



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Tuesday, February 21, 2012

Trade deadline looms over Sabres

Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
February 21, 2012

Buffalo Sabres defenseman Jordan Leopold knows the drill. He's been sent packing at the trade deadline twice in his career, from Colorado to Calgary in 2009 and from Florida to Pittsburgh in 2010. It's tough on the player, even tougher on their families.

The final week countdown to the NHL's swap meet is on, as the deadline looms next Monday at 3 p.m. The Sabres, who host the New York Islanders tonight in First Niagara Center, are trying to play both sides. They can get within five points of the final playoff spot with a win tonight but are still in 14th place in the Eastern Conference and likely to be sellers to create some salary cap space.

The chatter is growing by the hour.

"It's changed a lot over the years as far as the access to blogs, rumors, Twitter, television tickers on the bottom of the page," said Leopold. "The whole thing has just evolved into a social media circus. You start reading all that stuff and start believing it, you never know.

"It's absolutely crazy at that this time of year. As a player, the best thing you can do is not read any of that stuff."

Sage advice from Leopold to Paul Gaustad, and the Sabres' center appears to have already taken it to heart.

As a veteran who is seventh in the league in faceoff percentage, can kill penalties and play against another team's top scoring line, Gaustad might rank as one of the better rental players on the market. Basically, his name is everywhere from major media outlets on both sides of the border to Johnny's Blog from the Basement.

The "Goooose" calls have been heard in downtown Buffalo for seven straight years. They could be in their final days.

"I'm not too focused on it. I don't really listen to guys on the radio or read your newspaper articles." Gaustad said matter-of-factly Monday. "So it's not too hard for me. It's focusing on our team. We've had some struggles and that's what's tough on us."

Gaustad's four-year, \$9.2 million deal expires after this year. He makes \$2.5 million this season and if he's acquired on deadline day, he would only cost a new team about \$497,000.

His value is only going up. Gaustad has seven points in his last 10 games and has combined with Nathan Gerbe and Patrick Kaleta to stunt opponents' top lines, notably Evgeni Malkin's unit in Sunday's 6-2 win over Pittsburgh.

"He's a great teammate, a consistent teammate for us and we hope he stays." said Gerbe. "You can't control the rumors. We have to control how we play and Paul is doing a good job."

Gaustad said he spoke with General Manager Darcy Regier on Saturday but that the conversation was mostly about this year's team. But he didn't say it was entirely about it. Gaustad said Monday he'd like to stay with the Sabres, or at least consider re-signing with them as a free agent on July 1 if he's traded.

"I've always wanted to be a Sabre and win in Buffalo." he said. "I've come to grow up here and my adult life has been in Western New York. Winning here is one of my main goals."

Gaustad and Brad Boyes, also in the final year of his contract, could easily be rented out. Players like Leopold, with one year left on his deal at a reasonable \$3 million, and Derek Roy (one year, \$4 million) could be in play.

For his part, Gaustad said he's solely focused on Buffalo's playoff push and won't allow trade rumors to be a distraction. But is it really possible to avoid everything said everywhere this week?

"You're asking a guy with three kids and watching Mickey Mouse clubhouse all day long so it's pretty easy for me," cracked Leopold. "Hey, if you start worrying about it, it starts to affect how you live your day-to-day life and you don't need that."

The Sabres have three games left before the deadline. There's tonight's game against an Islanders team that was blanked Monday by Ottawa, 6-0, and sits one point ahead of Buffalo. And then there's this weekend's killer back-to-back, Friday's visit by Boston and Saturday's trip to Madison Square Garden to meet the New York Rangers.

The Sabres are 6-3-2 in their last 11 games. They still have 23 to go and teams in front of them, notably Toronto and Washington, have been struggling. That's keeping Buffalo in the race to the point that coach Lindy Ruff didn't want to entertain trade questions Monday.

"I think we can put a run together and I told the team that before Pittsburgh, 'I still believe in you,'" Ruff said. "When we've been healthy and been on the same page, we've been able to push ahead."

"One game you can be in 14th, then win a game and be in 10th or 11th." Ruff said. "It creates hope. You can look at baseball, you can look at football. There's teams that get in the playoffs the last day and that might have to be us."

The Sabres have plenty of teams to leap over. Their only chance is to keep winning.

"I kind of describe it like Frogger." Gaustad said of the old arcade game. "You know it's cliché but have you to focus on just winning that one and those two points and that works best."

mharrington@buffnews.com

Isles head to Buffalo after 6-0 loss

Brian Compton

NHL.com

February 20, 2012

ISLANDERS (25-26-8) at SABRES (25-27-7)

TV: MSG PLUS, MSG-B

Last 10: New York 5-4-1; Buffalo 5-3-2.

Season Series: This is the fourth and final meeting between the teams. The Islanders are 2-0-1 against the Sabres this season, but Buffalo took the most recent showdown -- a 4-3 shootout decision on Feb. 4 at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum.

Big Story: Where is [Evgeni Nabokov](#)?

The [New York Islanders'](#) No. 1 goaltender missed his third straight game Monday afternoon due to the flu, and will not make the trip with the club to Buffalo. That means it will be at least 10 days between starts for Nabokov, since the Isles won't play again until Friday night against the Rangers at the Coliseum.

"I don't know where Nabokov is in terms of his health right now," Isles coach Jack Capauno said Monday after watching his team suffer a 6-0 loss on home ice to the Ottawa Senators.

Team Scope:

Islanders: A win Monday would have pulled New York within four points of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference. The Isles performed as if they weren't aware.

New York allowed two goals in the first 2:21 en route to a 6-0 pummeling from the Senators. The Islanders, who once again fell beneath the .500 mark, have alternated wins and losses in their last 10 games and have yet to win back-to-back contests this month.

