



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*Wednesday, March 21, 2012*

## **Sabres' Foligno having big impact**

*Line of Ennis, Stafford and Foligno remains red hot*

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 21, 2012

The Buffalo Sabres have had plenty of rookies play major roles in their history, most recently the Calder Trophy-winning season of Tyler Myers in 2010.

But it's hard to imagine many first-year players having the kind of sudden impact in March that Marcus Foligno is adding. In the heat of the playoff race.

Heading into tonight's game against the Montreal Canadiens, with the Sabres looking to tie Washington for the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference, the 20-year-old has combined with Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford to form a trio that has quickly ascended to the role of Buffalo's top line.

The numbers are astounding:

- In the five games since Foligno joined the club from Rochester, the trio has 11 goals, 14 assists and a plus-22 rating. Ennis has four goals, five assists and is plus-9 while Stafford is 2-7-9/+7.
- Foligno has five goals and two assists with a plus-6 rating in six games (he played one scoreless outing in the NHL in December). In Sabres history, the only players with seven or more points in their first six NHL games were Phil Housley (9) and Ray Sheppard (7).
- Among active NHLers, the only other players who scored five goals in their first six career games were Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin (7) and Anaheim's Teemu Selanne (5).

"It's a great start so I'm pretty excited," Foligno said after the Sabres met Tuesday afternoon in First Niagara Center. "It's just the confidence I've built from the first game being called up here.

Playing with Ennis and Stafford is huge but I just want to keep it rolling, not get overconfident and stay level-headed."

Still, Foligno admitted he was floored when he learned about approaching the career starts of Housley and Sheppard, two former 1980s teammates of his father, Mike.

"I don't really see myself with those guys," Foligno said. "They're tremendous players, guys I looked up when I watched their highlight tapes and saw what they've done. The way it's gone for me lately, we're just connecting and I've been getting pucks to the net. Things are clicking and we really don't want to stop."

"I remember when I first stepped in, it was a pretty tough adjustment," Myers said. "I can imagine what he's going through. But he's doing very well, exceeding expectations."

The Sabres drafted Foligno in the fourth round in 2009 and have been high on him since he became a key player here last year for Canada in the World Junior Championships.

He has had a good pro debut season in Rochester, with 14 goals and 34 points, but has been noticeably more effective than he was during training camp and during his one previous NHL game Dec. 20 in Ottawa.

Foligno credits plenty of post-practice work in Rochester with first-year Amerks assistant coach Chris Taylor, the longtime Buffalo farmhand.

"We just did a lot of skill stuff and driving the net," he said. "I knew I was a big guy and might have had that 'slow feet' tag but the biggest thing was to get [my] feet going, not really stopping and to drive the net."

"He's skating better which has helped him get to places," said coach Lindy Ruff, pointing out Foligno's improved backchecking as well. "He's got a little bit more quickness and he's been able to get inside."

Foligno has scored in several ways, including on his butt, with a shot hitting his skate and with a laser-like snapshot. And he's been physical, quickly giving credence to General Manager Darcy Regier's theory that the 6-foot-2, 215-pounder could do the same things the Sabres hoped for from former No. 1 draft pick Zack Kassian before they shipped him to Vancouver.

"[Foligno's goals] are the kind of breaks you get when the work's there and the habits are there," Stafford said. "It couldn't come at a better time. He won't get outmuscled in front but not only that, he's got a good set of hands."

"He can make little passes, make little plays. He's obviously still a young player. If he keeps it up and stays with it, he can be a great player for a long time in this league."

Foligno has celebrated a couple goals with his father's trademark two-footed stomp and the elder Foligno, a former Sabres captain, has been at some of his home games to see what's going on in person.

"He just wants me to keep working hard," Marcus said. "He says you don't have to score every game. You just have to keep working hard and help your team win and that's the biggest thing."

The key to the line has been the center play of Ennis. He's on a five-game point streak that equals his career high, set earlier this season. The Sabres are 12-1-5 this season when Ennis records a point and 39-9-9 in his career when he does so.

"Ennis is just a waterbug out there," Foligno said. "It's just giving those guys space and time and we're going to be dangerous in the offensive zone. Ennis is going to put the puck on your stick nine times out of 10. He's an unbelievable playmaker."

The odd part of all this is that Foligno is on emergency recall, summoned when Thomas Vanek was injured March 7 in Boston. The Sabres won't have to make any move with Foligno since Nathan Gerbe and Matt Ellis are now injured, but there's no way he's going back to the AHL anyway.

Still, Foligno has plenty of things back in his Rochester apartment and even still has his car in the Flower City. And it's staying there so his luck doesn't change. He's driving a loaner from a family friend.

Said Foligno: "You keep the car there until things go wrong."

"He's put together a good run of games but there will be a dropoff," cautioned Ruff. "There always is, will be one or two games where we'll need him to find his game again. It happens to all young players."

But the Buffalo coach is hardly all Debby Downer about Foligno. He's liking the show the line is putting on too.

"It's fun to watch them," Ruff said. "They make a lot of good plays, show real good creativity in the offensive zone. They really like playing with each other and every time you put them out there, you feel like they have a chance to score."

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## **Relieved Myers rejoins push for playoffs**

*With seven healthy defenseman, Ruff faces lineup decision*

Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 21, 2012

Defenseman Tyler Myers has cashed in his get-out-of-NHL-jail card and is free to return to the lineup tonight against Montreal.

The Sabres went 1-0-2, collecting four of six points, during Myers' three-game suspension for his hit from behind last week on Montreal forward Scott Gomez and Myers is relieved the defense held up in his absence.

"[Monday's 7-3 win at Tampa Bay] I thought was one of our best efforts of the year," Myers said Tuesday after taking a brief skate in First Niagara Center. "I think the score showed that and with nine games left we have to keep that going.

"It's always good to see the guys do well when you're not playing. As hard as it is to watch, it's good to see we got points."

"Tyler gives us that guy who can get up ice and make a difference on the offensive side of it," said coach Lindy Ruff. "He has the ability off the right-hand side to shoot pucks without picking it off the wall and moving it to your forehand."

Rookie Brayden McNabb, who was up on emergency recall, was sent back to Rochester on Tuesday. The Sabres have seven defensemen on their roster and one is going to have to sit.

It would appear the only choices would be Mike Weber (team-worst minus-19 rating) or Alexander Sulzer, who is plus-2 in eight games since arriving from Vancouver and has proven to be a revelation in playing at least 18 minutes over the last six games.

Weber, of course, appears to be the most vulnerable but Ruff said Tuesday he does not expect to keep one blueliner in the press box repeatedly.

"We're going to keep all seven going," Ruff said. "That's the thought right now."

Myers said he didn't think he'll need to play tonight with eyes in the back of his head waiting for the Canadiens to seek some revenge for the hit; Gomez has a concussion and has not played since.

