power plays should not have surprised anyone because, like most Penguins-Flyers games, this one had a fairly nasty edge.

It started with a punishing Deryk Engelland hit on Flyers center Claude Giroux early in the first period and included a nasty-looking slash by Flyers winger James van Riemsdyk to the left wrist of winger James Neal.

There also was a hit from behind by center Jordan Staal on Braydon Coburn of the Flyers midway through the second period that earned Staal a \$2,500 fine from the league office.

Staal received a minor penalty for that; the Flyers presumably were hoping for more, and, if Staal had received a major penalty and game-misconduct, he would not have been around to score the short-handed goal that tied the score, 2-2, at 15:14.

That goal was largely overlooked, however, because of what followed.

The Flyers ended up with a two-man advantage for 87 seconds, but the Penguins needed only 86 to get the goal that put them in front, albeit briefly.

Cooke, who had opened the scoring at 3:17 of the first period, fought through a Kimmo Timonen hook to beat goalie Ilya Bryzgalov from close range at 16:57 to put the Penguins on top and to scrawl his name alongside Lemieux's in the franchise record book.

"Matt makes an unbelievable play," said winger Pascal Dupuis, who viewed the play from the penalty box, where he was serving a tripping minor that preceded a hooking call against Brooks Orpik.

Cooke and Staal put the Flyers into their own record book, as well: This was just the second time Philadelphia has allowed two short-handed goals in under two minutes; the first was in a 12-0 loss to Chicago Jan. 30, 1969.

The short-handed goals gave the Penguins a 3-2 edge, but the Flyers pulled even when Engelland lost his balance, and the puck, in front of his net, allowing Eric Wellwood to pull Philadelphia even before the second intermission.

By then, the Flyers had replaced Bryzgalov, who allowed three goals on 13 shots, with Sergei Bobrovksy.

An understandable move, to be sure, but not an effective one.

Jeffrey knocked in a rebound just 37 seconds into the third period to put the Penguins in front to stay, and Dupuis and Neal (his 30th) added insurance goals. Wayne Simmonds of Philadelphia scored in the waning seconds of regulation, but the outcome had been settled long before that.

Thanks, in large part, to what just might have been Matt Cooke's finest day in the NHL.

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On the Penguins: 1 day, 1 hit, 1 life-altering concussion

Dave Molinari

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

February 19, 2012

Jason Botterill had been hit hard before, and he had the medical history to prove it.

And this check, well, it really seemed like nothing special.

"I remember going to the bench thinking, 'I got dinged a little bit,' " Botterill said. "But I didn't think too much of it."

Not until a few hours later, anyway.

"After the game, I felt something was wrong," Botterill said. "Especially the next morning, once the adrenaline wore off."

What seemed like a routine hit at the time turned out to be the most significant one Botterill absorbed in his career, because it was the one that ended that career.

Botterill, who already had been diagnosed with three concussions after graduating from the University of Michigan, picked up his fourth in late October 2005 while playing for Buffalo's American Hockey League affiliate in Rochester, N.Y.

That one, though, was different.

In just about every way.

The previous three times, he had been concussed by big hits. The kind that often leave the victim dazed and on all fours, or perhaps stumbling toward the bench like a guy whose blood-alcohol level was approaching the spontaneous-combustion stage.

And each time, despite the ferocity of the check that injured him, Botterill rebounded in about a week. Took it easy for a few days, then went back to work.

Not this time.

Oh, he didn't have to spend his days in bed or in a darkened room after No. 4 was diagnosed, but it was evident from the start that his recovery would not be like any of those he had experienced previously.

"I was very fortunate because, from the standpoint of day-to-day life, I was fine," Botterill said. "I didn't really have too many issues at all. But whenever I started to get my heart rate up, my symptoms were room-spins and [seeing] black spots."

Botterill spent most of that season hoping that he'd be able to resume playing, but he eventually accepted his doctors' advice to leave the game before he suffered something even more serious.

Which, they advised him, was a pretty good bet to happen if he didn't retire.

"They pretty much assured me that I would recover from this concussion, which I feel I did," Botterill said. "But they felt my ability to take a hit had diminished and my ability to recover from concussions had diminished."

"This one was going to take a little while to recover [from]; the next one probably wouldn't be a big hit that would cause it and how long it would take me to recover from that one was a question mark."

So Botterill left the game, but the lingering effects of the game -- specifically, the one that yielded his final concussion -- didn't leave him. Not immediately, at least.

"Even doing the simplest of chores -- like a couple of years afterward, shoveling the driveway -- if I got my heart rate up, the symptoms came back," he said.

He returned to Michigan to pursue an MBA, with the goal of pursuing a career in commercial banking or corporate finance.

While in Ann Arbor, however, he did some part-time scouting for Dallas, the team that had invested a first-round draft choice in him in 1994.

That led to a position with NHL Central Registry and, later, a job with the Penguins, who promoted him to assistant general manager when Chuck Fletcher was hired as GM in Minnesota in 2009.