Clearly, they're missing that sense of urgency.

"No push back," Capuano said after Monday's loss. "(In a) game like that, you've got to be physical. Matty Martin was the only guy that stepped to the plate. Disappointing."

Sabres: Tuesday night marks the third of a four-game homestand for Buffalo, which trails the Islanders by just one point in the standings. The Sabres looked impressive Sunday afternoon,

when they disposed of the Pittsburgh Penguins in a 6-2 victory at the First Niagara Center.

[Derek Roy](#) enjoyed his first two-goal game in more than three months, while [Christian Ehrhoff](#) contributed three assists to help the Sabres snap a 0-3-1 skid.

"I thought we just kept coming," coach Lindy Ruff said. "I know we made some mistakes. We got some great saves out of Ryan (Miller), but from a skating and moving the puck standpoint, we did a good job against their top line."

Who's Hot: Sabres forward [Paul Gaustad](#) tallied the game-winning goal Sunday and now has 7 points (3 goals, 4 assists) in his last 10 games, while captain [Jason Pominville](#) has 6 goals and 4 assists in his last eight contests.

Injury Report: Besides Nabokov, New York will also be without [Rick DiPietro](#) (sports hernia, knee swelling), [Travis Hamonic](#) (nose), [Mike Mottau](#) (concussion) and [Dylan Reese](#) (leg). ... Sabres forward [Cody McCormick](#) is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, while [Jochen Hecht](#) is out due to a concussion.

Stat Pack: With Monday's 6-0 loss, the Isles now have the worst goals for/against differential in the Eastern Conference (minus-35). ... Pominville has earned at least a point in 41 of Buffalo's 59 games this season.

Puck Drop: "At this time of the year, you need physicality. You have to pay the price. I'll never ask anybody to fight, but we weren't physical enough. We need an injection in our lineup. We need something to happen here. We can't have the emotion that we had on the bench here tonight." -- *Isles coach Jack Capuano after Monday's 6-0 loss to Ottawa*

NY Islanders (25-26-8) at Buffalo (25-27-7)

Noey Kupchan

Associated Press

February 20, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) and [New York Islanders](#) sit out on the outside of the Eastern Conference playoff picture.

While the Sabres inched closer to getting back in the mix during their last game, the Islanders took a big step back.

Looking to build on its latest effort, Buffalo tries to avoid a fourth consecutive home defeat to the Islanders as the teams conclude their season series Tuesday night.

The Sabres (25-27-7) are one point behind the 12th-place Islanders (25-26-8) in the East. Both teams have their work cut out if they hope to catch Toronto, which holds the eighth and final playoff spot with 64 points and two fewer games played than Winnipeg.

Buffalo gained a bit of ground and snapped an 0-3-1 skid with Sunday's 6-2 win over Pittsburgh. [Derek Roy](#) had two goals and an assist while [Ryan Miller](#) made 24 saves.

"A lot of things clicked," said Miller, 2-1-2 with a 4.11 goals-against average over his last six meetings in this series. "We do have the skill to win some hockey games. It's been a matter of being smart and working at it and giving our skill a chance to shine a little more. (Sunday) was a good game for us and I hope we can take that as a little bit of a lesson of what we can do."

The Islanders, in contrast, failed to get on the board for the ninth time this season in falling 6-0 to Ottawa on Monday.

"This was very disappointing. We came with no physicality and stood around and watched their best players," coach Jack Capuano said. "You have to battle and compete and we didn't.

"We need an injection in our lineup. We need something to happen here. We can't have the (lack of) emotion we had here."

[Kevin Poulin](#) surrendered two goals in the game's first 95 seconds before getting pulled. [Al Montoya](#) turned away 23 shots the rest of the way.

"There wasn't any intensity in our game. We've had a couple of bad starts, but we topped it today. We keep doing this to ourselves," captain [Mark Streit](#) said.

"We can't just put our heads hanging right now, we gotta come back strong. We gonna play in Buffalo and it's that time of the year. We gotta turn the page here and be ready."

The Islanders have outscored the Sabres 14-9 in winning three straight at First Niagara Center, including 2-1 on Nov. 29. New York also defeated Buffalo 4-2 at home Jan. 14 before blowing a two-goal lead in a 4-3 shootout loss Feb. 4.

New York's [Evgeni Nabokov](#), who made 23 saves in January's meeting, could be back Tuesday after missing the last three games with flu-like symptoms. Nabokov is 5-1-0 with a 0.98 GAA and two shutouts over his last six road starts.

If in goal, Nabokov could have a hard time slowing down Roy, who's picked up the pace after a lackluster stretch. Roy's five points in three games are one more than his total from his previous 19 contests.

"It's tough. Whenever you're slumping and not scoring and your team's losing hockey games, the burden falls on you," Roy told the Sabres' official website.

"I've just got to keep doing that, working hard to make plays, power play, five-on-five, whatever it takes. Just make plays and score goals."

THOUGHTS ON THE LOOMING DEADLINE

Kevin Sylvester

Sabres.com

February 20, 2012

It's one week before the NHL trade deadline and I'm asked quite frequently at games and on Bitter (my name for Twitter) what the Sabres are going to do, and what can we get for so and so? They're great questions and I wish I had the answers (if I did I'd be working down the hall in the hockey department). However, I do have a few opinions to offer. I think this year is a really difficult year for General Managers across the league to navigate this deadline, especially in the Eastern Conference. It's close. The Sabres sit (today) seven points out of the final playoff spot in the East, but with six teams to overtake for the spot. It's possible, but oddsmakers say highly improbable. Anything can happen, as we witnessed last year. The deals to date have been for pending UFA's heading to teams that are in good playoff position right now in exchange for draft picks. Tampa Bay sent two players (Pavel Kubina and Dominic Moore) packing despite being only 6 points out. Is Tampa GM Steve Yzerman giving up on the season? I doubt it. I think he received good draft picks for players that he didn't plan on re-signing. To me, that's the right approach when you're not currently in a playoff spot. If you get a good offer for pending free agents (UFA or RFA) that you have no future plans for, then trade them. Other than that, I'd be very cautious with other players you still have under term or that anybody else does.