"I'm going to approach it like any other game. It's in the past," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt him. It's not my intention to go in and kill a guy like that. Whatever happens, happens. I'm just going to focus on two points."

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The Sabres called up Travis Turnbull on emergency basis Tuesday night and the 25-year-old forward would make his NHL debut if he plays tonight. Because the Sabres didn't practice Tuesday, it's unclear who the 6-foot, 197-pound Turnbull would replace; Patrick Kaleta joined Myers on the ice and may have been testing an injury.

Turnbull, a free agent signee in 2009 from the University of Michigan, has 12 goals, 15 assists and 94 penalty minutes in 53 games this year at Rochester. He is the son of former NHLer Perry Turnbull.

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The Sabres would give everyone a break, from coaches to fans to deadline-sweating reporters, if they could finish a game tonight in regulation. Their last four home games have all gone past regulation and Buffalo has won three. Three of the first five meetings with Montreal this year have gone past 60 minutes.

Buffalo leads the NHL in overtime/shootout affairs with 21, and in extended home games with 14 (no one else has more than 12). The Sabres are 11-10 overall in OT, 6-8 at home.

The Sabres are 7-6 in shootouts (2-5 home, 5-1 road), and 4-4 in deciding goals (4-3 home, 0-1 road).

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- The Sabres have gone 7-0-1 in their last eight games against Montreal, and are 4-0-1 this year. Their last regulation loss to Montreal was a 3-1 defeat in the Bell Centre on Nov. 27, 2010.

The Habs won the first three against Buffalo last year, two here, but their only breakthrough since was their 4-3 shootout win here on Feb. 17.

- Ruff said Nathan Gerbe is still unable to play due to his upper-body muscle strain. He will miss his third straight game tonight. Matt Ellis will miss his fourth straight due to a knee injury; Ruff said he is improving but not yet close to skating.

- Center Cody Hodgson's two assists Monday gave him his first multi-point game since he scored two goals for Vancouver Jan. 21 against San Jose. He had no points in his first 10 games with the Sabres.

Hodgson has now gone 13 games without a goal, dating to his tally in Vancouver's Feb. 23 shootout win at Detroit that snapped the Red Wings' NHL-record, 23-game home winning streak.

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## **Sabres need points vs. Habs in pursuit of playoff spot**

Tal Pinchevsky

NHL.com

March 20, 2012

**CANADIENS (28-32-13) at SABRES (34-29-10)**

**TV: MSG-Buffalo (HD), RDS (HD)**

**Last 10:** Montreal 4-3-3; Buffalo 6-2-2

**Season Series:** This is the sixth and final meeting between these Northeast Division rivals. Three of the previous five matchups have gone past regulation, although Buffalo has yet to lose in regulation this season against Montreal, posting a 4-0-1 record.

**Big Story:** While Montreal is hoping to climb out of the Eastern Conference basement, Buffalo is looking to continue its unlikely march toward the postseason. The Canadiens haven't lost in regulation in two weeks, going 3-0-3 in their last six, but it's the Sabres whose play has been giving their fans fits. Mere points out of the East's eighth and final playoff spot, four of their last five games have gone beyond regulation.

### **Team Scope:**

**Canadiens:** Following a 2-1-1 road trip that ended with a 3-2 overtime loss in Buffalo, the Canadiens have managed to salvage a points in the final stretch in a disappointing season. With a 4-2-3 record in March, Montreal is mostly looking to play spoiler, as the majority of its remaining games are against Eastern Conference teams battling for playoff seeding.

That wasn't necessarily the case Saturday night against the Islanders, another team looking to stay out of the Eastern Conference basement. After [Aaron Palushaj](#) opened the scoring against the Isles with his first career goal, the Canadiens fell behind 2-1 on goals from Mark Streit and Franz Nielsen. [Louis Leblanc](#)'s third-period marker tied the game, thanks mostly to a great pass from [P.K. Subban](#), but Josh Bailey would get the winner in the sixth round of the shootout, giving the visiting Islanders the win and Montreal their second straight loss.

**Sabres:** In their late-season run toward a playoff spot, Buffalo has managed to earn valuable points, going 3-0-2 in its last five games. But in a League where three-point games can hurt a team like the Sabres, who remain on the outside looking in at the Eastern Conference's top eight, Buffalo is hoping to earn more regulation wins.

The Sabres were able to get one of those important regulation wins Monday night in Tampa Bay,

thanks to two goals from [Jason Pominville](#) and [Marcus Foligno](#), to cruise to a 7-3 win over the Lightning. [Drew Stafford](#)'s three-point night helped lead the Sabres to their most prolific offensive outburst of the season.

After their game against the Canadiens, the Sabres will have to get some big wins over sizeable competition. In their final two weeks of the season, they'll have games against top Eastern Conference teams like the Rangers, Penguins, Flyers, and Bruins, against whom they've gone 2-2-1 this season.

**Who's Hot:** Subban has 9 points in his last nine games for Montreal while [Erik Cole](#) has 5 points in his last five games. ... For the Sabres, [Tyler Ennis](#) has 4 goals and 5 assists in his current five-game point streak while Foligno has 5 goals and 2 assists in five games since being called up from Rochester.

**Injury Report:** [Brian Gionta](#) (bicep surgery), [Travis Moen](#) (upper body), and [Raphael Diaz](#) (lower body) are on IR for the Habs, while [Scott Gomez](#) (concussion) and [Tomas Kaberle](#) (upper body) are questionable. ... For the Sabres, [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) is on IR while [Matt Ellis](#) (knee) is out and [Nathan Gerbe](#) is questionable after missing the win in Tampa Bay with an upper-body injury.

**Stat Pack:** With two weeks to go, every indication is that Pominville will lead the Sabres in goals this season, which would mark the first time that [Thomas Vanek](#) hasn't been the team leader in tallies since the 2005-06 campaign, Vanek's first with the Sabres. In his seventh season with Buffalo and first as its captain, Pominville has already established a career high for assists in a season and is two points shy of tying his career high of 68 points.

**Puck Drop:** Wednesday should see the return of [Tyler Myers](#), who has fully served a three-game suspension following a questionable hit that took place March 12 against these same [Montreal Canadiens](#). The recipient of that hit, [Scott Gomez](#), has not played since the collision.



## Foligno emerges for hometown Sabres

Pete Jensen

NHL.com

March 20, 2012

It's a small world after all, as the [Buffalo Sabres](#) have received the jolt they've been longing for all season from a product of their own city.

Rookie winger [Marcus Foligno](#), a Buffalo native, was recalled from the team's AHL affiliate in Rochester on March 9 and has quickly emerged as a catalyst for the Sabres in the offensive zone. In five games since the call-up, the 20-year-old has mustered a five-game point streak with 5 goals, 2 assists, a plus-6 rating and 8 SOG. Hits have also been abundant for Foligno, as he has totaled 15 in only six games this season.