The Penguins have, of course, endured a spate of concussions in recent seasons, and what Botterill went through gives him particular insight into what players with such injuries are going through.

And to the difficulties they can have explaining their condition to players who haven't suffered one.

"It's a difficult injury to relate to your teammates with and to your coaching staff," he said. "A lot of times with concussions, you are fine just walking around, and around the locker room."

"It's different from, say, your shoulder. I also had a lot of shoulder injuries in my career. At least with a shoulder injury, the coaches and players ... at least you can have some quantitative measure to tell them. 'I went up 10 percent in my weight today in my shoulder exercises. I feel I'm getting stronger.'"

"How do you quantify a concussion? 'I feel 5 percent or 10 percent less foggy today than I did yesterday.' It's difficult."

That mental haze is a distant memory for Botterill now. He's developed into one of the NHL's most promising young executives, and that might not have been the case if his playing career hadn't been cut short.

"On one hand, [having to retire early] was an extremely frustrating part of my life, to have to give up the game of hockey," he said.

"But in retrospect, with the way it turned out, the timing of things, it turned out to be a great experience, to be able to join this organization, being able to be part of a Stanley Cup. It's interesting how things turned out."

Asham, Jeffrey, Cooke deliver in return to lineup

Chris Harlan

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

February 19, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- Arron Asham rejoined the Penguins lineup Saturday, ending the 23-day layoff he needed to recover from a concussion.

Asham was on the ice for 9:27 in the 6-4 victory over the Flyers at Wells Fargo Center. The right wing had last played Jan. 15 and missed 13 games since, so his conditioning was a concern.

"I don't think he's in optimal condition right now, but he's a big body and a guy we want to have back in our lineup," Penguins coach Dan Bylsma said. "He's feeling real good about (rejoining the lineup). He's been wanting to play."

Asham was paired with Dustin Jeffrey and Matt Cooke on a line that scored twice. Cooke had a first-period goal while the three were together, and Jeffrey scored in the third.

This was Jeffrey's first game at Wells Fargo Center since March 24, 2011, when he tore his ACL.

"We got big shifts from the Jeffrey line," Bylsma said.

In 41 games before the injury, Asham had two goals and nine assists. His 53 penalty minutes were second-most on the team. Asham was concussed Jan. 11 in Washington, but he played two more games before the injury was diagnosed several days later.

With Asham healthy, Cal O'Reilly was scratched from the lineup. Ben Lovejoy and Tyler Kennedy (ankle) also were scratched.

Staal fined

Jordan Staal was fined \$2,500 by the league for boarding Flyers defenseman Braydon Coburn during the second period. The fine was the maximum allowed.

It was announced immediately after the game by league's Department of Player Safety.

Staal received a minor penalty on the play.

Penguins repeat feat

Not since Oct. 27, 2010 had the Penguins scored two short-handed goals in the same game. Craig Adams and Cooke scored them 61 seconds apart that night in a 5-3 loss to the Lightning in Tampa Bay.

Both were scored on the same penalty. Cooke and Staal had short-handed goals 1:41 apart yesterday, also on the same penalty.

Coincidentally, both penalties were against Pascal Dupuis.

"After the period, I think (Dupuis) said something like: 'That was the perfect penalty to take, if there is one,' " said Cooke, with a laugh.

Pair of shorthanded goals help Pens past rival Flyers

Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

February 18, 2012

PHILADELPHIA -- As [Pittsburgh Penguins](#) forward [Pascal Dupuis](#) skated to the penalty box at 14:58 of the second period with his team trailing the [Philadelphia Flyers](#), 2-1, he thought his team was in a bad spot.

"We know they have a good power play," Dupuis said. "We know they shoot well, we know (Claude) Giroux is a great playmaker. Obviously it doesn't feel great to be in the box when your team is on the PK."

The Flyers may have had the man-power advantage, but in the two minutes Dupuis sat in the box, the advantage was all Pittsburgh's.

[Jordan Staal](#) scored a 4-on-5 goal and [Matt Cooke](#) scored 3-on-5 in a 1:43 span to spark the Penguins to a 6-4 victory against the Flyers.

It was the Penguins' first win in three tries against their intrastate rival this season and moved them into fifth place in the Eastern Conference with 71 points, the same as the fourth-place Flyers.

"That's huge," Dupuis said. "They were ahead of us in the standings, and you want to catch teams, especially down the stretch like that. It was a big win for us."

Cooke had two goals and an assist, Staal had a goal and an assist, and [Dustin Jeffrey](#), Dupuis and [James Neal](#) all had goals for the Penguins.

[Jaromir Jagr](#) scored a pair of goals 18 seconds apart in the first period for the Flyers, rookie Eric Wellwood scored his first NHL goal and [Wayne Simmonds](#) also had a goal as the Flyers fell to 2-5-1 in their last eight games.

Jagr's scoring burst had given the Flyers a 2-1 lead late in the second period, and just when it looked like the Flyers were going to be able to take full control, the Penguins penalty killers killed the Flyers' hopes.