Sometimes you're too close to the forest to see the trees. I feel that way about Sabres captain [Jason Pominville](#). I knew he was a good player, but I was blind to how good. I guess it's because he was always in the line-up as the Sabres "iron man" until being blindsided by Niklas Hjalmarsson last season. The coaching staff knew, and that's why he was named captain in Helsinki, Finland, back in October. His numbers are tops on the team with 23 goals and 57 points. He kills penalties, and can move around on the power play from the point to the front of the net, and averages 19:29 of ice time per game. Those numbers speak for themselves. What really convinced me was talking to [Thomas Vanek](#), and seeing what [Ville Leino](#) was able to do playing with Pominville. Leino has played his best hockey for the Sabres during stints on Pominville's line. I think it's because Pominville adjusted to Leino's style and can read what Leino is going to do with the puck. I recently asked [Thomas Vanek](#) if we don't realize how good the Sabres captain is. His response (and I'm paraphrasing): 'We all know how good he is and I think the fans in Buffalo do too. I personally love playing with him, because he's always in the right spot. He puts in himself in great position.' I also asked Sabres assistant coach Kevyn Adams the same question. Adams said (once again paraphrasing): 'I know from having played against him how good he is. Believe me, guys in the league are aware who [Jason Pominville](#) is and how tough he is to play against.' I always knew he was good, but am a little embarrassed that it took a letter on his sweater for me to notice.

I was reading the results of the Hockey Night in Canada/NHLPA 2011-12 Player Poll today and wanted to share a few items. Judging by all the categories he won, Pavel Datsyuk is regarded as the best player in the league by his peers. Datsyuk was voted the smartest player, most difficult to play against, hardest to take the puck from, most difficult to stop, cleanest player, and the toughest player to play against. The only one of those I would take exception to would be smartest player. My vote is for George Parros of the Anaheim Ducks. He played four years at Princeton (no dummies allowed), and has figured out how to stay in the league for seven years and counting, while becoming a fan favorite in Anaheim. That's smart. He's a fighter, and that's the other thing I would like to share from the survey. The poll also said that 47 percent of the players are in favor of getting rid of the instigator penalty, while 98 percent want to keep fighting in the game. Count me in on the latter.

DOWN ON THE FARM

The Amerks are currently 11th in the AHL's Western Conference with a record of 23-21-6-3

Sabres.com

February 20, 2012

WEEKLY NOTES: One week is all that remains in the month of February, and like the 29 other teams in the American Hockey League, the Rochester Americans are in full throttle as the league enters the final third of the 2011-12 regular season. The race to the postseason will certainly heat up over the next six weeks as the road to the Calder Cup begins to take shape. After claiming just two out of a possible six points this past weekend, the Amerks enter the final week of the month with home-ice advantage on their side as they look to inch their way up the Western Conference standings, and more importantly, solidify a playoff berth. With another three games on tap over the course of the next six nights, Rochester has the opportunity to make up some ground at a time where every possible point becomes increasingly important. This week's slate of games features a battle between the AHL's cornerstone franchises in a midweek tilt with Hershey before the Amerks go up against Adirondack and Lake Erie on back-to-back nights to bring the weekend to a close.

LAST WEEK'S RESULTS:

Friday, Feb. 17 vs. Lake Erie – W, 6-2... Multiple-point efforts from four different skaters drove the Rochester Americans to a 6-2 victory in the first of back-to-back meetings with the North Division rival Lake Erie Monsters Friday night at The Blue Cross Arena. Phil Varone led the way for Rochester with a season-high three-point (0+3) performance, with T.J. Brennan (1+1), Derek Whitmore (2+0), and [Luke Adam](#) (0+2) each chipping in two. Marcus Foligno, Maxime Legault and Brayden McNabb also found the back of the net for Rochester while [David Leggio](#) turned away 20 of 22 shots between the pipes. The game, which featured the 20th goal of the season for Whitmore, also saw the Amerks net a game-high three power-play goals on eight man-advantage opportunities.

Saturday, Feb. 18 @ Lake Erie – L, 3-1... On Saturday night, the home-and-home series between the Amerks and Monsters shifted to Quicken Loans Arena in downtown Cleveland, where Lake Erie earned its first win of the season over Rochester by a 3-1 count. Varone tallied the lone goal for Rochester in the contest, with assists going to [Travis Turnbull](#) and Leggio, who also finished the night with 31 saves in his third consecutive start.

Sunday, Feb. 19 vs. Hamilton – L, 7-3... Having already met eight times this season, the Amerks returned home to close out the weekend with a 7-3 loss to the Hamilton Bulldogs Sunday evening as both teams were playing their third game in as many nights. Corey Tropp, Paul Szczechura and Whitmore all provided single tallies for the Amerks, while Varone extended his point streak to three games with an assist, giving him five points (1+4) on the weekend. [Drew MacIntyre](#) finished the night with 41 saves between the pipes.

THIS WEEK'S OPPONENTS: The oldest rivalry in the American Hockey League will be renewed on Wednesday, February 22 in Rochester when the Amerks welcome the Hershey Bears to The Blue Cross

Arena for the only time this season. The puck drops on the 444th all-time meeting between the league's two oldest teams at 7:05 p.m. with all the action being carried live on 107.3 FM and 1280 AM, Rochester's Sports Talk. The game will also be televised live on Time Warner Cable SportsNet Channel 26. The matchup will be the second and final of the season between the Amerks and Bears, who last met on January 8 in Hershey where the Bears came away with a 4-3 shootout win despite a three-goal, third period comeback by the Amerks and a 49-save performance by Leggio. Rochester is 184-205-54 all-time against their longtime nemesis.

