



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Wednesday, March 7, 2012*

## **Sabres have little time to catch breath**

*Miller's workload being closely monitored by Ruff*

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 7, 2012

The Sabres know they've made their playoff chase measurably tougher by losing the one game they could not afford to lose. The setback in the showdown with Winnipeg still weighed on the team Tuesday when it finally headed home to Buffalo.

Ryan Miller, though, wants folks to realize the team that's down is not out.

Buffalo makes up the game in hand it holds over eighth-place Winnipeg tonight, and a victory over Carolina in First Niagara Center can pull the Sabres back within two points of the final postseason position.

It's a spot they could have held if not for Monday's 3-1 loss to the Jets, a defeat that diminished an otherwise successful 3-1 road trip.

"Obviously had the implications for the Eastern Conference there, but I thought we did a nice job getting on the road and battling for points," Miller said. "We put ourselves in a position to chase down eighth place, and [Monday] wasn't our night but we've got many more opportunities to go. I don't think anybody in this pack is going to run the table, so we just have to be good."

The Sabres certainly don't have the luxury of letting the disappointment of Monday's defeat impact their future outings. They'll board their plane again after hosting the Hurricanes and depart for Thursday's game in Boston and Saturday's outing in Ottawa.

"We've got to look ahead and not be negative," captain Jason Pominville said. "We're not going to be home much, but the games that we are home we've got to make sure we play well and win."

Coach Lindy Ruff left the Canadian prairie bemoaning the fact his team simply lost the wrong game on the four-game journey. The meeting with Winnipeg was one of those "four-point games" people point to as so important. A brief examination shows why.

Say the Sabres went 3-1 but lost to Vancouver instead of Winnipeg. Buffalo would have met the Jets four points back with a game in hand. A victory would've put them two points out with a game to be played.

Instead, they went to Winnipeg just two points out, lost and found themselves four points back. It hurts almost as much as the 3-0 start helped.

"I think coming off four [games] in six [nights] and playing the teams we played and how hard we had to battle, you're happy with where you're at," Ruff said. "But we know that we could've been in a lot better position if at least we got a point [Monday]. That's the part that stings."

The Sabres were a tired team at times during the trip through Anaheim, San Jose, Vancouver and Winnipeg. They figure to play with fatigue through the final 16 games of the season. They have an unenviable schedule, one that features six more road trips and three sets of back-to-back games.

Seven of the remaining games are against teams that held a playoff spot Tuesday, while five others are against squads within five points of the postseason in the jumbled conference races.

"We carried some momentum going home," left wing Thomas Vanek said. "This time of the year, you win one, you put it behind you. You lose one, you put it behind you. That's the mentality as a team right now."

The immediate schedule leaves Ruff with a tough goaltending question. He could continue to ride Miller, who has started 19 of the last 20 games. If he chooses to give the netminder a day off, the question becomes which game to use Jhonas Enroth.

The backup is 2-0 against the Hurricanes in his career with a 0.49 goals-against average and .986 save percentage. Carolina, though, is in 14th place and seems an easier target than Northeast Division-leading Boston. The coach could decide to run his top player out against the weaker team to ensure a two-point showing.

If Ruff does go with Enroth tonight and use Miller on Thursday, he's sending the reigning First Star of the Week into what's sure to be a ravenous environment. The Sabres haven't been to Boston since Nov. 12, the date of the infamous collision between Milan Lucic and Miller.

The aggressive team and crowd in Boston would no doubt salivate at the chance to torment the goalie who has beaten the Bruins twice in the last month, allowing just one goal in the process.

Miller, though, was ridden hard by a mocking Winnipeg crowd and likely wouldn't be too bothered in Boston.

"Not too many people have thousands of people chanting their name trying to throw them off," Miller said, "so obviously they have some small amount of respect for me someplace in their hearts."

[jvogl@buffnews.com](mailto:jvogl@buffnews.com)

## **It's crunch time and Leino's enjoying it**

*Leino feeling comfortable at center between Gerbe and Kaleta*

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 7, 2012

This is the time of year when Ville Leino is supposed to play better. He is.

The Sabres' center, who has struggled through much of his first season in Buffalo, has brought life to his game since the All-Star break. Though not producing at the rate many expected, he had his first multigoal game of the season during the Western road trip and has looked good at center between left wing Nathan Gerbe and right wing Patrick Kaleta.

