



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

Friday, March 30, 2012

Streiking Sabres, Penguins collide

Playoff incentive exists for both teams

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2012

Mike Weber, a Pittsburgh native, called his dad recently for a chat. Rick Weber said the locals have been going crazy for the Penguins, especially now that Sidney Crosby is back.

"There's always excitement in that city when you've got as good of a team as they do," Mike Weber said Thursday.

The Buffalo defenseman and his teammates get a chance tonight to see how good the Penguins are playing. On the flip side of the puck, the Sabres get to show the Pens how good they are, too.

Two of the hottest teams in the NHL collide in First Niagara Center with plenty on the line. The Sabres are trying to regain the Eastern Conference playoff spot they earned this week. The Pens are angling to claim the No. 1 spot in the conference.

"It's going to be an extremely fun game," said Weber, who will return to the lineup in place of injured defenseman Christian Ehrhoff. "It's really playoff hockey right now. Teams are ramped up and playing extremely solid. We've just got to keep playing the way we've been playing."

The Sabres are on a run that borders on ridiculous. They have won five straight and are 7-0-2 in the last nine. That is part of a 14-2-4 rally that dates to Feb. 17 and a 19-5-5 surge going back to Jan. 24.

Pittsburgh is one of the few teams that can go back even further for its streak. After losing Thursday at the New York Islanders, it is 26-7-2 since Jan. 13.

"It's a good test for us," said Buffalo center Derek Roy, who returned to practice Thursday after a missing a day with flu-like symptoms. "These are the games you play for. These are the games you grow up thinking about, wanting to play the big game, wanting to be in the spotlight, score the big goal, make the big save, block the big shot -- whatever has to be done.

"We have to embrace this challenge and really work at it."

The Sabres need at least a point to stay ahead of Washington for the eighth and final postseason spot. The Capitals beat Boston, 3-2, Thursday in a shootout to equal the Sabres with 86 points. Washington has played one more game but owns the tiebreaker of regulation and overtime victories. The Sabres have five games left.

The Sabres are trying to forget about the Caps and the big victory Tuesday. They held an optional skate Thursday to rest after practicing Wednesday to revel in the victory.

"We've talked about it for almost two months now of not getting too excited after wins and enjoying the win and putting it away," Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said. "I think we've done a good job of that. We knew that that game was like a four-pointer. That was a game we wanted to get, and we got it.

"Part of skating [Wednesday] was to kind of flush that out of the system. Now we're resting up and getting ready for the next one."

The game tonight will be filled with players performing at their best. Buffalo boasts goaltender Ryan Miller and forwards Drew Stafford, Tyler Ennis and Marcus Foligno. Pittsburgh counters with Evgeni Malkin, Pascal Dupuis, Jordan Staal and Crosby, to name a few.

Miller is 19-3-5 with a 1.80 goals-against average and .940 save percentage since late January. Stafford, Ennis and Foligno have combined for 17 goals and 38 points in the last nine games.

The Pens' lineup is filled with streaking players. Malkin has nine goals and 19 points in 10 games. Dupuis has put up at least a point in 12 straight, pouring in nine goals with six assists. Staal has reached the score sheet in 17 of 21 games.

Crosby, who has missed most of the season with concussion problems, has recorded 11 assists and 13 points in the opening nine games of his return.

"You've got one of the best players in the world back and healthy and playing the way he is, it's a better league," Ruff said. "He's made them a better team."

It's the Sabres' first look at Crosby. They are 2-1 against the Pens so far with 3-2 and 6-2 victories sandwiching an 8-3 loss.

"Offensively, they've been going pretty good," Ruff said. "Defensively, I've read some stuff where they want to tighten up on the defensive side of it. ... It should be a great skating game."

jvogl@buffnews.com

Fan Appreciation Night precedes game against Penguins

John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2012

Fans who head to First Niagara Center tonight will get the chance to see two of the hottest teams in hockey -- and get a chance to walk away with coach Lindy Ruff's tie.