Rochester continues its four-game homestand on Friday, February 24 as the Amerks and Adirondack Phantoms square off in the third of four get-togethers this season. Game time is slated for a 7:35 p. m. start at The Blue Cross Arena and will be broadcast live on 107.3 FM and 1280 AM, Rochester's Sports Talk. The Amerks carry a 0-1-1-0 record into the matchup against the Phantoms after dropping a 3-2 overtime decision in the most recent meeting with Adirondack back on December 10 at the Glens Falls Civic Center. The teams will complete the season series later this season on Sunday, April 8 when the Amerks visit their intrastate rival prior to the end of the regular season.

The Amerks will bring the month of February to a close the following night when the Lake Erie Monsters return to the Flower City for the second time in as many weeks. The 7:35 p.m. contest will also mark the third encounter in nine days for the North Division rivals, who are coming off their two-game split this past weekend. Rochester has claimed three of the first four meetings with Lake this season and has outscored the Monsters 16-11 through the previous four engagements. Home-ice advantage proved to be the deciding factor in the recent home-and-home series between the two teams as Rochester used a three-goal third period to cruise to a 6-2 win over the Monsters on Friday before Lake Erie responded with 3-1 victory of its own on Saturday. The Amerks are 3-1-0-0 this season and 13-16-2 lifetime against the Colorado Avalanche's affiliate.

AMERKS NOTES: Rochester (23-21-6-3, 55 points) enters the week in the thick of what is shaping up to be a very tight race to the finish among its fellow Western Conference opponents, where just a mere four points is all that separates the Amerks from their closest rivals, including Abbotsford, who currently ranks sixth with 59 points. After claiming just two out of a possible six points this past weekend, the Amerks have fallen to third in the division standings, trailing only the second-place Lake Erie Monsters by a point. Hamilton, too, is closing its gap, and coming off its 7-3 win over Rochester last night, now sits within two points of the Amerks with a game in hand. In addition to their pursuit of the first-place Toronto Marlies, who remain nine points ahead of the Amerks for the top spot in the North Division, the Amerks are presently tied with Milwaukee for 10th in the Western Conference, needing all but four points for to secure the eighth and final playoff spot. This week's slate of games has Rochester in action three times over the next six nights, including three games in a four-night stretch to bring the month of February to a close.

THE STREAK CONTINUES: With a pair of goals in Friday night's win over Lake Erie, Whitmore became the first player this season to net 20 goals on his way to posting back-to-back 20-goal campaigns for the first time in his professional career. In doing so, Whitmore also preserved Rochester's 56-year tradition of having at least one player from each season since the team's inception in 1956 to score 20 or more goals, a streak that was sparked by Bronco Horvath's team-leading 37 tallies during the Amerks'

inaugural 1956-57 season.

WHO'S HOT: Varone has taken over the team lead in scoring with 33 points (8+25) by notching five points (1+4) in the last three games, a streak highlighted by a season-high three-point (0+3) game Friday against Lake Erie. After starting the season with just six points in the first 23 games, Varone has scored 27 points in the last 30 games. During the month of February alone, Varone has registered nine points (3+8) in nine games and has been held scoreless just three times over the last 13 contests. Foligno, who ranks second on the team in scoring, has also recorded nine points (1+8) in nine games this month and has been held off the scoresheet just twice in the last 10 games. Foligno has also amassed 20 points (4+16) over his last 24 games, a stretch that includes five multi-point performances. McNabb, yet another rookie, has recorded nine points (1+8) over his last nine games since his return from the Sabres, including three consecutive appearances with multiple points from February 4-10. With points in four of the last five games, Szczechura has recorded 13 points (7+6) in his last 15 games and has already moved into fourth on the team in scoring with 28 points (11+17) in just 34 games this season. Tropp has six points (1+5) in his first six games back in the lineup following a 10-game injury absence, while Brennan, who carried a career-best seven-game point streak (3+5) into 2012, shows 14 points (5+9) in his last 15 games and has only been held scoreless four times during that stretch. Whitmore has three goals over his last three games and has five points (4+1) in as many outings. Despite currently being on NHL recall, [Zack Kassian](#) was in the midst of a three-game goal scoring streak and had back-to-back games with multiple goals, giving him 12 points (8+4) in his last 12 games with the Amerks, prior to re-joining the Sabres.

TEAM AND LEAGUE LEADERS: With impressive numbers through the first nine games of February, Varone (8+25) and Foligno (13+19) have quickly ascended to the top of Rochester's point leaders. The pair of rookie forwards enter the week ranked 1-2 on the Amerks scoring list and are 14th and 15th among league rookies in overall scoring, respectively. Foligno and McNabb rank in the top 20 in the AHL with +13 on-ice ratings. Foligno also sits tied for 13th in the league with four game-winning goals this season, which are the second-most among first-year skaters. Whitmore shows a team-best 21 goals, including six on the power-play, and is on pace to match his career-high 27 he scored last season in Portland. His 21 goals rank him tied for 11th among the AHL's top goal scorers, while he also ranks 10th in the AHL with 165 shots on goal. With 15 helpers through his last 22 games, Varone has taken over the team lead with 25 assists and is the only Amerk this season to appear in all 53 games thus far. Defenseman [Joe Finley](#) leads Rochester with 85 penalty minutes. Brennan (9+12) and McNabb (2+17) continue to lead all Rochester blueliners with 21 and 19 points, respectively. Leggio, who has started eight of the last 11 games for the Amerks, boasts a 15-15-1 record with a 2.78 goals-against average and a .913 save percentage in 31 games. Coming off his first shutout of the season in a 33-save effort against Abbotsford on February 2, he presently ranks seventh among AHL netminders in saves (888) and tied for 14th in wins. He's also 12th in minutes played (1,837) and tied for 17th in save percentage.