"Ever since we put him in the shutdown position, he's played well," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "His play in the second half here has been real good for our team, and there's probably better things to come yet."

The Sabres signed Leino to a six-year, \$27 million deal based largely on his postseason performances. He recorded 10 goals and 26 points in 31 games for Philadelphia during the last two playoffs seasons.

The Sabres are four points out of a playoff spot, so they are considering the final 16 games -- including tonight's home game against Carolina -- as the start of the postseason. It's the time of year Leino relishes.

"There's so many games during the regular season that it's sometimes tough to get excited," Leino said. "You're obviously playing for a win, but now you're playing for the big things, especially now that we need to win games."

"It's our playoffs now, so everything counts: every shift, every stride, every pass, every shot. It's exciting. You're really playing for something, which doesn't happen in Game 22 or 42 or whatever. But it's exciting and I'm having a lot of fun out there. It's a different vibe."

Leino balked at playing center earlier in the season, but the erstwhile winger seems to have accepted the latest assignment in the middle.

"Since the break, I've felt good whether I was playing the wing or center," he said. "I've felt comfortable playing, and more comfortable at center as the games have gone on."

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The line of center Brad Boyes, left wing Matt Ellis and right wing Corey Tropp scored the only goal in Monday's 3-1 loss to Winnipeg, with Tropp pushing home Ellis' goal-line attempt. The unit has earned rave reviews lately.

"You want every line to treat the shifts the way that line treats a shift," Ruff said. "It's making it as hard as possible on the other team to get it in your zone, and once they get it in the other team's zone they don't relinquish the puck unless you take it from them. In Matty's case and Tropp's case, they're hard bodies on the puck and they don't give it up.

"It's a little bit frustrating on the opposition, and there's a little bit of a lesson for even the rest of the guys on our team."

...

Drew Schiestel started this season in line for an early call-up from Rochester if something happened to the Sabres' defense. Now he doesn't even play for the Amerks.

The Sabres loaned the defenseman to the Texas Stars for the rest of the season Tuesday. Buffalo hopes the move will allow Schiestel to get playing time on Dallas' American Hockey League affiliate. An AHL All-Star last season and a second-round pick in the 2007 draft, Schiestel had fallen to seventh on the Amerks' depth chart.

Schiestel, who turns 23 next month and will be a restricted free agent this summer, remains the property of the Sabres. The team tried trading him, the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle reports, but a deal fell through on the morning of the Feb. 27 trade deadline.

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Sabres fans watched with record-setting interest as the team made a historic run up the West Coast. Buffalo's late-night victories in Anaheim, San Jose and Vancouver -- which marked the first time they'd garnered all the available points in the Pacific time zone -- averaged a 7.1 rating on MSG, the highest of any Western Conference road trip since the channel began broadcasting the team's games in 2005-06.

The 7.1 rating indicates an average of 7.1 percent of television-equipped households tuned into each game at some point. In the Buffalo market, that translates to approximately 46,000 households. The 1-0 win in San Jose on Thursday featured the highest-rated broadcast, earning an 8.0 rating.

"Sabres fans are certainly willing to give up sleep for their Sabres hockey, especially as the team fights for playoff contention," Sabres President Ted Black said. "Even after the clock struck midnight back in Buffalo, our fans stayed glued to their sets and we were all rewarded with some of our best hockey of the season."

[jvogl@buffnews.com](mailto:jvogl@buffnews.com)

## **Sabres return home to face Hurricanes**

Davis Harper

NHL.com

March 7, 2012

### **HURRICANES (25-27-14) at SABRES (30-28-8)**

**TV: FS-Carolinas (HD), MSG-Buffalo**

**Last 10:** Carolina 5-2-3; Buffalo 6-2-2.

**Season Series:** This is the fourth and final meeting of the season. Carolina holds a 2-1 edge by way of their 4-2 win at the RBC Center on Jan. 6. The 'Canes also won the other meeting at First Niagara Center, a 4-3 affair during the first week of the season.

**Big Story:** Carolina and Buffalo are separated by just two places and four points in the Eastern Conference standings after the former's overtime win against Washington on Tuesday night. The Sabres have used a late-season surge to pull within four points of eighth-place Winnipeg. However, Buffalo's eight-game point streak came to an end Monday against those same Jets.