The meeting between the Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins coincides with Fan Appreciation Night. The event will begin at 5 p.m. with a free Party in the Plaza featuring local band Strictly Hip. Fans without tickets can stay in the plaza to watch the game on two large video screens.

The Sabres Store will have fan-appreciation prices in effect throughout the night. Ticket-holders can take advantage of family friendly food prices inside the arena from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m.

The 50-50 raffle to benefit the Sabres' alumni and team foundations will have a guaranteed prize of at least \$25,000. Following the game, the players will give away the jersey off their back to winning fans in an on-ice ceremony. One fan will receive a game-worn tie from Ruff. On-ice festivities before the game will include player awards voted on by the team.

Perry Street will be closed between Main and Illinois streets during the plaza party. The Illinois Street entrances to the First Niagara Center parking ramp will remain accessible via South Park Avenue and Perry Street.

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The Sabres have signed one of the top collegiate scorers in the nation, agreeing to a one-year, entry-level deal with Brian Flynn worth \$925,000. The center was captain of the University of Maine.

Flynn ranked ninth in the NCAA this season with 48 points in 40 games. He had 18 goals and 30 assists, many of the helpers going to college scoring leader and Hobey Baker Award candidate Spencer Abbott.

The 23-year-old Flynn has reported to the Rochester Americans and will complete this season on an amateur tryout contract. The 6-foot-1, 185-pound Massachusetts native is expected to play today against the Toronto Marlies.

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Nathan Gerbe was one of the few players to participate in the Sabres' optional skate Thursday, but the left winger is likely to miss his eighth straight game with an upper-body muscle strain.

"He's kind of stuck in that 80-90 percent but hasn't got over the hump yet," Ruff said. "We're hoping that one of these days it just clicks in."

Center Cody Hodgson also took part in the light session. He has three goals and seven points in the last five games. He was blanked in his opening 10 games with the Sabres after being acquired from Vancouver at the trade deadline.

Said Ruff: "He's taken it to a new level here in the last five or six and gotten more comfortable."

jvogl@buffnews.com

Penguins try to cool off sizzling Sabres

John Kreiser

NHL.com

March 29, 2012

PENGUINS (47-24-6) at SABRES (38-29-10)

TV: ROOT (HS); MSG-Buffalo (HD)

Last 10: Pittsburgh 6-3-1; Buffalo 7-1-2

Season Series: It's the last of the four meetings this season. The Sabres won two of the first three, including a 6-2 victory at First Niagara Center in the last one on Feb. 17.

Big Story: The Sabres have supplanted the Penguins as the NHL's hottest team. Buffalo has won five in a row and capped a climb from last in the East to the top eight with a 5-1 win at Washington on Tuesday. The Penguins went more than a month without losing in regulation, but have been lit up defensively while dropping three of their last four games, including a home-and-home sweep by the New York Islanders.

Team Scope:

Penguins: With two games against the Islanders, a team they've dominated for the past few seasons, Pittsburgh began the week looking to make a final push to pass the Rangers for the top spot in the East. Instead, they lost 5-3 at home on Tuesday and again by the same score Thursday night on Long Island.

"We talked about it a lot. We expected the guys to have a better effort," center [Jordan Staal](#) said. "It just wasn't there. We have to definitely find a way to get our game back and do the things we need to do to win games."

Sabres: Little did they know it at the time, but the Sabres' 6-2 win against the Penguins in Pittsburgh's last trip to Buffalo would be the beginning of what could be one of the great playoff sprints in NHL history. The Sabres are 14-2-3 in their last 19 games and have gone from last in the East to eighth place.

"We can control our fate now," said forward [Drew Stafford](#), who scored twice in Washington. "We know every game from now on is just like it's been the past month or so -- it's must-win."