Foligno burst onto the scene when he went head-to-head with his brother, Nick, in his first game since the call-up in Ottawa on March 10. It all started with a great individual effort and a lucky bounce for the game-tying goal in an eventual shootout win for Buffalo. Ever since, it's been a dream ride for the young forward -- not to mention for the few fantasy owners who have caught onto this growing commodity.

The 6-foot-2, 215-pound forward is only owned in 2 percent of Yahoo! leagues to date, but if his magical run continues, that number will certainly skyrocket. The former fourth-round selection by Buffalo in 2009 has sparked the Sabres' offense, which ranks 23rd in the NHL in goals-per-game (2.47).

His second multi-goal game in three contests came in Monday's 7-3 rout of the [Tampa Bay Lightning](#), as he tallied two goals on as many shots. Foligno's ice time has been on an incline since being recalled, and he is finding a home on the Sabres' secondary line with [Tyler Ennis](#) and [Drew Stafford](#), as evidenced by his power-play goal Tuesday.

To put Foligno's surge into perspective, the Sabres have seen a similar one from a rookie forward this season, as [Luke Adam](#) got off to a torrid start with 4 goals and 7 assists in his first 11 games. Adam cooled off from there, though, and was assigned to Rochester in February in the midst of a 20-game goalless drought.

Whether or not Foligno's game comes back down to earth in the near future, he has been a sensational story from a fantasy standpoint in his first week and a half of extensive NHL action. Any playoff contending team in a fantasy league should give Foligno a serious look, especially with more meaningful hockey to come for the Sabres -- who stand only two points behind the [Washington Capitals](#) for the eighth seed in the Eastern Conference.

## **Montreal (28-32-13) at Buffalo (34-29-10)**

Matt Becker

STATS

March 20, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#) have won four of the season's five meetings with the [Montreal Canadiens](#).

The one loss, however, may have been a blessing in disguise as it seems to have sparked their playoff push.

The surging Sabres look to pull into a tie for points with the Eastern Conference's eighth-place team when they host the Canadiens on Wednesday night in the final meeting between these Northeast Division rivals.

A 4-3 shootout loss to Montreal at home Feb. 17 marked a fourth straight defeat for Buffalo (34-29-10) and dropped it into a tie for last place in the East, nine points out of a playoff spot. Following the game, coach Lindy Ruff said he felt "disappointed" and "embarrassed."

The Sabres have responded by going 10-2-3 since to move within two points of eighth-place Washington, which will have played one fewer game than Buffalo when it takes the ice Thursday.

"Getting closer to where we want to be is fun," forward [Jason Pominville](#) said after Monday's 7-3 win over Tampa Bay. "That's what it's all about, so we'll try to keep climbing, and we're slowly getting to where we want to be."

Pominville and [Marcus Foligno](#) each scored twice against the Lightning, while [Drew Stafford](#), [Corey Tropp](#) and [Brad Boyes](#) also had goals in Buffalo's highest-scoring game of the season.

Pominville, Buffalo's leader with 27 goals and 39 assists, has four goals and three assists in his last seven games. Foligno, meanwhile, has been a surprising offensive catalyst over the last week.

Since being called up from the minors, Foligno has five goals and two assists in five games, with the Sabres earning a point in each (3-0-2).

That stretch includes a 3-2 overtime win over the Canadiens (28-32-13) on March 12. Buffalo allowed [David Desharnais](#) to score the tying goal with five seconds left in regulation, but [Tyler Myers](#) scored 2:01 into overtime.

Earlier in the game, Myers struck a defenseless [Scott Gomez](#) into the boards and received a minor boarding penalty. The following day, Myers was suspended three games without pay for that hit and this will be his first contest back. Gomez was diagnosed with a concussion and hasn't played since.

[Tyler Ennis](#) scored Buffalo's other two goals in last week's meeting and [Ryan Miller](#) stopped 26 shots to help the Sabres beat the Canadiens for the seventh time in eight games.

Miller, who is 7-1-2 with a 2.15 goals-against average and two shutouts in his last 10 starts, is 5-0-1 with a 1.31 GAA and a shutout in his past six versus Montreal.

The 2010 Vezina Trophy winner has had to be on top of his game against the Canadiens because counterpart [Carey Price](#) has been almost as good. Price has a 1.94 GAA in his last seven starts against the Sabres but is 1-3-3.

Price, who is 3-6-1 with a 2.77 GAA in his last 10 starts, is expected to be in net Wednesday after getting the night off in Saturday's 3-2 shootout loss to the [New York Islanders](#).

[Aaron Palushaj](#) recorded his first NHL goal and [Louis Leblanc](#) also scored for Montreal, which has collected points in six straight games (3-0-3) but is still in last place in the East.

## MYERS SET TO REJOIN TEAM AFTER SUSPENSION

Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 21, 2012

The Buffalo Sabres collected four of six points with defenseman [Tyler Myers](#) watching from the press box. Tomorrow night, he will return to the lineup when the Sabres host the Montreal Canadiens at 7 p.m. at First Niagara Center.

Myers was suspended three games for hitting Canadiens forward Scott Gomez into the boards from behind during the team's last match-up on March 12. Myers was called for boarding on the play and Gomez has not played since. The suspension was the first of Myers' career.

If there is any retaliation coming from the Canadiens tomorrow, Myers told the media after this afternoon's team meeting that he's not thinking about it.

"I'm going to approach tomorrow night like any other game. It's in the past. I didn't mean to hurt him," Myers said. "That's not my intention to go in looking to kill a guy, so whatever happens happens. I'm just going to go into that game and focus on getting two points."

With Myers back, the Sabres have seven healthy defensemen ready to go. [Christian Ehrhoff](#), [Jordan Leopold](#), [Robyn Regehr](#), [Andrej Sekera](#), [Alexander Sulzer](#) and [Mike Weber](#) round out the back end and one will have to sit. Ruff said that he'd like to keep all seven playing so it's likely that sixth spot will be rotated on a nightly basis.

"It's a great situation for us to be in. We would've begged to have been this healthy three months ago," said head coach Lindy Ruff. "For me, it's tough, but the way the seven guys have played, we're going to need them all."

Goaltender [Ryan Miller](#) was impressed by the defense's play during Myers' absence but he said that he's excited to have the 6-foot-8 d-man back on the ice.

"I thought our D corps played really well but we do miss his skating ability, his range," Miller said. "...Everybody looked like they were playing pretty well with their partner so it's good to see that we've got guys able to step in and play. Tyler's a key part of this team and we need him to be on the top of his game."

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Buffalo currently sits in ninth place in the East with 78 points, two behind eighth-place Washington. Winnipeg, currently in 10th place, can get themselves up to 78 points as well with a win tonight in Pittsburgh. Washington is off until Thursday when they play the Flyers in Philadelphia.