#### **Team Scope:**

**Hurricanes:** After losing two straight at the RBC Center, Carolina entered the nation's capital on Tuesday with the worst away record in the NHL (7-14-8). The 'Canes were facing a Washington team desperate to re-enter the playoff race. Against all odds, Carolina took advantage of two odd-man rushes, an all-too-easy breakaway and a fortuitous bounce to bury the Caps, 4-3 in overtime. The 'Canes went down 2-0 early in the game, but took advantage of Washington's mental mistakes to score three times – starting with a [Jiri Tlustý](#) finish at 4:51 of the second – in 15 minutes to take the lead.

"When you get down by two like that and make it a one-goal game again, it's huge, especially on the road," Sutter said. "It was a big momentum boost, and we managed to play pretty well from that point forward."

**Sabres:** If it wasn't already a known fact, Buffalo brought their reliance on goaltender [Ryan Miller](#) into stark reality over the past two weeks. The Sabres ace was in net for each of Buffalo's games over their 6-0-2 stretch from Feb. 17-March 3, shutting opponents out twice and giving up just 13 goals. On Monday in Winnipeg, Buffalo again turned to Miller in the fourth and final game of Buffalo's recent road trip.

Once again, he was good – stopping 26 of 29 shots for a .903 save percentage – just not good enough, as Winnipeg broke a 1-1 tie in the third period as goals from Blake Wheeler and Chris Thorburn proved the difference.

"It was a hard-fought game," said Miller. "Both teams understood the position they're in. Unfortunately, we broke in the third period."

**Who's Hot:** Carolina captain [Eric Staal](#) had the secondary assist of Thrush's goal, running his point streak to 12 games. He has seven goals and 14 assists in that span.

**Injury Report:** [Drayson Bowman](#) missed Tuesday's game with a sinus infection. [Tuomo Ruutu](#) is going to miss three weeks with an upper-body injury. ... Buffalo's [Cody McCormick](#) is out indefinitely with an upper-body injury, while [Jochen Hecht](#) is on injured reserve with a concussion.

**Stat Pack:** As good as Miller has been – and he has been very good, with a 1.67 goals-against average over Buffalo's last nine games – Carolina's [Cam Ward](#) has enjoyed a measure of success against the Sabres. Ward is 4-1-1 over his last six meetings with Buffalo, including wins in both starts this season. He kept the 'Canes in the game Tuesday night, making 46 saves.

**Puck Drop:** Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff said he was disappointed in Monday's result, highlighting the importance of getting points from every game.

"We knew that they would probably be a fresher team," Ruff said. "It's disappointing to have it 1-1 after almost 50 minutes and make the mistake that we made. We could have been in a lot better position if we at least got a point tonight, and that is the part that stings."

"I didn't talk about the road trip," Ruff replied when asked about his post-game message to his club. "I talked about how we let a point slip away. We don't have that luxury."

## **Carolina (25-27-14) at Buffalo (30-28-8)**

Jeff Bartl

STATS

March 6, 2012

Every point is crucial for the [Buffalo Sabres](#) in their pursuit of the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot, and a victory over one of the worst road teams in the NHL would help them keep pace.

Buffalo seeks a season-high fourth straight home victory Wednesday when it meets the [Carolina Hurricanes](#), who continue their five-game road trip.

The Sabres (30-28-8) are tied for 10th place in the East and are four points behind eighth-place Winnipeg after falling to the Jets 3-1 on Monday. The loss snapped an eight-game point streak for Buffalo, which finished its road trip 3-1-1.

"I think if anybody would've said before we left that we'd win three of (five), you'd be pretty happy," coach Lindy Ruff said. "We just lost to the wrong team. We know we could've been in a lot better position if at least we got a point. That's the part that stings."

Buffalo has earned a point in 14 of its last 18 games, but Ruff said he didn't talk to the team about how well it's played recently.

"I talked about how we let a point slip away. We don't have that luxury," Ruff said.

The Sabres will welcome a Carolina team with a league-low eight road victories, though its first came in Buffalo with a 4-3 win Oct. 14.

The Hurricanes (25-27-14) began their longest trip of the season with a 4-3 overtime win over Washington on Tuesday, as [Cam Ward](#) made 46 saves.

Captain [Eric Staal](#) had an assist to give him seven goals and 14 assists during his 12-game point streak, which is the franchise's longest since it was known as the Hartford Whalers prior to the 1997-98 season.

"We felt like we played a pretty solid road game and were deserving to get the two points," Staal said.