Who's Hot: Pittsburgh's [Evgeni Malkin](#) had a goal Thursday to become the first player in the NHL to reach the 100-point mark this season. He has six points in two games against the Sabres this season and is 8-18-26 in 20 career meetings. [Pascal Dupuis](#) had a goal Thursday to extend his scoring streak to 12 games. ... Buffalo goaltender [Ryan Miller](#) has a 1.20 goals-against average and a shutout during a five-game winning streak.

Injury Report: The Penguins are missing defensemen [Kris Letang](#) (lower body) and [Matt Niskanen](#) (upper body). Another defenseman, [Ben Lovejoy](#), is out after undergoing knee surgery this week. ... Buffalo suffered a major loss on the blue line when defenseman [Christian Ehrhoff](#) was injured in the second period of the win in Washington. He's out indefinitely after knocking knees with Caps forward Troy Brouwer. [Matt Ellis](#) (knee), [Nathan Gerbe](#) (upper body) and [Jochen Hecht](#) (concussion) are also out

Stat Pack: [Sidney Crosby](#) has 16 points during a 12-game scoring streak against the Sabres. ... [Cody McCormick](#) became the 30th Sabre to score a goal this season when he connected against Washington. That matches the franchise record, which had been accomplished three times previously.

Puck Drop: The two losses to the Islanders have made catching the Rangers difficult, if not impossible. Staal said the Penguins' biggest task now is to return to the level of performance they showed during the 13-0-1 run that got them close to New York.

"We've got to worry about our game," he said. "The standings will be the standings. We want to win games. Right now, we're not playing our best hockey and we're losing games. That's definitely something we've got to address first."

Pittsburgh (47-24-6) at Buffalo (38-29-10)

Nicolino DiBenedetto

STATS

March 29, 2012

The [Buffalo Sabres](#)' longest winning streak in over two years has them charging into a playoff spot, but a key injury creates another obstacle.

The [Pittsburgh Penguins](#)' run at first place in the Eastern Conference has stalled.

The Sabres will need to withstand the absence of defenseman [Christian Ehrhoff](#) if they're going to regain sole possession of eighth place in the East when they host the Penguins on Friday night.

A 6-2 home victory over Pittsburgh on Feb. 19 started a 14-2-3 run for Buffalo (38-29-10), which has won five straight to move into a tie with Washington for the conference's final playoff spot.

The Sabres have a game in hand on the Capitals, and beat them 5-1 on Tuesday for their longest winning streak since a six-game run from Dec. 27, 2009-Jan. 8, 2010.

"It's a great thing because of the way we're playing," right wing [Drew Stafford](#) said. "We can control our fate now. We know every game from now on is just like it's been the past month or so - it's must-win."

That job will likely be made more difficult with Ehrhoff out indefinitely after hurting his left knee when he knocked knees with the Capitals' [Troy Brouwer](#) in the first period.

The defenseman's importance was evident earlier this season when he missed 11 games with a rib injury and Buffalo went 2-7-2.

"I think dealing with one injury is maybe better than what we had to deal with in the past," said coach Lindy Ruff, who at one point was missing as many as nine regulars. "We have to deal with it. We have to face a little adversity, and we need players to step up."

The Penguins were getting plenty of that during a 14-1-1 run that moved them within a point of the conference-leading [New York Rangers](#). They've cooled significantly since, getting swept in a home-and-home set with the last-place [New York Islanders](#) following Thursday's 5-3 loss.

They've fallen five points back of the Rangers, who hold the tiebreaker. The Pens may be more concerned with Philadelphia, which is two points behind them in the race for the fourth seed and home ice in the opening round of the playoffs.

Pittsburgh's remaining five regular-season games are daunting.

“We’re in Buffalo (Friday), and we have big games with Philly, New York, Boston and Philly again,” coach Dan Bylsma said. “We’re going to try to win every one of those games.”

[Evgeni Malkin](#) continued his stellar season with his team-leading 47th goal Thursday, giving the superstar center nine goals and 10 assists in his last 10 games.