With three more games this week, the Sabres know it's going to continue to be a tough battle to get into the playoffs.

“Obviously we need a little bit of help but we're not worried about that,” said forward [Drew Stafford](#). “We're worried about taking care of our own business here. We're worried about winning our games and then whatever happens is out of our hands.”

The Sabres have nine games to go this season and two more sets of back-to-backs, including this weekend when they travel to play the Rangers on Friday and then come back to Buffalo to host the Minnesota Wild on Saturday. The next three games lead up to what could be a showdown with major playoff implications against Washington on March 27.

“For us, it's just knowing that we have to take care of two points at a time,” Miller said. “We really just have to keep pace until we can play a team like Washington and hopefully get a swing.”

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[Jochen Hecht](#), [Patrick Kaleta](#), [Derek Roy](#) and Myers were among the few players who took the ice.

Ruff updated the media on the conditions of Hecht and [Nathan Gerbe](#) and [Matt Ellis](#). Ellis has been out since March 11 with a knee injury. Ruff said that while he's doing a lot better, he still isn't close to returning to the lineup.

The team had hoped Gerbe would be able to play during the Florida trip. He's missed the last three games with an upper-body injury.

“He's just not responding to treatment,” Ruff said. “He's skated on his own but just can't quite get over the hump.”

Hecht is still skating in a non-contact role.

## **TURNBULL RECALLED FROM AMERKS**

Sabres.com

March 20, 2012

Buffalo Sabres General Manager Darcy Regier announced today that forward [Travis Turnbull](#) has been recalled on an emergency basis from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League.

A native of Chesterfield, MO, Turnbull (7/7/86, 6'0", 197 lbs) will join the Sabres on his first NHL recall after being signed by the Sabres on April 6, 2009.

Turnbull has 27 points (12+15) and 94 penalty minutes in 53 games for the Americans this season. In four AHL seasons, Turnbull has totaled 54 points (26+28) and 225 penalty minutes in 133 games with the Americans and the Portland Pirates.

## **Fast start has Sabres rookie Foligno in rare company**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

March 21, 2012

BUFFALO — NHL success can be fleeting, especially for 20-year-olds thrown headfirst into a ferocious postseason race. Today's hero can quickly become overwhelmed the next day.

With five goals and seven points just six games into his career, winger Marcus Foligno's already enjoying one of the greatest rookie stretches in the Sabres' 41-year history.

Only Phil Housley (nine points, 1982-83) and Ray Sheppard (seven, 1987-88) have tallied seven or more points in their first six contests, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

"I don't really see myself a lot with those guys," Foligno said Tuesday following a team meeting inside the First Niagara Center. "I think those guys are tremendous players — players I've looked up to when I'm watching them, seeing what they've done on their highlight tapes."

League-wide, only Anaheim's Teemu Selanne and Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin have scored five or more goals in their first six appearances.

Foligno's certainly skating in some rarified air entering tonight's home tilt against the Montreal Canadiens. It's helped the Sabres creep to within two points of the final Eastern Conference playoff spot.

But Foligno, one-third of a dynamic trio beside Tyler Ennis and Drew Stafford, isn't getting too comfortable with NHL life.

Heck, he's still on emergency recall. He's living in a hotel and has his possessions, including his car, back in Rochester. He's driving a vehicle around Buffalo a family friend loaned him.

"Keep the car until things go wrong," joked Foligno, who scored twice Monday in the Sabres' 7-3 win in Tampa Bay.

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff cautioned Foligno's play will inevitably dip.

"Marcus isn't on an amazing run yet for me," Ruff said. "He's put together a good number of games. And there will be a drop off. There always is. There will be maybe a one- or two-game (stretch) where you're going to need him to find his game again. It happens with all young players."

Nonetheless, Foligno hasn't dropped off yet. Factor in the tightness of late-season games and the high stakes of a wild playoff chase, and his brief run is even more remarkable.

“I remember when I first stepped in it was a pretty tough adjustment,” said Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers, the 2009-10 Calder Trophy winner for top rookie. “I can imagine what he’s going through. He’s doing very well. I think exceeding expectations.”

While statisticians have been using Foligno’s six NHL games as a records barometer, he’s actually compiled all his numbers during this five-game recall (he made his NHL debut in December).

Ruff placed him on the left wing with Ennis and Stafford on March 10, and Foligno scored his first NHL goal. He has at least one point in every game, a pair of two-goal efforts and is a plus-7.

“If he keeps it up and stays with it, obviously he’s going to be a great player for a long time in this league,” said Stafford, who has two goals and nine points in the last five games.

The dominant line’s combined for 11 goals, 25 points and plus-23 rating together. At times, it appears the trio can score at will.

“It’s fun to watch them,” Ruff said. “They’re making a lot of good plays. They’ve shown real good creativity in the offensive zone. They really like playing with each other. Every time you put them out there you feel like you’ve got a chance to score.”

Foligno, the 104<sup>th</sup> pick in 2009, had never been a top scorer until 2010-11, when he tallied 23 times in 47 games.

The improvement he showcased during his final Ontario Hockey League season – he also cracked Canada’s stacked world junior championship club – cemented his prospect status.

Ruff’s already seen Foligno’s game advance again throughout his first professional season.

“He’s skating better, which has helped him get to places,” Ruff said. “He’s been able to play not only the offensive side. He made a couple great plays defensively (Monday) night. He used his legs to get back and break up rush situations.”

Foligno, 6-foot-2 and 215 pounds, credits his net prowess to post-practice sessions with Rochester assistant coach Chris Taylor, a former Sabre and AHL star. They spent about 20 minutes each day working on skills around the net – driving and getting the legs going, he said – to improve what Foligno called his “slow feet.”

It’s been paying handsome dividends.

“It’s obviously a great start, so I’m pretty excited,” Foligno said. “I think it’s the confidence I built from my first game being called up here. Playing with Ennis and Stafford has been huge. I just want to keep it rolling and know not to get overconfident, just stay level-headed – know that every game’s going to be huge.”

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The Sabres recalled forward Travis Turnbull from Rochester on an emergency basis late Tuesday. The 25-year-old could make his NHL debut tonight.

It's unknown which player is hurt or sick. Most Sabres stayed off the ice Tuesday.

Turnbull, undrafted out of the University of Michigan, has 12 goals, 27 points, 94 penalty minutes and a plus-5 rating in 53 games with the Americans.

Meanwhile, Ruff said Nathan Gerbe (muscle pull, three games) is "getting better." He thought the winger would return during the Sabres' two-game trip.

"He just isn't responding to treatment and skated on his own but just can't quite get over the hump," he said.

Forward Matt Ellis (knee, four games) "is doing a lot better. But he's not close yet," Ruff said.

Also, center Jochen Hecht, who's recovering from his second concussion this season, is skating again.