Ward made 39 saves in October's win in Buffalo, then stopped 31 shots in a 4-2 victory Jan. 6 to improve to 4-0-1 with a 1.78 goals-against average in his last five starts versus the Sabres.

Both victories this season came against [Ryan Miller](#), who is 0-3-1 with a 2.79 GAA in his last four starts against the Hurricanes.



Miller, though, has played well of late, going 6-1-1 with a 1.60 GAA in his last eight starts. He said despite the Sabres being outside the East playoff picture at the moment, anything can happen down the stretch.

“We have plenty more opportunities (to earn points),” Miller said. “I don’t think anyone in this pack (of playoff contenders) is going to run the table, so we just have to be good.”

The Hurricanes have not been officially eliminated, though they are second-to-last in the conference and eight points behind Winnipeg with 16 games remaining. They’ve remained in the hunt by picking up at least one point in 18 of their last 22 games, going 11-4-7.

Carolina has played six consecutive one-goal games, and recent matchups with Buffalo also have been tight.

Prior to the most recent meeting, the previous six were decided by one goal, including the Sabres’ 1-0 win Nov. 18.

Sabres leading scorer [Jason Pominville](#), who has gone without a point in six straight games, scored in that contest.

## **Strong road trip has Sabres in position for a run at eighth place**

*Team hosts Carolina tonight*

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

March 7, 2012

BUFFALO — Go ahead, pick the dates the underachieving Sabres appeared finished and primed to play out the string for a lottery pick.

There are plenty, you know.

There was that embarrassing 5-0 dismantling Jan. 16 in Detroit, after which an emotional Ryan Miller said a trade wouldn't help the Sabres. Two nights later, the Blackhawks throttled them 6-2 in Chicago, the third of five straight losses on a six game-trip.

On Feb. 16, the Flyers ran them out of Philadelphia, scoring seven straight goals in a 7-2 drubbing. The next night at home, the Sabres' fourth consecutive loss, a 4-3 shootout to Montreal, kicked them into 15<sup>th</sup> place, nine points back of the final playoff spot.

Somehow, the Sabres, who host the Carolina Hurricanes tonight at the First Niagara Center, keep bouncing back from each disastrous stretch.

A triumph Monday in Winnipeg against the Jets would've propelled them into eighth place for the first time since Dec. 19. The Sabres fell 3-1.

Still, their 3-1-1 road trip, which included three Pacific time zone wins, a franchise first, has positioned the Sabres for an unlikely run at the final playoff spot.

It'll be an arduous task, however.

Right now, the 11<sup>th</sup>-place Sabres (68 points) trail Winnipeg (72) by four with a game in hand. The Jets are on an 88-point pace, so the Sabres could need around 21 points in their final 16 games to grab eighth place. They're currently enjoying a 6-1-2 run.

They have seven home games and nine road contests left. The remaining slate's a mixed bag, as they visit defending champion Boston twice (Thursday and the April 7 season finale) and the No. 1 overall New York Rangers once (March 23). The Sabres also get cellar-dwelling Montreal twice at home.

They play seven times against teams that had a playoff spot as of Tuesday afternoon. The Sabres face Washington (70 points) and Tampa Bay (68), the clubs between them and Winnipeg, once each on the road.

Of course, with way Miller's been playing goal for the last six weeks, the Sabres have a chance against any opponent.

The 31-year-old looks every bit like the Vezina Trophy winner and Olympic hero from two years ago. In the last four games, the American's 3-1 with a 1.51 goals-against average and .959 save percentage.

Miller compiled arguably the greatest consecutive goaltending efforts in team history last week, stopping a combined 82 shots during shutouts in Anaheim and San Jose, including 43 on Wednesday against the Ducks.

But Miller sounds like a goalie desperately in need of some rest. He's started the last nine games and played in 20 straight.

"I'm tired from this trip," Miller told reporters Monday in Winnipeg. "I can't even talk right now."

With tonight kicking off another set of back-to-back games and five contests in eight days, Sabres coach Lindy Ruff could turn to backup Jhonas Enroth for a rare nod.

The rookie's struggled following an amazing beginning to his first full NHL season, going 1-9-2 in his last 12 decisions. He hasn't won since Nov. 26. He got yanked from his last start, the atrocious effort in Philadelphia.

But Enroth blanked the Hurricanes on Nov. 18 in Carolina and has allowed only one goal in two career appearances against them. At some point, Miller has to rest.