He reached 100 points for the first time since he had a career-high 113 in 2008-09.

Malkin has eight goals and 18 assists in 20 career meetings with the Sabres, including six points in two this season.

Teammate [Sidney Crosby](#) has 16 points during a 12-game scoring streak against Buffalo.

Crosby was held without a point and was a minus-3 in the two losses to the Islanders, and left Thursday’s game briefly in the second period after he was struck in the nose by a puck.

Malkin and Crosby will likely have to deal with red-hot [Ryan Miller](#), who has a 1.20 goals-against average and a shutout during the five-game winning streak.

Miller made 24 saves versus the Penguins on Feb. 19 after going 0-4-1 with a 4.67 GAA in his previous seven meetings.

GM Regier discusses Sabres' hot streak on 'NHL Hour'

NHL.com

March 29, 2012

[Buffalo Sabres](#) general manager [Darcy Regier](#), appearing as a guest on Thursday's "NHL Hour With Commissioner Gary Bettman," was asked if he was surprised at his team's ability to put together its current 14-2-4 stretch given its struggles with injuries and inconsistency for most of the season.

"Not totally, we did a little bit of it last year, but ... yeah, I am, because you don't think you can do it two years in a row," Regier said, referring to the Sabres' 16-4-4 finish last season that allowed them to rise from outside the top eight in the Eastern Conference to a seventh seed in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

What the Sabres are bidding to accomplish over the next 10 days would be even more significant, however -- they were 10 points out of a playoff spot and occupying the East basement as recently as Feb. 17 but enter Thursday holding down the No. 8 seed. If they're still above the cutoff line after the final regular-season games on April 7, it will mark the latest point in a season a team has rallied from a double-digit deficit in the standings to make the postseason.

"I think the biggest thing is we got healthy," Regier said. "It probably starts with the goaltending, with [Ryan Miller](#). I think we learned some things while we were injured as well. We had some young guys that played some games for us that probably would not have otherwise have gotten into games. They performed well and they continue to perform well. We've gotten a lot of energy from them, and the rest of the guys are doing their jobs."

The Sabres' resurgence can certainly be traced to the comeback second half by Miller, who spent the early months getting dinged up, watching his goals-against average inflate and dealing with persistent trade rumors. While it might be too late for the 2010 Vezina Trophy winner to lift his name back into the discussion for this year's award, it's undeniable he's been at the top of his game during a 14-1-4 stretch that dates to Feb. 17, when Buffalo began its push following an overtime loss to Montreal.

"He's back," Regier said simply. "He started the season off very well, was injured in November. Even though he came back and played I didn't think he was quite right, back to his normal form. Really I think it started with a West Coast trip (Feb. 29-March 3), he had the back-to-back shutouts on the West Coast and was really locked in and has really carried that over since then."

Regier described a Jan. 21 loss in St. Louis, the Sabres' ninth straight on the road, as the low point of the season.

"You're just waiting for a time in which you're going to get out of that hole, and the hole just keeps getting deeper," he said. "And people are going by you, and you recognize at that point that you're becoming very close to being out of it. And you run the numbers and you know what you have to do as a team and an organization, and you come pretty close to being despondent.

"Where we are now, it's cautious optimism. We are in a position to control our own destiny, but even with five games left and the margin for error and the competitiveness of the League and the competitiveness of our conference, you can't even for a moment take anything for granted. So you're respectfully grateful for where you are, recognizing you're not out of the woods yet.

Even still, with a home game against Pittsburgh coming up Friday followed by a home-and-home against Toronto and road games in Philadelphia and Boston to close out the regular season, the Sabres' mentality is to see if they might even improve their seeding rather than worry about the Capitals' pursuit of them in eighth.

"I think the key is you have to keep looking up. Don't look down," Regier said. "What that means for us is, well, there's Ottawa two points in front of us, we've played even games, let's see if we can chase Ottawa in these remaining games. ... To look down and try to hold on to something is probably not the right mindset to take."