## **Ruff plans to utilize seven Sabres defensemen with Myers back from suspension**

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

March 21, 2012

BUFFALO — With star defenseman Tyler Myers banished three games for hitting Montreal's Scott Gomez into the boards from behind, the Sabres went 1-0-2, earning four of a possible six points.

Now, with his full fleet of defensemen back for tonight's tilt against the Montreal Canadiens at the First Niagara Center, what does Sabres coach Lindy Ruff do?

"I really think we're going to keep all seven going," Ruff said Tuesday.

What does that mean? Ruff didn't elaborate, although he could dress all seven or start rotating one in and out.

"It's a great situation for us to be in," Ruff said. "We would've begged to be in this situation a few months ago. For me, it's tough, but the way the seven guys have played we're going to need them all."

In an odd scheduling quirk, Myers will immediately face the team he earned his suspension against.

The hit concussed Gomez, and he's likely finished for the season. The Canadiens could want some retribution.

"I'm going to approach (tonight) like any other game," Myers said. "It's in the past. I didn't mean to hurt him. It's not my intention to go in looking to kill a guy. What happens happens."

The Sabres have returned rookie defenseman Brayden McNabb to Rochester.

## **There's No Mistaking The Chemistry In Tyler Ennis' Line Combo**

Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

March 20, 2012

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Most of the Buffalo Sabres stayed off of the ice on Tuesday afternoon when the team met at First Niagara Center. Only a small group of players, including Tyler Myers, worked on the ice ahead of their game against the Montreal Canadiens on Wednesday night.

Myers is set to come back from a three-game suspension handed down for his hit from behind on Canadiens' forward Scott Gomez. Myers is happy that the Sabres were able to record 4 out of a possible six points in his absence. It wasn't easy for the third year defenseman to watch, but the play of his teammates made it a little more bearable.

While he was forced to sit and watch, Myers has seen the other Tyler on the team, Tyler Ennis, help lead the team from the center position on a line with Drew Stafford and Marcus Foligno. All three skaters on the line extended their current point streaks in the 7-3 win over the Tampa Bay Lightning last night.

Ennis has been bounced around from the wing to the center position this season, but he really has taken his game up a level since being moved back in the middle. The trio of Foligno-Ennis-Stafford found immediate chemistry when they were paired up more than a week ago in Ottawa. Myers has been impressed with what he has seen out of Foligno in that time, adding, "he's been great ever since he stepped in and the level that Drew [Stafford] and Tyler [Ennis], have elevated their game, it's fun to watch. Even though I don't wanna watch it."

Foligno has registered at least point in all 5 games since the recall on March 9<sup>th</sup>, scoring 5 goals and adding 2 assists. It sounds pretty simple, but the recipe for the line's success has been the different traits each has brought to the rink, according to the rookie.

Foligno brings some size and strength to the combination, and he knows what to expect of the other line mates, saying he knows that "Staff's really big and strong and Ennis is a water bug out there like I said before. So, it's just giving those guys space and time and we're gonna be dangerous moving in the offensive zone."

Ennis has 19 points (8G, 9A) since coming back from a high ankle sprain for the second time this season. The forward is riding a five-game point streak into Wednesday night's game, coming off of a two-assist game in Tampa Bay. The third year forward noticed the chemistry with Foligno and Stafford right away in Ottawa, with one of the keys being that "had a lot of zone time, created a lot, you know, actually off the rush was good too. So, the most important

thing is to be good in all three zones.”

Ennis also credits Stafford and Foligno with working down low in the offensive zone and their respective size to their advantage while he distributes the puck from the middle. That has opened up the game for the three, according to the Edmonton, Alberta native and has led to more scoring chances. The trio combined for 7 points (3G, 4A) last night, and overall in the last 5 games has recorded 25 points (11G, 14A).

## Amerks' best players key to playoff run

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

March 21, 2012

For a team on the bubble of playoff qualification or failure as a group, every [game](#) is critical.

A failure to earn two points in every particular game can ultimately be the reason a team misses a playoff spot by one point.

This is the time of the season where every shift can be the difference between winning and losing. It's also the time when heroes shine.

"Your big-time players have to be your go-to guys every night, and be your leadership guys every night," [Rochester Americans](#) coach Ron Rolston said.

Center Paul Szczechura certainly understands those concepts. He has been an offensive catalyst for the [Amerks](#) as they continue their [drive](#) for a playoff spot.

With 71 points, they sat tied for eighth in the American Hockey League's Western Conference yesterday heading into Wednesday's 7:05 home game against the Syracuse Crunch.

The Amerks lost at Syracuse on Friday, 4-3, and they didn't play very well. They rebounded the following night with a 4-3 overtime victory at Binghamton, with Szczechura scoring the winning goal.

"That was a great bounce-back game; we did what we had to do to win," Szczechura said. "We made some mistakes but a lot of guys dug deep."

Szczechura has been one of the Amerks' most consistent scorers during the past month and a half. Over the past 19 [games](#), he has scored 11 goals and assisted on eight.

He scored the winning goal three times since Feb. 4, including two in overtime. He also has goals in four consecutive games.

"He made a nice play on the goal (in Binghamton)," Rolston said.

"He has the ability, if he has space on the rush, to make good plays."

Tonight's game against the Crunch will be the second of three meetings in an eight-day span. Between March 9 and Friday, the Crunch and Binghamton Senators (four games) are the only opponents for the Amerks.

"It brings a lot of intensity to games and each team has to keep tweaking things to be successful," Rolston said.

“Players know tendencies of other players, but they also know they have to battle every night.”

In essence, it’s a taste of a playoff series before the playoffs. But what happened Friday in the loss at Syracuse — too many turnovers combined with an inability to negate the pounding style played by the Crunch — won’t consume the Amerks tonight.

“If you dwell on the losses,” Szczechura said, “it’s not going to help you.

“We’ve played them enough to know what they’re going to bring. We just have to take care of the puck and not turn it over.”

## Talent abounds at Bowman Showcase

Mary Jo Monnin

The Buffalo News

March 21, 2012

A third game was added to this year's Scotty Bowman Showcase highlighting the talent between Buffalo and Rochester's prep school and junior hockey players. After Tuesday night's showing in the First Niagara Center, the game is here to stay.

The Buffalo Junior/Prep team beat the Rochester Junior/Prep, 5-2, in what was an impressive showing of the hockey talent between the two cities. For its effort, Buffalo was awarded the first Rick Martin Memorial Cup in a postgame ceremony.

Buffalo jumped out to a 4-0 lead after the first of two 22-minute halves. Darrin Trebes, Brian Ruff, Sean Malone and Shane Bennett each scored.

"We came out quick, got the first few in the net, it starts flowing and you start working as a team together," said Ruff, who is a junior at Clarence High School and the son of Sabres' coach Lindy Ruff. "This was awesome, everyone was working hard, working together."