Some offense would certainly relieve some pressure on the goaltending. The Sabres, despite their recent surge, still don't have much.

Their 5-3 win Saturday in Vancouver was the first time they had scored four goals in a road tilt since Oct. 8 in Berlin.

Their supposed top line of Jason Pominville, Derek Roy and Thomas Vanek has generated little recently.

Pominville, a model of consistency all season, is pointless in six straight. The captain hadn't gone more than three games without a point prior to the current drought. He's also a minus-5 in the past two contests.

Meanwhile, Vanek is pointless in four games, has one goal in nine games and just four in his last 23. The Austrian, once on pace for a career season, could be playing through an injury. He missed three games in early February.

Roy's pointless in three after tallying three goals and nine points in seven games, his best stretch this year. He has only 36 points this season.

Some secondary offense from four rare contributors – Brad Boyes, Tyler Ennis, Ville Leino and Drew Stafford – has helped recently.

So far, the Sabres haven't received much from newcomer Cody Hodgson, who will make his home debut tonight. The rookie center, acquired at the trade deadline from Vancouver for winger Zack Kassian, is pointless in four games.

## **Sabres loan Schiestel to Dallas' AHL affiliate**

*Team hopes struggling prospect can find playing time*

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

March 7, 2012

BUFFALO — Last winter, Sabres defense prospect Drew Schiestel earned an AHL All-Star berth.

With 23 points and a gaudy plus-15 rating in Portland, a recall seemed inevitable for the 59<sup>th</sup> pick in 2007. Then, two games before the big tilt, Schiestel tore his ACL, shelving him for the season.

The 22-year-old hurt his knee again on opening night for Rochester this season, his first appearance in eight months.

On Tuesday, the Sabres loaned Schiestel to the Texas Stars, Dallas' AHL affiliate, to get him more playing time.

Incredibly, Schiestel had dropped to about eighth on the Americans' depth chart. He was recently a healthy scratch four times in nine games and made his last two appearances at forward.

“If you would have asked our people last year, he would have been the top defensive prospect,” Sabres amateur scouting director Kevin Devine, who oversees the Amerks, told the Rochester Democrat and Chronicle.

Devine said the injuries have stunted Schiestel's growth. He's played only 88 games in the last two seasons.

“We certainly haven't given up on Drew as a prospect,” Devine told the paper. “But we have decisions to make this summer on defensemen.”

Schiestel, who has 12 points and minus-3 rating in 43 games, is a restricted free agent following the season.

## **Sabres unable to find a forward for Amerks' playoff push**

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

March 7, 2012

Attempts on Monday to improve the Rochester Americans' roster failed, so it will be status quo as the American Hockey League team continues its push for a Calder Cup playoff berth.

The parent Buffalo Sabres had hoped to find the Amerks help at forward through a loan with another team but nothing materialized. One deal fell through late Monday morning.

Thus, when the AHL released clear-day rosters on Tuesday, the only alteration to the Amerks list was the absence of defenseman Drew Schiestel.

Schiestel was loaned to the AHL's Texas Stars. The Amerks received no one in return, even though they were trying to find help at forward.

All moves involving players on NHL contracts needed to be loans, since the NHL trade deadline was Feb. 27.

Schiestel is in his third season, but his progress was derailed by two knee injuries in the past 14 months. A knee surgery ended his 2010-11 season after 45 games, and then he suffered a sprained knee in his Amerk debut.

Even when he returned, however, he wasn't playing his A-game. By February, he was clearly seventh or eighth on the depth chart. He sat out four games and then last weekend played twice at forward, not defense, because of callups and injuries.

When the Sabres made Schiestel available on Monday to other AHL teams, they wanted assurances that he would play for the new club.

"We certainly haven't given up on Drew as a prospect," said Kevin Devine, director of amateur scouting for the Sabres who oversees Amerk hockey operations. "But we do have decisions to make this summer on defensemen. This will give Drew a chance to play and hopefully he can find his game and make our decision easy this summer."

Schiestel and three other Amerk defensemen — T.J. Brennan, Alex Biega and Dennis Persson — will become restricted free agents this summer. The Sabres must decide whether to re-sign, or cut loose, some or all.

Two highly regarded 2010 draft picks are turning pro next season: Mark Pysyk (first round, 23rd overall) and Jerome Gauthier-Leduc (third round, 68th).