The 54-year-old Regier came to Buffalo in 1997 after serving as an assistant GM and interim GM with the [New York Islanders](#), where his career as an executive was greatly influenced by such greats of the game as Bill Torrey, [Al Arbour](#) and Jim Devellano.

"Wonderful people, all of them," he said. "I wouldn't be here without those gentlemen, and the other part of it is, the idea of trying to work together as a general manager and coach was easy for me because I saw Bill and Al work together, and it worked very well for them. I'd love to be able to get anywhere close to that success rate they had in their working relationship."

Regier has carved out a niche of his own in Buffalo along with coach [Lindy Ruff](#) -- they form the longest current tenure of any GM and coach in the League.

"The coaching relationship, I think we've built on it," Regier said. "We've had an opportunity with all the time we spend together to, I think, in a respectful way challenge each other to be better, recognize that if we work together we can hopefully do more than the traditional relationship, which is the general manager is the boss, the coach has to coach and the strong lines of division. He understands a lot of what I do, I understand a lot of what he does, and we try to collaborate and work together and do things that way. So far we've been fortunate enough to be given the opportunity to continue it."

Maine F Brian Flynn agrees to 1-year with Sabres

Associated Press

March 29, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)—The [Buffalo Sabres](#) have agreed to a one-year entry level contract with University of Maine forward Brian Flynn.

An undrafted free agent, Flynn just completed a four-year college career in which he finished second on the team—and ninth in the nation—with 48 points (18 goals, 30 assists). Overall, the 6-foot-1, 185-pound player from Lynnfield, Mass., finished with 69 goals and 156 points in 153 career games to rank 11th on Maine's points list.

Flynn's contract doesn't begin until next season, though he'll finish this year with Buffalo's minor-league affiliate, AHL Rochester.

AROUND THE NHL

Brian Duff

Sabres.com

March 29, 2012

As you wake up today, in anticipation of Fan Appreciation Night on Friday at the First Niagara Center, know that there are now only 10 days to go in the NHL's regular season which culminates on Saturday, April 7.

With that in mind, and knowing full well that you already have the Sabres remaining schedule committed to memory, allow me to serve as your "NHL TV Guide" for non-Sabres games that you absolutely should take time to watch down the stretch.

Thursday, March 29

Washington at Boston. Do I really need to tell you why? The Capitals did win last time in at the Garden, and recently at that. With the Bruins having yet to clinch the Northeast, chances are they'd love to pretty much lock it down in front of the home fans.

Friday, March 30

While watching Sabres and Pens, use the DVR for Nashville at Detroit. For years this has been the most underrated rivalry in the NHL, and it's very likely this sixth and final meeting of the regular season will be serving as a precursor to a third first-round playoff meeting between these two in the past eight years. And with home ice still to be determined, there is plenty at stake.

Saturday, March 31

The nightcap on the penultimate Saturday of the season is a beauty: Dallas at San Jose. It's the front end of a home-and-home series that concludes Tuesday in Texas. The Sharks, rather handily, took the first three meetings this season, but Dallas scored an early March shootout win to get on the board. And as of right now, there is only a single point between them in their respective quests for the Pacific Division crown.

Sunday, April 1

Only a fool would settle for one game on this final Sunday of the 2011-12 season. Boston meets the Rangers in a matinee at MSG (final score prediction: 2-1); followed by the last meeting (prior to another potentially epic first round encounter) between the Flyers and Penguins at Consol Energy Center. The latest chapter in the Keystone State rivalry had NBC all but anointing -- and for very valid reasons -- the Pens the Cup through 40 minutes of play. But a funny thing happened. Even the almighty Penguins showed that the two-goal lead is a hard one to hold, and they succumbed to the Flyers in overtime just as the clock was about to expire.