Andrew Poturalski had Buffalo's only goal of the second half.

Former Sabre Michael Peca was the head coach of the Buffalo team. "Our team is just very deep, all three goalies are just outstanding," he said. "All four lines — there wasn't one bad line out there. As a coach sitting back there with the other two [assistants Mike Mondoux, Mark Mobus] it was just a treat to be able to coach these kids."

**SENIORS:** Carlos Ross of Brockport jammed home a puck with 4:04 left as Rochester senior stars beat their Buffalo counterparts for just the second time in the Cup's eight-year history.

Nick Pagliacci of Kenmore East scored Buffalo's first goal in the first of two 22-minute periods. Trevor Simonick of Williamsville South and Don Battista of Kenmore East scored for Buffalo in the second period.

"We gave up the late goal, we got a touch sloppy in our end, but they fought back to make it 3-3," said Buffalo Seniors coach Grant Ledyard. "The one line of Battista, [Austin] Ford and Pagliacci, they played together at Kenmore East, and they were impressive. You could tell they were very familiar with each other and they made some very nice cycles down low."

Marc Mallare (St. Joe's), David Nowak (St. Francis) and Matt Peccia (West Seneca West) shared time in goal for the Buffalo team.

**JUNIORS:** Team captain Nick Matos of Niagara-Wheatfield accepted the Tim Horton Memorial Cup after the Buffalo Juniors dominated the Rochester Juniors, 7-2, in the first game. It was the first time a Cup was presented to the winner of the Juniors game.

The last time Matos played on the Sabres' home ice his team ended Williamsville North's championship reign as the Falcons won their second Western New York Federation title in four years.

Buffalo coach Rich Crozier of St. Joe's said he thought his players worked hard from the first puck drop. He talked to his team about not trying to do too much and enjoy the experience.

One of those players was forward Rick Eberhart of Lockport, who netted two goals. "It was great. When you first get out there the lights are really bright. So it's a little scary at first. You get used to it," said Eberhart. On his first goal, Tyler Chodkowski of West Seneca West passed it to him out front before connecting and his second goal came on a two-on-one break with Brian Dudek.

Dudek of St. Mary's, Dimitrios Gogos of St. Joe's, Tyler McTigue of St. Francis, Bob Piotrowicz of Frontier and Cory Swift of West Seneca East added single goals.

Buffalo goalie Connor Naughton of Canisius, one of three keepers, did not give up any goals.

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## Settling the score

Shauna Denis

Canadiens.com

March 20, 2012

**BROSSARD** – The Habs will be out for revenge on Wednesday night.

Sabres defenseman Tyler Myers is ready to make his return to action on Wednesday after serving a three-game suspension for a hit from behind on Scott Gomez last Monday. Still sidelined with an upper-body injury stemming from the incident, Gomez won't be in the lineup in Buffalo, although his teammates will be ready to get a little retribution on his behalf – they're just planning to keep their gloves on in the process.

“I think the league has sent the message,” stressed Randy Cunneyworth of Brendan Shanahan's decision to suspend the 6-foot-8 blue-liner. “If he's going back for the puck, I think we would approach it like any other player going back. There's a time and a place for that. He's paid his fine and that's a situation I think he was regretful about. Honestly, he's a young player, he got involved, he got angry and went out there and played a little too hard against a defenseless player who had his back turned. I think there's a good lesson there.”

For the Habs, the best revenge – both for the Myers incident and the 3-2 overtime loss – will be to hit the Sabres where it really hurts.

“We're just looking to compete against them, get the win and maybe spoil their chances at the playoffs,” explained the Canadiens coach of the ninth-place Sabres. “Again, that's not our sole intention. Our sole intention is to play a solid hockey game, play within our system and play hard.”

Given his position on retribution, it's unlikely Cunneyworth will be following Devils head coach Peter DeBoer's lead in determining his starting lineup on Wednesday. Instead of lining up stars like Zach Parise and Ilya Kovalchuk to start Monday's game against the Rangers, DeBoer instead chose to give enforcers Cam Janssen, Eric Boulton and Ryan Carter the nod. John Tortorella replied by starting three tough guys of his own in Brandon Prust, Mike Rupp and Stu Bickel. The result: three fights off the opening faceoff three seconds into the game.

“It's surprising; you don't see that every day. But that's old school hockey,” offered Brad Staubitz, who has already dropped the gloves 13 times this season. “Those are two pretty honest, competitive coaches and they were gun-slinging and had it out that way. You see the way the game is changing where they're talking about taking fighting out of it, I don't know if we're going to see that too often but it's an exciting part of hockey.”

Never one to shy away from a fight, Staubitz will be ready to square off if necessary on Wednesday, although he's not expecting to put his scrapping skills to use quite as early as the Devils and Rangers.

"[Myers] knows it was a cheap shot – he got suspended," explained Staubitz. "We'll pay attention to it but we also have to pay attention to winning the game. We can't get sidetracked."

## **Canadiens' prospects on display in NCAA**

Pat Hickey

Montreal Gazette

March 20, 2012

The Canadiens aren't going to make the playoffs but fans can follow some of the team's prospects when the NCAA championships begin this weekend at four regional sites.

The player likely to have the most immediate impact at the pro level is forward Danny Kristo, who plays for the North Dakota Fighting Sioux, who are the No. 1 seed in the West Regional and currently ranked No. 4. Kristo, who made headlines of the wrong kind last season when he suffered frostbite after walking through a snowstorm in his sneakers, has had a solid season with 18 goals and 25 assists and a plus-13 rating in 40 games.

Kristo has one more year of eligibility, but the secondround draft pick from 2008 might feel it's time to follow the lead of his USHL teammate Louis Leblanc and give pro hockey a shot.

The North Dakota roster also includes Mark Mac-Millan, who was drafted in the fourth round last June. The good news regarding MacMillan is that he has added 20 pounds to his 6-foot frame since enrolling at North Dakota. He played in all 40 games as a freshman and had seven goals and 15 assists with a plus-3 rating.

The Canadiens also have two defence prospects playing for the Michigan Wolverines, who are the No. 1 seed in the Midwest Regional and ranked No. 2 overall behind Brian Gionta's alma mater, Boston College.

Greg Pateryn, a 6-foot-3, 216-pounder, had two goals and 13 assists and a plus-15 rating in his fourth and final year. Pateryn, whose rights were acquired from Toronto in the Mikhail Grabovski deal, has his sights set on medical school, but has said that he's interested in seeing how far he can go in hockey. It's common for teams to give a player whose college career is over a chance to get a head start on his career in the spring, but that may not be feasible if Michigan advances to the Frozen Four in early April and the Hamilton Bulldogs don't make the playoffs in the American Hockey League.