ROOKIES STEPPING IT UP: The transition to the professional ranks for the Amerks' freshmen this season has undoubtedly been a successful one for the young Buffalo Sabres prospects. Entering this week, three of Rochester's top five scorers are currently in their first pro season, including each of the top two scorers on the team. The Amerks have scored 153 goals through the first 53 games this season, but more impressively, 42 have been netted by a rookie, which equates to more than 25% of this year's total offense. On a team that features eight different first-year players, four have made their NHL debuts with

Buffalo and even spent significant time with the big club.

BY THE NUMBERS: The Amerks are 10-10-3-1 (24 points) this season against North Division rivals, but show a 13-11-3-2 (31 points) mark versus non-divisional foes. Rochester has outscored its opponents 84-73 at The Blue Cross Arena this season. The third period has been the Amerks' strong suit thus far as the club has accounted for 54 goals while allowing 40. The Amerks have scored the first goal in 26 of the first 53 games of the campaign and show a 16-8-1-1 record when doing so, including a 9-4-0-0 mark at home. Rochester is also 13-0-1-0 when leading after two periods, a streak that also comes with an unblemished 9-0-0-0 mark at home.

HOME, SWEET HOME: Home-ice advantage has certainly been a factor in Rochester's recent success as the Amerks are 10-7-2-0 in their last 19 games at home, including 4-2-1-0 in the last seven. After beginning the season with just two home wins in the first five outings, the Amerks show a 14-9-2-1 record (31 points) this season when playing in their downtown barn. Conversely, Rochester is 9-12-4-2 (24 points) away from the friendly confines of The Blue Cross Arena.

SPECIAL TEAMS BREAKDOWN: On the penalty kill, Rochester has successfully killed off 179-of-228 (78.5%) shorthanded situations, including 94 of 117 at home for an 80.3% efficiency rate. As a team, Rochester has allowed eight shorthanded goals against, four coming at home and four on the road. They have also scored six shorthanded goals, as Varone scored his team-leading second of the season Saturday at Lake Erie.

MILESTONE WATCH: Back from a four-month injury absence that sidelined him for 44 games, veteran forward [Michael Ryan](#) reached a benchmark in his nine-year professional career on February 11 against San Antonio by playing in his 400th professional game, 218 of which have been played in Rochester. MacIntyre's next win will represent the 50th of his AHL career while injured Evan Rankin is four points shy of 200 professional points and six assists away from 100 assists. Team captain Colin Stuart is on the verge of yet another personal milestone, needing just 11 more points for 200 in his AHL career. Tropp needs just three more games to reach the century mark for his AHL career.

THIS WEEK IN AMERKS HISTORY: Check out what happened this week in Amerks history over the years.

February 20, 1991 – Exactly 21 years ago today, Amerks Hall of Famer Jody Gage scores the franchise's 10,000th goal in a 6-2 win over Moncton at the War Memorial.

February 20, 2002 – Today also marks the 10-year anniversary of Rochester's 1,700th franchise win as Hall of Famer Craig Charron nets the game-winning goal to guide the Amerks to a 4-2 victory over Hamilton at Copps Coliseum.

February 21, 2010 – The Amerks joined elite company with their historic 2,000th franchise win with via a 3-2 shootout over the Portland Pirates at The Blue Cross Arena. Rochester became just the second team in the American Hockey League and only the eighth team in North American hockey history to collect 2,000 wins. In addition to all the founding original six members of the National Hockey League, the only

other AHL team to accomplish the feat is the Hershey Bears.

UPCOMING PROMOTIONS: The Rochester Americans will hold their annual Wendy's Skate on Tuesday, February 21 from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. at The Blue Cross Arena. Fans can stop in at any participating Monroe County Wendy's location to pick up a free pass to the event. Passes are distributed out on a first-come, first-served basis while supplies last. One pass admits one person and all patrons must have their passes present upon arrival to attend. Skates and helmets are required for all participants. Wednesday's game against Hershey will be another "WindDown Wednesday", Rochester's midweek Business Persons Special that invites patrons to exchange their business cards at The Blue Cross Arena Box Office for an \$11 ticket in the best available seating location anywhere in the arena. Friday's contest falls on the next installment of the "Ditch the Dorms" night. The Amerks are encouraging all college students to "Ditch the Dorms" on Friday nights and bring the party downtown for Amerks College Nights. Current students who show a valid school ID can get best available seating anywhere in the arena for as low as \$10.00. In conjunction with Savor Catering at The Blue Cross Arena, fans can take part in the "Amerks Happy Hour" from 6:30-7:30 in the Upper Atrium Bar with \$2.00 drafts, courtesy of Molson and Coors Light. On Saturday, fans can receive special discounted tickets for showing their true colors. The game features the fourth "Hockey Night in Rochester" promotion of the season. For all Saturday home games for the rest of year, fans that show up sporting either an Amerks or Sabres jersey can purchase \$12.00 tickets from The Blue Cross Arena Box Office for best available seating.

Gaustad's stock rising as trade deadline approaches for Sabres

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

February 21, 2012

BUFFALO — In a seller's market, with bubble teams clamoring for any asset that might buoy their playoff chances and contenders searching for that last piece, Sabres veteran Paul Gaustad should be coveted at the upcoming NHL trade deadline.

The versatile American, an unrestricted free agent in July, has been at his best recently, centering a strong shutdown line with Nathan Gerbe and Patrick Kaleta.