Monday, April 2

Washington at Tampa Bay. Beyond the playoff race implications, this game marks the final home game for my favorite player in the game right now - Steven Stamkos. (Please don't tell Gabriel Landeskog, or the 96 other players that I routinely throw out there as my favorite.) The Stammer may well treat the fans to one last trick and could well hit the 60 goal plateau in front of 19,204 at the Tampa Bay Times Forum.

Tuesday, April 3

After the Sabres final home game versus the Leafs, make sure to catch the back end of the aforementioned home-and-home series between San Jose and Dallas.

Wednesday, April 4

Detroit at St. Louis. Two days ago the Blues dispatched of a season long nemesis - the Predators. They'll look to assert themselves again, against another Central Division rival to whom they've lost each of the last three meetings.

Thursday, April 5

There are 14 games in total, and beyond the Sabres at Flyers, so many good ones! Rangers at Penguins, Panthers at Capitals, to name but two. But again, I am most intrigued by how the Pacific will be won. That's why you should focus your late-evening viewing attention to Darryl Sutter and his Kings against his former team, the Sharks, as they start a home-and-home series in Los Angeles.

Friday, April 6

There's only one game on this night, and it's a huge one for Phoenix as they travel to St. Louis. The Blues are 3-0 against the Coyotes this season, but may have less to play for by then which could open the door for the desert dogs to sneak away with two points.

Saturday, April 7

The NHL sells the drama and has all 30 teams in action on the final day of the regular season. Buffalo at Boston will be among the afternoon affairs, as will the Rangers home to the Capitals. But again, the anxiety in the west will played out with Dallas home to the Blues, Phoenix at Minnesota, and the Kings in San Jose to conclude the regular season. Any bets on whether the last game will be a three pointer?

Visit from Crosby, Penguins promises to challenge Sabres

Bill Hoppe

Niagara Gazette

March 30, 2012

BUFFALO — Give it a shot. Try drawing up a better late-season NHL matchup. The Sabres' tilt against the powerhouse Pittsburgh Penguins tonight could make for a wildly entertaining three hours inside the First Niagara Center.

This one promises to be action-packed and fun, folks.

The scorching Sabres, having climbed into eighth place Tuesday, are roaring toward another unlikely playoff appearance. They've won five straight games and seven of the last nine, piling up goals while stymieing the opposition.

It took about 70 games, but they're performing like the dynamic club many anointed them during the offseason.

Meanwhile, the Penguins, owners of the league's slickest offense, already have 100 points thanks to a recent 14-1-1 run.

Superstar Sidney Crosby, who sat for 10 months following a scary concussion, hasn't missed a beat since returning from a "soft tissue" problem March 15. Tonight will be his first appearance here since Dec. 11, 2010 and only his 18th game this season.

With 47 goals and 100 points, Evgeni Malkin is the NHL's most lethal threat and the frontrunner to earn the Hart Trophy for MVP.

And then there's James Neal, who quietly has 37 goals and 78 points.

"It's going to be an extremely fun game," said Sabres defenseman Mike Weber, a Pittsburgh native who will replace Christian Ehrhoff tonight (knee) following a four-game absence. "There's been a lot of them lately, so everything's extremely important. It's really playoff hockey right now. Teams are ramped up and playing extremely solid. We got to keep playing the way we've been playing."

Sabres center Tyler Ennis added: "It's going to be a good test for us. We've done a good job to get into this spot. We got to keep pushing. We can't take our foot off the pedal."

The Sabres haven't taken their foot off the pedal much in the past nine weeks, going an incredible 19-5-5 since January 24. They have points in nine straight (7-0-2).

Two huge road wins in five days turned heads and served notice throughout the league. First, the Sabres downed the Rangers 4-1 on Friday in New York, and then they throttled the Capitals 5-1 on Tuesday in Washington to nab eighth place.

The even-keeled approach the Sabres have embraced does wonders, coach Lindy Ruff said. They're never too high or low. They just keep plowing forward.