Giroux made a blind, backhand pass intended for [Jakub Voracek](#) that instead found the Penguins' [Craig Adams](#), who broke out of the Pittsburgh zone. He passed Staal following on the left side, and as he entered the Philadelphia zone, he used Voracek as a screen and fired a shot that Flyers goalie [Ilya Bryzgalov](#) missed with his glove at 15:14.

Seconds later, [Brooks Orpik](#) joined Dupuis in the penalty box after being called for hooking Giroux. The Flyers had a two-man advantage, but [Kimmo Timonen](#) misplayed a Giroux pass and Cooke blew past him to grab the loose puck. With Timonen hooking him, Cooke lifted the puck over Bryzgalov's blocker at 16:57.

According to the Elias Sports Bureau, it's the first 3-on-5 goal allowed by the Flyers since Benoit Hogue of the Islanders scored two men down into an empty net March 9, 1993. The last time a Penguins player scored a 3-on-5 goal was Mario Lemieux against the Los Angeles Kings on Feb. 13, 1988.

"We haven't scored a lot of goals shorthanded lately," said Cooke. "Our focus is to kill them first. But when given the opportunity or you have the chance to go on the offensive, we want to do that. (Adams) did a great job letting (Staal) join on the 2-on-2, pushed the 'D' back and (Staal) shot through the screen. That was a great shot, I don't think the goalie saw it. And then mine, puck took a fortunate bounce. On the 5-on-3 they only have one guy back. Timonen had been out there for a while, I thought I could try it. Fortunately it went in because I was pretty tired at the end of it."

The Flyers were baffled at how a great advantage could end up with them trailing.

"We had a 5-on-3, a good chance to score a goal, and then, I don't know," Giroux said. "Personally, I did some bad passes. I mean, 5-on-3 should be automatic and in the net, so we know we have to be better. It didn't help our case tonight."

The back-to-back shorthanded goals also brought an end to a tough day for Bryzgalov, who was yanked after allowing three goals on 13 shots. He left to a combination of boos and cheers for his replacement, [Sergei Bobrovsky](#).

"It's an easy life when you can blame one guy," Bryzgalov said. "It's a bad goalie, the goalie's mistake. It's easy to find scapegoat when you point to one guy and say we always lose because we have a bad goalie. But I think it's the wrong philosophy. I know ... I was frustrated with my game today. I know I've got to be better. I will continue to work on this but ... I'll try to find peace in my soul to play in this city."

Bobrovsky didn't fare much better, letting in three goals on 17 shots.

"I think everybody is frustrated right now with the loss to Pittsburgh and I think that we can be better in a lot of different areas," Flyers coach Peter Laviolette said when asked about his goaltending, "and that certainly is one of them."

The Flyers were able to regain momentum late in the second when Wellwood took advantage of a Penguins mistake. Playing the puck while skating backward in his zone, [Deryk Engelland](#) fell right in front of the Penguins' net, and Wellwood poked the loose puck under Fleury at 18:41 for his first NHL goal.

"You never expect the puck to be there," said Wellwood, who became the eighth Flyer this season to score his first NHL goal. "Everything happened so fast. I was so close on (goalie Marc-Andre) Fleury, I just tried to poke it on net. I didn't have any place I was trying to put it, it just went in so that's nice."

Any momentum gained, however, was lost on the first shift of the third period. Timonen gave the puck away twice, and Bobrovsky was able to stop in-close attempts by Jeffrey and Cooke, but Jeffrey's third shot found the back of the net, just 37 seconds into the third.

"We really haven't forechecked all that well recently," said Cooke. "It's been a focus of ours. Tonight in the first period we felt we did it pretty good and wanted to get back to it. Kind of a weird second period because of all the penalties. Wanted to get back to it in the third, and it so happened that our first shift out we get some offensive zone time. I get a chance and then Dustin buries the rebound."

Minutes later Dupuis scored to make it 5-3, and then Neal knocked his own rebound past Bobrovsky for his 30th of the season to make it 6-3.

Simmonds' goal with 19.0 seconds left closed the scoring.

The Penguins had taken a 1-0 lead just 3:17 into the game when miscommunication between the Flyers' newest defense pair, [Andrej Meszaros](#) and [Nicklas Grossman](#), making his debut with the Flyers after being acquired Thursday, allowed Cooke and [Arron Asham](#) to break out on a 2-on-1. Cooke carried the puck down the left side beat Bryzgalov for his 10th of the season.

The Flyers took the lead in quick order as Jagr ripped a pair of shots from almost the identical spot in the right circle. At 15:16, with the teams skating 4-on-4, [Danny Briere](#) pushed a puck through the neutral zone to Jagr, who carried into the Pittsburgh end along the right side of the ice. He looked up like he was going to pass and then ripped a shot over Fleury's glove.

Seconds later, with Staal off for holding, Giroux set up Jagr in the right circle, and he ripped another shot over Fleury's glove for his 15th of the season at 15:34.

Jagr now has 661 goals, seven behind 10th-place Luc Robitaille on the NHL's all-time list.

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