Gaustad has three goals, including the winning score Sunday, and seven points in the past 10 contests. At 56.8, he ranks ninth overall in faceoff percentage. He won 16 of 23 draws last game. He also kills penalties and can play center or wing.

With his stock rising, he could bring at least a second-round pick.

But who says the 14th-place Sabres are sellers leading up to Monday's trade embargo?

Fresh off a 6-2 thumping of Pittsburgh on Sunday, a win tonight against the New York Islanders at the First Niagara Center could bring the Sabres (57 points) to within five of the eighth and final playoff spot with 22 games remaining.

"Right now, I'm not even going to comment," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said Monday when asked if he expected any moves. "I look at it like if we can win a game, we can close the gap to five points. You win that game (tonight), I think we can put ourselves in this. ...

"I think we can put a run together, and I told the team that before Pittsburgh, that I still believe in you, that when we've been healthy and on the same page, we've been able to push ahead."

Whether the Sabres, a sturdy 6-3-2 since they reached full strength Jan. 24 in New Jersey, push ahead with Gaustad will be interesting.

The 30-year-old met with Sabres general manager Darcy Regier on Saturday, a meeting he's downplaying as being about the team and not his future. Clearly, Gaustad, a homegrown player in his seventh season, doesn't want to leave.

"I've always wanted to be a Sabre. I've always wanted to be in Buffalo," Gaustad said. "I've come to grow up here. My adult life has been in Western New York. Winning here is one of my main goals in hockey."

Gaustad said he discusses "all sorts of different things" with his agent.

“What I’ve told him and what I’ve said from the beginning is I have to focus on playing hockey,” he said. “That’s all I can control. There’s no point in talking or focusing on different things that I can’t control.”

Gaustad said he hasn’t had any in-season extension negotiations. He signed a four-year, \$9.2 million deal in 2008.

“We talked a little bit about just where I wanted to be (before the season),” he said.

How does Gaustad balance any thoughts of leaving the only organization he’s known and joining another team?

“I just focus on playing the game and playing with the team I’m on, just like I’ve done years before,” he said. “It’s the same things. Address it the same way. You can get traded in any season.”

One scenario could have the Sabres basically renting Gaustad, who has zero goals in 38 playoff games, to another team and re-signing him in the summer.

“Anything’s possible, I guess,” Gaustad said.

Of course, Gaustad’s hardly alone. Deadline week can be a rough time for many players.

“You really have to avoid all the noise out there,” Ruff said. “In this situation, there’s a lot of it, which is understandable. But if you look at (Sunday’s) game, that’s an indication the players were focused.”

Sabres defenseman Jordan Leopold said the enhanced media today only makes deadline time tougher.

“It’s changed a lot over the years – the access to blogs, Twitter, television, the tickers on the bottom of the page,” he said. “The whole thing has evolved into a social media circus. You start reading all that stuff and believing it, you never know. It’s absolutely crazy at this time of year. As a player, the best thing you can do for yourself is not read any of that stuff.”

But it’s hard for Gaustad to avoid the talk. He’s spoken about his status the last two days.

His line, which enjoyed a nice run last postseason, keeps drawing the opposition’s best. On Sunday, the trio outplayed and outscored superstar Evgeni Malkin’s line. They should face the Isles’ top combination of P.A. Parenteau, Matt Moulson and John Tavares tonight.

“Yeah, definitely he has played some of his best,” Ruff said about Gaustad. “Even if you want to look at the last two games, that line against the top line from Montreal, that line against the Malkin line not only went head-to-head, but outscored them.

“You couldn’t tell a lot of people that was going to happen. But Paul’s done a good job, scored a great goal. They look a lot like they did in the playoffs.”

Who knows, maybe the line sticks together and helps the Sabres earn that unlikely playoff berth?

xxx

Ruff said winger Cody McCormick (upper body) is riding an exercise bike again and center Jochen Hecht (concussion) is progressing and “starting to do a little bit of work.”

Could Hecht, out since Jan. 24, be back on the ice in a couple of weeks?

“I don’t think it’s out of the realm of possibility he can get back on,” Ruff said. “He’s making progress. These are always kind of gray areas where you don’t know.”

xxx

Ruff on the tight standings: “That’s the crazy part about where we’re at. One game you can be in 14th. You can win a game you can be in 10th or 11th. It creates hope. There’s teams – you can look at baseball, you can look at football – teams that get in the playoffs the last day, and that might have to be us.”

Sabres Ruff has not lost hope

Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 20, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Depending on what the Caps do on Monday the Sabres could be either seven or eight points out of a playoff spot when they face off against the Islanders on Tuesday.

Many good arguments can be made that the way this team has played this season and the position it's in holding 14th place in the East, that they are out of it. Lindy Ruff is not one of those people, "I look at it if we can win a game, we can close the gap to five points. You win that game tomorrow I think we can put those two disappointing periods against Philly behind us which have really been the only disappoint in about a 10 games stretch (6-3-2) I think we can put a run together and I told the team that before Pittsburgh that 'I still believe in yah'. When we've been health and on the same page we've been able to push ahead." Ruff added, "That's the crazy part about where we're at, one game we can be in 14th and you can win a game and you can be in 10th or 11th and it creates hope. There's teams, you can look at baseball, you can look at football, teams that get into the playoffs on the last day and that might have to be us."

Ruff realizes where this team has been this year, but that doesn't cloud his vision forward. "We've put ourselves in a situation where you're going to lose some games that you probably deserve to win, but if you go back to Jersey where the four guys went back into the lineup and we went 5-0-1 then we lost a game I thought we could've been right there to win and you go on a little bit of a down turn. You come into Philly and play a great first period, then you play a terrible second and third, but I think we've been able to bounce back and right the ship again. So if you look at it, with strong goaltending and I think our power play needs to finish."