[KevinO@DemocratandChronicle.com](mailto:KevinO@DemocratandChronicle.com)

Twitter: @KevinDandC

## **Varone an emerging star for Amerks**

Matthew Coller

WGR 550

March 7, 2012

Back in December, you never would have guessed Phil Varone would lead the Rochester Americans in scoring. You couldn't have fathomed he would play an enormous role in the team's push for a playoff race. And you certainly wouldn't have seen him getting the call in a key shootout.

But that's exactly what happened Sunday night against the stacked Toronto Marlies. Varone scored the game-winning shootout goal on a nifty move to complete a two-goal comeback.

"My brother taught me the move," he said. "I've been doing it ever since. I noticed on Paulie's (Szczuchura) shot that the goalie was so active in net, he wasn't very calm. I kind of read off that stuff.

Varone's brother Rick played at SUNY Oswego and also in the IHL.

The Amerks' center wasn't just the star because of his shootout goal, he also had an assist to give him 41 points in 59 games this season.

Amazing when you consider he had six points after 22 games. Do a little math, that means 35 points in the last 37.

"I have to give coach Rolston credit," Varone said. "He gave me an opportunity when there were injuries and call-ups. I just needed a little bit of confidence and a little bit of time in the league getting used to the pro life."

The 22-year-old forward was signed to a one-year contract by the Amerks in late August after playing four years in the OHL. He has flown under the radar because he isn't a "name" like Marcus Foligno, Luke Adam or Brayden McNabb, but his emergence has played an enormous role in keeping the team in the playoff race.

Rochester's win moved them into seventh place in the Western conference with 65 points. The race couldn't be any closer. The Amerks are two points out of fourth place and one point out of 11<sup>th</sup>.

### **ADDITIONAL NOTES**

**Luke Adam** has been under some scrutiny from fans who expected him to light the league on fire after his demotion from the Buffalo Sabres. His play has been at times very strong, but he's struggled to finish chances. On Twitter he joked that he is "petitioning for soccer nets" after missing an open one Sunday night. The word is he needs to work on his two-way game and that's obvious from struggles in the defensive end. After 10 games in the AHL, he has one goal and

five assists. People close to the situation say that his attitude about the demotion has been very good.

**TJ Brennan** now leads the AHL in goals by a defenseman with 13 after another power play goal Sunday. He continues to flash an NHL-caliber point shot. Maybe equally as impressive, he was very physical against the Marlies, even dropping the gloves to answer for a big hit. Watching his progress, you wonder where the Sabres will be able to fit him in the near future, but he appears to be ready for the big show.

**David Leggio** has been flat-out amazing. He stopped all five shooters in the shootout and single-handedly kept the Amerks from disaster in the first period. This coming while playing every game in a three-in-three. Leggio, a Buffalo native, has never really been given a chance to be a No. 1 goalie outside of a stretch run in Portland last season. He's showing that he's not only capable in the AHL, but possibly good enough to be a backup in the NHL.

“He's been lights out,” Varone said of his goalie. “He's a phenomenal goaltender. He's been really focused and he knows what his game plan is going in. He doesn't get overly excited, he's very calm which is a calming influence on the team as well.”

**Evan Rankin** was officially signed to an AHL contract. Great move. He has jumped right back in where he left off after being sidelined with a concussion. He's got 15 points in 18 games. “How was this guy in the ECHL?” Is the constant sentiment in the press box while watching him blow by opponents, make sharp passes and drive to the net. Earlier in the year, he said he'd never been given much of a chance to show what he could do – he's doing that now and it's been something.

**Travis Turnbull** made a perfect pass to Mark Voakes to create the game-tying goal for the Amerks. He's shown some offensive ability – 22 points in 49 games – to compliment his toughness. He's played an important role in shutting down opponents' top players and ticking them off.

## Ward makes 46 saves as 'Canes edge Caps in OT

NHL.com

March 6, 2012

Not even 49 shots on goal were enough for the reeling [Washington Capitals](#) on Tuesday night.

[Cam Ward](#) made 46 saves and [Justin Faulk](#) scored at 3:38 of overtime as the [Carolina Hurricanes](#) beat the Caps by a 4-3 score at the Verizon Center.

After suffering back-to-back shutout defeats on home ice, Washington went ahead 2-0 before Carolina rallied and grabbed the lead on a breakaway goal by [Brandon Sutter](#) at 1:45 of the third period.