The Wolverines also have sophomore Mac Bennett, a 5-foot-11, 185-pound puckmoving defenceman. Bennett had four goals and 16 assists in 40 games and was also plus-15. There will be concern about his size, but he has attended several development camps with the Canadiens and has shown that he can handle himself against larger players.

And finally, there's defenceman Scott Kishel from defending champion Minnesota-Duluth. A seventh-rounder from 2007, he had three goals and 15 assists this season.

Cunneyworth fesses up: When the Canadiens were called for having too many men on the ice Saturday night, it was the eighth time this season they took a bench minor, but only the second time under Randy Cunneyworth's watch.

"I'll take blame for the too many men on the ice," Cunneyworth said after Saturday's shootout loss to the Islanders. "Noky and Pleky sound way too close. I'm screaming it out, but they're the same number of syllables so it's not a smart move on my part. I had (Petteri) Nokelainen's line up, but (Tomas Plekanec) thought his line was up."

Bench management was a concern last season when the Canadiens led the NHL with 14 minors for having too many men on the ice.

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## **Price wasn't right: he was short two bits**

Dave Stubbs

Montreal Gazette

March 20, 2012

MONTREAL - Because the Internet can be woefully out of date, and because Canadiens goaltender Carey Price can go for a Friday afternoon drive from his South Shore home to the West Island without calling ahead, one woman's world can pretty much be turned upside down.

So it is that Sylvie Brunet, owner of the Yazoo pet food and supply store in Pointe Claire's sleepy Valois village, is still shaking her head in disbelief more than two weeks after superstardom strolled into her shop.

"The door opened and I thought I was seeing things," Brunet said. "I just said: 'What the heck are you doing here?' and Carey just looked at me, dumbfounded."

In fact, Price was looking for a shedding blade for his two Labrador retrievers. He'd used such a brush last summer out west on his rodeo horses, then with great success on one of his dogs.

Price had been online two weeks ago last Friday, searching for Montreal-area equestrian stores, and he happened upon a listing for Le Chevalois, a small tack shop on Donegani Ave. in the Valois village. He didn't know the listing was long out of date, the store having closed years ago, and he didn't call ahead before setting out from home in his truck.

"It was one of the places I found online and I don't mind going for a drive," Price said. "I'd been out that way once before, but I don't remember why. It's kinda out of the way for me.

"I was sitting around between ropings last summer out west so I gave my dog a going-over with a shedding blade and it worked really well. I was looking for one of those and when I couldn't find the equestrian shop (in Valois), I went into the pet store a few doors down."

To say that this stunned store owner Brunet, a huge Canadiens fan who was chatting with two customers at 4:45 that afternoon, is a grand understatement.

"I was surprised she recognized me," Price said earnestly. "I was wearing a camouflage hat and a Levi's jacket."

The netminder wasn't the first Canadien to come through Brunet's door; former Habs forward Chris Nilan is a regular customer, his signed photo hanging behind the cash.

So when Price didn't immediately reply to her "what the heck ...", Brunet began again.

"I looked back at Carey from my customers, who no longer had my attention, and asked: 'No, seriously, what are you doing here? Have you come to meet Chris?' " she said.

“And he just replied, ‘No. Chris who?’ ”

Price told Brunet he was looking for a shedding blade, by now having wandered to that aisle in the tiny store, politely declining the assistance of clerk Leah McIntosh.

He described the blade in great detail to a regular customer, a man who had no idea he was talking to Price.

The goalie took the blade, another brush and a few rawhides to the cash, then gently had to ask Brunet for his credit card when the star-struck shopkeeper forgot it in the machine after processing his \$40 purchase.

Brunet had been busy explaining to Price the Nilan reference and expressing her sympathies to the netminder for the season he was enduring.

“I told Carey: ‘I really feel bad for you. You can stand on your head and give 500 per cent and it’s never enough. You don’t deserve that,’ ” she recalled.

“He just said: ‘Thank you. It’s a good thing I love hockey.’ Then I told him it was lucky for me that the equestrian store was closed.”

Price walked to the door, first shaking hands with the brush-aisle gentleman who still didn’t recognize him – until Brunet told the customer, whom she headed off outside when he began to give chase.

The goalie had wandered across Valois Bay Ave. to Laviolette’s, a dépanneur that’s been a village landmark for decades and probably still has the stubby-bottle Dow empties in the back to prove it.

“I wanted to buy a Coke for the drive home, but they didn’t take credit cards,” Price said, grinning. “I had a dollar and a quarter in my pocket and the drink was like a buck fifty. I couldn’t afford it, so I had to drive home without one. I was pretty choked.”

Yazoo clerk McIntosh remembers Price coming out of Laviolette’s to his truck, probably looking for some change he couldn’t find, then returning to the store.

And still no dice, despite the fact his face was on the Habs pocket calendar on the counter next to the cash.

It’s funny that Price, earning \$2.75 million this season and about to break the bank with a new contract, couldn’t afford a soft drink.

But it’s downright hilarious that there’s a dépanneur cashier in Quebec who doesn’t recognize him, or wouldn’t be willing to trade the near-penniless star a Coke for an autograph or a tape-on-the-cash camera-phone picture.

Brunet and McIntosh incredulously watched it all unfold.

“We were standing outside our store, looking at Carey in line at the cash, saying: ‘Let’s not stare, we don’t want to look stupid, and imagine if all the people driving by, waving at us, knew that he was in Laviolette’s?’ ” Brunet said, laughing.

Price emerged again, empty-handed, where he was met by McIntosh, holding Brunet’s iPhone. Obviously, the women didn’t know of the Coke crisis or they’d have found the quarter he needed.

“I told Carey: ‘My boss is the biggest Habs fanatic I’ve ever met. She doesn’t want to bother you, but I will. Come with me,’ ” McIntosh recalled.

Price cheerfully followed to his truck and posed for a photo with Brunet. A few days later, having heard the store owner’s tale, I printed the image she’d emailed and took it to the Bell Centre. Price autographed it – “To Sylvie, Thanks for the brush! Carey Price 31” – as he related his side of the story.

Needless to say, the picture is bound for a wall in Yazoo.

McIntosh, a former longtime hockey player on the West Island, is a big-time Price fan, too. But she didn’t have her photo snapped with him that afternoon “because I didn’t like my hair that day.”

Brunet is still in the clouds, delighted to include the Canadiens all-star as a customer. But even more special to her might be this connection:

“I told Carey that the brush he chose for his labs is amazing,” Brunet said. “I told him that when I opened Yazoo 20 years ago this May, I’d bought a shedding blade for my lab, and I was saying all the great things about it then that he was now.”

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## **Taking pride in blocking shots**

*Canadiens' Gorges leads NHL with 215 and loves watching others take one for team*

Dave Stubbs

Montreal Gazette

March 20, 2012

Canadiens defenceman Alexei Emelin hit the ice last Friday as though he'd been Tasered or hit with an elephant gun, a shot off the stick of Ottawa's Erik Karlsson having nearly cut him in two.