Paul Gaustad had an interesting take on the task at hand, "You can kind of describe it like Frogger (so many teams to leap over), but it's one of those things where you have to focus on one game and winning those two points and that's usually how it works with us."

Brad Boyes doesn't pay much attention to the teams they need to jump over. He said, "We look at the team in 8th place, that's the team we're going after whether we have one team ahead of us or we have six teams ahead of us, that's the one spot we've got to get so that's what we're concentrating on so we just think that we need to get points. Win tomorrow night and then look at the next one and win that one. You look at last year and that's the way we did it, we didn't sit there on the computer seeing where we're at in the standings, it's we got a game tonight, let's win it and that's the way we did it."

Senators rout Islanders 6-0

Davis Harper

NHL.com

February 20, 2012

UNIONDALE, N.Y. – Ottawa spent a Monday afternoon matinee against the [New York Islanders](#) emphatically answering any questions about the effects of a four-day break.

In fact, the Senators sucked the air out of a hopeful Nassau Coliseum crowd – on hand to see if the Islanders could close the six-point gap between them and the eighth-place Toronto Maple Leafs – before many of them had time to find their seats in a 6-0 rout of the Islanders.

Ottawa led 2-0 after just 1:35 through goals by [Erik Karlsson](#) and [Jason Spezza](#), sending Isles starter Kevin Poulin to the bench in just 95 seconds. The Senators (31-22-8) wound up getting two goals and two assists from Karlsson, the NHL's highest-scoring defenseman, and two goals from Spezza.

"Six-to-nothing. That sums it up pretty well," said Senators coach Paul MacLean when asked about the effects of a four-day break, one that included two complete days off the ice, this late in the season. "I thought our team was really ready to play. Scoring in the first minutes, getting two goals in the first 90 seconds, was good. It was a good sign of our preparation and our willingness to compete today against a team that we knew was going to be able to skate real well. ... We were very pleased with how we started and how we ended."

The Senators finished with four goals from their defense, as [Chris Phillips](#) and [Brian Lee](#) also scored to support [Craig Anderson](#)'s third shutout of the season. Anderson was rarely tested while stopping 28 shots, but the goalie said his defense deserved much of the credit.

"Allowing me to see the puck, that's huge," Anderson said. "When a goalie can see the puck, he's going to stop most times than not."

Ottawa improved to 4-0-1 in its last five games and moved within one point of Philadelphia and Pittsburgh in the conference standings. The Senators lead eighth-place Toronto by six points.

Meanwhile, the Islanders fell to 25-26-8 – still six points behind the Leafs and in 12th place – and continued their prolonged stretch without back-to-back wins. The last time New York won two in a row was Jan. 19-21.

"Obviously, we didn't have a good start," center [Josh Bailey](#) said. "We were not on our game, and that's what happens when you're not on your game teams are fired up and ready to play. You're not going to come out on the winning end if you play the way we did tonight."

Off since a 6-2 win against Florida on Wednesday, the Senators felt no ill effects from their four-day break. In fact, it was 1-0 after just 68 seconds.

A poor clearing attempt from the Islanders was intercepted at the blue line by Karlsson, who skated down

the right side to the goal line and threw the puck off Poulin and into the net at 1:08. The goal was Karlsson's 11th of the season.

Twenty-seven seconds later during a delayed penalty, Spezza made it 2-0 when fired a one-timer past Poulin from the right hash marks for his 26th of the season. Seconds before, Poulin was clumsy in his attempted poke-check of [Chris Neil](#), tripping him and allowing Ottawa to take advantage. [Nick Foligno](#) picked up the puck behind the net and passed out to a waiting Spezza, who made no mistake.

"It was nice we got two days to actually rest," said Spezza, after extending his points streak to six games, during which he has seven goals and 15 points. "We had two hard days of practice mixed in there, but not many teams get that at this point in the year. That's the advantage of us playing so many games early."

Added Karlsson: "Coach has been nice to us giving us some complete days off, and we wanted to show him that we want more of those."

Poulin, back in net after a 33-save performance Saturday in a 4-3 win against Carolina, could not repeat and was pulled after conceding two goals on five shots.

Later in the first, Karlsson struck again to make it 3-0. Just after Ottawa's first power play expired, [Sergei Gonchar](#) passed down the right boards to [Daniel Alfredsson](#), who laid a perfect pass in between the circles for Karlsson to snap past Montoya at 14:03.

The second period brought more frustrations for the Isles faithful. The Senators were constantly threatening, and Phillips made it 4-0 at 9:37. Seventeen seconds after [Steve Staios](#) went to the box for delay of game, Gonchar crossed to [Kyle Turris](#), who laid it off for Phillips to fire high past Montoya for his third of the season.

The Isles threatened in the third period, tallying the first nine shots and testing Anderson on a couple of occasions. His best stop came on [Matt Martin](#) from point-blank range after a giveaway.

Midway through the period, Lee scored his first of the season when his point shot off a swing pass from Karlsson flew past Montoya's glove at 9:49. Spezza made it 6-0 off another incisive Karlsson pass, collecting in the left circle and roofing it for his 27th of the year on the power play at 10:57. Spezza now has seven goals in his last five games.

"That was one of our better ones for sure," Phillips said. "Coming in after the break, it's a strong focus – teams starting to play playoff hockey, everybody's raising their level of play."

The Islanders will try to revive their playoffs hopes once again when they face Buffalo on Tuesday.

"We can't just have our heads hanging," said captain [Mark Streit](#) when asked about the quick turnaround. "We know we have to come back strong. It's the time of the year when you have to turn the page and be ready tomorrow.

"It's a perfect thing. You don't want to have that feeling (of losing) for another two or three days."

Islanders crushed by Senators

Associated Press

February 20, 2012

In a Presidents Day matinee, Nassau Coliseum turned into the White Flag House.