The Capitals forced overtime when [Brooks Laich](#) scored off a centering pass from [Marcus Johansson](#) at 17:08 of the third, but Faulk took a centering pass from Sutter and fired a shot past [Michal Neuvirth](#) to hand Washington with its third straight loss.

The defeat left Washington -- which has qualified for the Stanley Cup Playoffs four straight years -- four points behind first-place Florida in the Southeast Division and two points in back of Winnipeg for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

Carolina scored off two odd-man rushes, received a gift-wrapped breakaway and benefited from a strange bounce off the back boards. It all added up to a rare road win for the Hurricanes and another frustrating night for the Capitals.

"Turnovers. Missed assignments. Just not playing the situation," Washington's [Brooks Laich](#) said. "If you're going to give up goals, you want to make them work for it."

Washington salvaged a point in the standings when Laich scored off a centering pass from [Marcus Johansson](#) at 17:08 of the third.

"It's not what we're hoping for, but it's better than nothing," Capitals right wing [Troy Brouwer](#) said of picking up a point in the standings.

It was the Hurricanes' eighth road win, still the fewest in the NHL.

"We felt like we played a pretty solid road game tonight and were deserving to get the two points," Carolina captain [Eric Staal](#) said.

Staal extended his point-scoring streak to 12 games with an assist on the Hurricanes' first goal. Staal's streak, during which he's registered seven goals and 14 assists, is the longest by a



Carolina player since the team moved from Hartford before the 1997-98 season.

Brouwer notched his 18th goal of the season at 13:59 of the first period to end Washington's scoreless run at 133 minutes, 59 seconds. After firing a shot from the left circle, Brouwer plucked the puck off Ward's right skate, whisked around the net and put in a backhand from the right side for a 1-0 lead.

It was the Capitals' first goal against Carolina in three games, following shutout defeats of 3-0 on Jan. 20 and 5-0 on Feb. 20.

Beagle made it 2-0 at 4:11 of the second period by cashing in the rebound of [Dmitry Orlov](#)'s shot from the left point. Beagle had gone 48 games since Dec. 28, 2010, without a goal.

"It seems like whenever they score, it's too easy," Beagle said. "We're giving them easy goals from either turnovers or missed coverage. I was guilty of a couple turnovers tonight, too."

Fifty seconds later, Carolina's [Jiri Tlustý](#) converted a centering pass from [Jerome Samson](#).

"When you get down by two like that and make it a one-goal game again, it's huge, especially on the road," Sutter said. "It was a big momentum boost, and we managed to play pretty well from that point forward."

The Hurricanes tied it when [Tim Gleason](#) took a shot that bounced off the back boards to [Chad LaRose](#), who beat Neuvirth from the left side at 8:30.

"It's one of them hockey plays that just happens, and I don't blame Neuvy on that one," Capitals coach Dale Hunter said.

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

## **Faulk scores for Canes in overtime**

David Ginsburg  
Associated Press  
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WASHINGTON -- Playoff hockey, it isn't.

If the Washington Capitals are going to make it to the postseason for the fifth straight time, they must lift their level of play. And they'd better do it quickly.

Justin Faulk scored the game-winner at 3:38 of overtime, Cam Ward stopped 46 shots, and the Carolina Hurricanes took advantage of several Washington mistakes in a 4-3 victory Tuesday night.

Faulk took a centering pass from Brandon Sutter and fired the puck past goaltender Michal Neuvirth to saddle the Capitals with their third successive defeat, although Washington did get a point by forcing overtime late in regulation.

Carolina scored off two odd-man rushes, received a gift-wrapped breakaway and benefited from a strange bounce off the back boards. It all added up to a rare road win for the Hurricanes and another miserable night for the Capitals.

Washington went ahead 2-0 before Carolina came back to take the lead on a breakaway goal by Sutter at 1:45 of the third. The tally came after Capitals defenseman Dennis Wideman took a futile whack at the bouncing puck in an effort to keep it in the Washington zone.

Washington salvaged a point in the standings when Laich scored off a centering pass from Marcus Johansson at 17:08 of the third.

It was the Hurricanes' eighth road win, still the fewest in the NHL.

"We felt like we played a pretty solid road game tonight and were deserving to get the two points," Carolina captain Eric Staal said.

Staal extended his point-scoring streak to 12 games with an assist on the Hurricanes' first goal. Staal's streak, during which he's registered seven goals and 14 assists, is the longest by a Carolina player since the team moved from Hartford, Conn., before the 1997-98 season.