The rookie finally made it off the ice, his face screwed tight in pain, but he'd return before period's end even if his ribs were more tender than if they'd been marinated overnight.

"I was so pumped, I couldn't stop smiling," Habs defenceman Josh Gorges recalled of Emelin's shot-block that hurt even those watching on TV.

Understand, Gorges doesn't feel a sadistic pleasure when a fellow Canadien gets in the way of a puck that weighs much more than its six ounces when fired with ungodly force.

And yet, there's something that swells Gorges's heart when such a shot doesn't make it from shooter to Canadiens goalies Carey Price or Peter Budaj - whether he's blocked it himself, as he has 215 times this season, or a teammate has got in the way.

"I knew right away that one hurt," Gorges said of Emelin's block. "I could hear it from the bench, and if you can hear it like that, you know it hurts.

"But I loved it. I love sacrifice for the betterment of the team. I know it hurts. I've been in that situation a few times and you have a lot of respect for guys who do it."

Four nights earlier, Canadiens forward Max Pacioretty had literally crawled off Buffalo ice, having been blasted by the Sabres' Tyler Myers in the right ankle.

Same reaction from Gorges. "I knew Max would be all right," he said, grinning. "I got some kind of sick enjoyment out of it. As much as I knew Max was in pain, I loved the fact that he'd stand in there and take one that would hurt, doing it for the team."

Emelin's encounter with vulcanized rubber Friday was the most dramatic blocked shot of the night, one of four the Russian absorbed.

But as he is almost quietly night in and night out, Gorges was a human wall, blocking what he's pretty certain was a career high 10 while dishing out six bodychecks.



A close-up of the bench late in the third period showed him seemingly close to tears, his body ravaged.

"I don't know if it was pain as much as fatigue," Gorges said. "All that penalty-killing wears on you."

Indeed, the 27-year-old from Kelowna, B.C., played 11: 20 of his 26: 39 while the Canadiens were a man short, the Habs PK blanking the Senators all nine times they were on the power play.

With nine games left on the Habs schedule, Gorges leads the league with his 215 blocked shots. That's well ahead of the 176 recorded through the same 73 games by Anaheim's François Beauchemin, the Ducks playing in San Jose late Monday night.

Gorges's total is 54 more than his previous best, his 161 in 81 games of 2008-09, the NHL's 16th-best that season.

This man clearly is a beast. He's the only Canadian who has not missed a game this season, almost miraculous considering the type of game he plays and that he returned for 2011-12 on a rebuilt, gameunried knee, a shredded ACL having been replaced.

Blocking shots was a preseason focus for Gorges and since-traded fellow rearguard Hal Gill, who's taken his penalty-kill genius to Nashville.

"I get some sort of a sick pride in blocking shots," Gorges said. "Hal and I talked about it coming into the season - the penalty-kill, being in shooting lanes and knocking down pucks.

"We talked with our forwards. If they did their job, it would allow us to block those shots real easy. But I didn't think I'd be blocking them to the extent I am this year."

If Gorges were an American, like Gill, you could award him a Purple Heart for being wounded in action. But you'd never see the decoration on his body, which is discoloured with bruises and welts.

"Oh yeah, I'm banged up," Gorges said. "But I think everybody is. After 73 games, if you're not black and blue, you're not playing the right kind of hockey."

The ribs, he says, are probably most vulnerable.

"Emelin went down on one knee and tried to cover as much ice as he could, which exposed that part of his body," Gorges said. "If I were to talk to him, I'd tell him not to rotate his body. A lot of times you can keep your arm in there. You've got your elbow and shoulder pads and they kind of protect your ribs. But if you leave your ribs open, that's a tender area to get (a shot)."

Even well-protected body parts are vulnerable, depending on the shot and who's loading up. Gorges says he's suffered a pressure cut on a shin, beneath a shinpad, after blocking a cannonball fired by Boston's Zdeno Chara.

When faced with the windup of Chara, or heavy shooters like Nashville's Shea Weber or Winnipeg's Dustin Byfuglien, Gorges says "the key is to try to get yourself into a tight enough space where the puck's not going to come up too high on you, but far enough away where they can get it above your feet.

"You want to take it anywhere from your shinpads up to your waist. If you get it in there, usually it doesn't hurt."

It does hurt when you take one in the back of the head, as Gorges did from Washington's Mike Green at the Bell Centre on Feb. 10, 2010. The force of the Capital's shot knocked Gorges out of the game and actually left in the hard plastic the impression of lettering on the puck's edge.

"That one made me change the way I think about blocking shots," Gorges said. "I'd gone down full body before and I remember the game after that I was a bit gun-shy going down. It took me a little while to understand the best way for me to block a shot.

"Going down, not only do you leave yourself vulnerable to getting hurt, leaving a lot of your body open, but a head's-up player can walk around you. You're not on your feet and can't get up and react. I've learned and got better at my timing and understand I can't go off my feet."

Unlike nine teammates, including fellow defencemen P.K. Subban, Yannick Weber and Raphael Diaz, Gorges doesn't wear strap-on plastic shields to cover his Bauer Vapors.

"Ask our trainers and they'll tell you they've been trying to get me to wear them, but I won't do it," he admitted.

A broken strap that wedged beneath Gorges's blade during the Canadiens-Philadelphia playoff series two seasons ago left him unable to manoeuvre, a Flyers skater slipping past to score.

"That was the last time I wore them and I said I'd never wear them again," Gorges said. "I'd rather have a sore foot than a guy walking around me."

No matter his pain, which never disappears during a season but is only managed, Gorges enjoys the respect and appreciation of his goaltenders.

Surely they've treated him to a fine meal as thanks?

"No, maybe you can work on that for me," he joked.

"But Price and Budes are both fantastic. Any time I block a shot, I always hear them say: 'Thanks, Gorgie' right in the middle of the play. They respect that. They honour the guys who go down and block shots. They'll come up and give you a tap on the pads during timeouts to let you know."

And both Canadiens goalies know this much: any whack of thanks on Gorges's shins is done lightly.

THE PUCK STOPS HERE

LEAGUE RANK PLAYER GAMES PLAYED SHOTS BLOCKED

2011-12 (in progress) (1) Josh Gorges 73 212

2010-11 (4) Roman Hamrlik 79 192

(48) Gorges 36 79

2009-10 (12) Gorges 82 158

2008-09 (4) Mike Komisarek 66 207

(16) Gorges 81 161

2007-08 (1) Mike Komisarek 75 227

(71) Gorges 62 101

2006-07 (26) Sheldon Souray 81 149

(35) Gorges (San Jose/Montreal) 54 76

2005-06 (32) Craig Rivet 82 135

(136) Gorges (San Jose) 49 76

Gorges's total: 863 shots blocked in 437 regular-season games, 1.97 average blocks per game

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