The Islanders surrendered three first-period goals, routed from the start of a 6-0 loss yesterday to the Senators.

“There wasn’t any intensity in our game,” Islanders defenseman and captain Mark Streit said. “We’ve had a couple of bad starts, but we topped it today.”

The inconsistent Islanders (25-26-8) squandered their fourth chance in their last six games to move above the .500 mark.

“This was very disappointing. We came with no physicality and stood around and watched their best players,” Islander coach Jack Capuano said. “You have to battle and compete and we didn’t.”

Erik Karlsson and Jason Spezza scored in the opening 1:35 for the Senators. Capuano then yanked goalie Kevin Poulin for Al Montoya, but Ottawa kept pouring it on.

Karlsson and Spezza finished with two goals apiece and defensemen Chris Phillips and Brian Lee also scored for the Senators.

The Islanders, 9-5-2 in their last 16 games, remained six points behind Toronto for the conference’s final playoff spot.

Flu keeps Evgeni Nabokov off the ice

Arthur Staple

Newsday

February 21, 2012

[Evgeni Nabokov](#) still didn't return to skating Monday and did not join his teammates on their flight to Buffalo after the game.

Nabokov has been off the ice and away from the team since coming down with the flu Thursday in St. Louis. Because he wasn't able to skate Monday, there was little point in taking him on the trip for Tuesday night's game against the Sabres.

He allowed three or more goals in only three of his last 11 starts before falling ill. With Nabokov out, the [Islanders](#) have allowed at least three goals in each of the last three games he's missed, going 1-2-0 during that stretch.

Hamonic goes for a spin

[Travis Hamonic](#) got back on the ice Monday, as planned. Now it's a matter of whether Hamonic, out since a deflected puck broke his nose and sent him to the hospital for surgery Feb. 4, can get enough workout time to build his conditioning back up for a return Friday against the [Rangers](#).

[Mike Mottau](#) (concussion) also skated Monday morning and appears ready to return, even though there isn't a spot for him on defense.

Jack Capuano stuck with the defense pairs that finished Saturday's game, with [Mark Streit](#) and [Andrew MacDonald](#) paired up. "Just a different look for some of our breakouts," he said.

Streit and MacDonald were on for the two quick Senators goals to open Monday's game.

Okposo shakes off flu

Kyle Okposo didn't skate Sunday because of the flu that had been going around the locker room, but was well enough to play Monday. Tim Wallace was the healthy scratch among the forwards . . . Hall of Famer [Denis Potvin](#) was back in the Coliseum, doing color on the Senators' broadcast . . . Former Islander Zenon Konopka also made his return, but only for warm-ups. He was a healthy scratch for the fifth straight game for [Ottawa](#).

Isles crushed, 6-0, at worst time possible

Arthur Staple

Newsday

February 21, 2012

They weren't ready.

In their biggest game so far, with a chance to be closer to a playoff spot than they'd been since November, the [Islanders](#) failed to pass the most basic test at this time of the season, and the [Ottawa Senators](#) reminded them how costly it is to be unprepared.

Rookie goaltender [Kevin Poulin](#) allowed two goals in the first 95 seconds Monday afternoon before being pulled, and the rest of his team was a step behind even after Al Montoya entered. The 6-0 final in front of 15,818 at [Nassau Coliseum](#) was never in doubt, leaving the Islanders six points behind eighth-place [Toronto](#) and 12 points behind the Senators.

"You can't have the emotion we had on the bench tonight," Jack Capuano said. "We needed some push-back after the first two goals, and I just didn't see it in a lot of guys."

After working hard in January to get themselves back to the edge of the Eastern Conference playoff race, the Islanders have failed to get any momentum going in February. Monday marked the fifth time this month the Isles have followed a win with a loss. The last four were in regulation and were over well before the final horn sounded.

They've been outscored 17-4 in those four losses, Monday being the third of those on home ice. This was the 10th time the Islanders have been shut out and the sixth at home, tying a franchise record set in the 1972-73 season, the organization's expansion year.

The Islanders get right back at it Tuesday night in Buffalo, but time is growing short to keep taking small steps forward and backward.

"We keep doing this to ourselves," said [Mark Streit](#), who was a minus-3. "We have good games with a lot of energy, the people like it, we like it, the coaches are happy. Then the next game, there's nothing. The intensity's missing and we have bad starts."

Monday was one of the worst. Senators defenseman [Erik Karlsson](#), who had two goals and two assists, corralled [Matt Martin](#)'s breakout pass and threw a no-angle shot from the boards that hit off Poulin's stick and went behind him at 1:08 of the first.

On a delayed penalty, [Jason Spezza](#) beat Poulin from the slot 27 seconds later, and the 21-year-old goaltender clearly was rattled by his initial mistake. Capuano pulled him and inserted Montoya, but the Islanders' skaters played as if the game already had been decided. Passes went off skates instead of sticks, Senators were left uncovered and there was no forechecking pressure.

"Stand around and watch" was how Capuano described his team's defensive-zone play. "You make good players look even better."

Just after [Michael Grabner](#) failed to get a shot on net on a shorthanded breakaway, Karlsson scored again at 14:03 of the first as an [Ottawa](#) power play ended. [Chris Phillips](#) scored on an unscreened point shot on the power play at 9:37 of the second. [Brian Lee](#) and Spezza scored in the third. The shots were 27-10 in the Sens' favor after two periods, and they were not at all misleading.

Aside from a Martin fight in the second, the only fire shown by an Islander was negative. [P.A. Parenteau](#) got 24 penalty minutes and was ejected midway through the third for arguing with referee Gord Dwyer.

"We could have been four points out of the playoffs if we win this," [Brian Rolston](#) said. "You've got to be consistent, and we let this one go."