But this one was about the team, which effectively bounced back after Laich's late tally.

"The last two or three years, a lot of times we've had tight games here in Washington and lost our fair share in overtime," Sutter said. "To come back and win it like that was a good feeling."

Troy Brouwer notched his 18th goal of the season at 13:59 of the first period to end Washington's scoreless run. After firing a shot from the left circle, Brouwer plucked the puck off

Ward's right skate, whisked around the net and put in a backhand from the right side for a 1-0 lead.

Beagle made it 2-0 at 4:11 of the second by cashing in the rebound of Dmitry Orlov's shot from the left point. Beagle had gone 48 games since Dec. 28, 2010, without a goal.

Fifty seconds later, Carolina's Jiri Tlustý converted a centering pass from Jerome Samson.

"When you get down by two like that and make it a one-goal game again, it's huge, especially on the road," Sutter said. "It was a big momentum boost, and we managed to play pretty well from that point forward."

The Hurricanes tied it when Tim Gleason took a shot that bounced off the back boards to Chad LaRose, who beat Neuvirth from the left side at 8:30.

## **Canes' Skinner working his way back to old form**

Chip Alexander

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RALEIGH -- For Jeff Skinner of the Carolina Hurricanes, tonight's game against the Washington Capitals at the Verizon Center offers a convenient measuring stick.

It was on Jan. 15 that Skinner returned from a concussion to face the Caps in Washington after being sidelined for 16 games. Since that last visit to the Verizon Center, last year's Calder Trophy winner has had some ups and downs, some good moments and not-so-good moments for the Canes (24-27-14).

"You come back and you're anxious. You're excited to be back and want to get back to where you left off," Skinner, 19, said Monday. "Sometimes you end up forcing it. That can only hurt you.

"But sometimes it's tough to kind of rein it back in and regroup and take it one step at a time and not rush things."

Before the concussion, caused by an open-ice hit by Edmonton's Andy Sutton on Dec. 7, Skinner had scored 12 goals and notched 12 assists in 30 games, exceeding the pace that made him the NHL rookie of the year last season. In the 19 games since his return, he has five goals and six assists.

The concussion was Skinner's first. While he hoped he would quickly regain the form he had before the injury, that he would again wade into the high-traffic areas around the net to score goals and wouldn't back away from any hits, there was no way of knowing until he was back on the ice.

"I didn't really know what to expect, having never been through it," Skinner said. "In this stretch, I probably haven't been playing my best hockey. I don't think there's any excuses for it. I think you just have to sort of dig deep and find ways to contribute and help the team win.

"Coming back, especially at midseason when games are starting to ramp up, to take that much time off. ... it's almost as much time off that I take during the summer. But then you have the offseason and training camp to get back up to speed. So it's a learning process and I think I've learned a lot on how to be better prepared if it were to happen again."

Mental and physical

Canes coach Kirk Muller has used Skinner at center and wing since Skinner's return. He moved Skinner back to left wing, with Jussi Jokinen at center, on Saturday against the Tampa Bay Lightning.

But regardless of Skinner's position, Muller recently said he does not want him believing he has to be the difference every shift or has to make the "game-breaking play."

"He wants to make a difference, he cares, he wants to do well," Muller said. "If he goes five or six shifts and doesn't create anything, that's OK as long as he's doing the right stuff."

But it's tough, Skinner said, not to be impatient after sitting out so long.

"As much as it is physical, coming back, a lot of it is mental," Skinner said. Under the radar

Skinner has taken some bad penalties, has had flashes of anger. But he had a three-game point streak that ended Saturday in the 4-3 overtime loss to Tampa Bay and appears to be back playing at his pace.

"I've just got to be patient," Skinner said. "You don't want to force anything. That's when you get in trouble. You get frustrated and you get off your game and you're not thinking of the right things.

"The last couple of weeks I've felt better mentally and physically getting back and contributing."

A year ago, when he scored 31 goals and his 63 points led the NHL's rookies, Skinner received teen-idol fawning and was besieged with media requests.

The stretch run of his second season should be a lot more sedate - not that he's pining for attention.

"It's not bad to sort of fly under the radar," Skinner said. "Last year, with everything, was a lot. Coming into my second year I was more prepared for it and knew how to handle it.

"But I don't mind it. Those little things are secondary - if they're there, if they're not, they're not. You can't get hung up on it because you can't really control it. I just have to go out and play."

Alexander: 919-829-8945