"We've talked about it for almost two months now, not getting too excited after wins and enjoying the win and putting it away," Ruff said. "I think we've done a good job of that. We knew that that game (Tuesday) was ... a four-pointer.

"It was a game we've been able to get and we got it. We've been able to put it away."

Even if the Sabres put their triumphs on the backburner, the good feelings they generate never leave completely.

They enjoyed a loose, laugh-filled 30-minute optional practice Thursday. Players smiled throughout.

"I think everyone's having fun," Ennis said. "Everyone loves winning and ... we're playing well right now. ... You know it's a confident bunch. When you get on the ice, it's fun to be out there, so guys are joking around."

But to a man, the Sabres will tell you their run hasn't yielded anything yet. Four games remain after tonight. Washington also has 86 points but has played one more game. The Sabres have little margin for error.

"That's very true. We haven't done anything yet," Weber said. "We've made a lot of strides in the right direction. I think the fun you're seeing on the ice is us just kind of (taking) a rest day. It's nice to kind of have those fun days on the ice. ...

"We all know starting now the whole focus is on the Pittsburgh Penguins."

Much of the focus will be on Crosby, hockey's biggest name.

Crosby has four goals and 25 points this season. No matter how long the 24-year-old sits, he comes back at an elite level.

"He's the best player in the league for a reason," Ennis said. "Everybody knows how hard he works and how committed he is and just how good he is. So I don't think anyone was really surprised that he came back and picked up right where he left off."

Ruff added: "A dynamic skater. He makes plays sometimes you wouldn't expect from real tight areas. He's a great player. I don't think there's a lot of difference. I think he's made them a better team."

Weber said his father told him Pittsburgh's a better city when Crosby's playing.

“I sense that it’s more exciting,” said Weber, who roughed up Crosby during his last visit. “While Crosby’s been off they’ve had Malkin having a career year. (There’s) always excitement in that city when you’ve got as good a team as they do.”

Just like Buffalo.

Notes: Sabres winger Nathan Gerbe (muscle pull) still isn’t ready to play. “He’s kind of stuck in that 80-90 percent but hasn’t gotten over that hump yet,” Ruff said. “We’re hoping that one of these days it just clicks in.” Center Derek Roy, who’s been feeling sick, practiced Thursday and should play tonight. ... With goalie Ryan Miller off the ice Thursday, the Sabres propped two pads against some wood in the empty net. “A little stiff, wasn’t he?” Ruff joked about the goalie. ... The Sabres have officially announced the signing of University of Maine forward Brian Flynn to a one-year, entry-level contract. He’ll play for Rochester this season on an amateur tryout. The 23-year-old’s 6-foot-1 and 185 pounds.

Sabres stress staying dialed in for final 5 games

Joe Buscaglia

WGR 550

March 30, 2012

Buffalo, NY -- In the thick of the Eastern Conference race to the playoffs, the Buffalo Sabres have gone an improbable run that culminated -- for the time being -- with a 5-1 win over Washington giving them sole possession of 8th place in the standings.

Since that monumental win on Tuesday, the Sabres have had some time to collect their thoughts and move on to their next opponents -- the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday night.

"Well we've talked about it for almost two months now, of not getting too excited after wins -- enjoying the win and putting it away. I think we've done a good job with that," head coach Lindy Ruff told reporters Thursday.

"We knew that that game was, as everybody says, it's like a four-pointer -- and it was a game that we wanted to get and we got it. We've been able to put it away. Part of it, skating yesterday was to kind of flush that out of the system and now we're resting up and getting ready for the next one."

Still with five games to go in their late-season push to get in to the post-season, many players in the locker room know the job isn't done. In fact to stay sharp, some are even aiming higher than just eighth place in the Eastern Conference when it's all said and done.

"It's easy," forward Derek Roy replied when asked if it's tough not to lose your edge. "We've got to look ahead, got to look at the teams ahead of us and try to catch them instead of worrying about the teams behind us right now. We've got to work hard at our game. We know it's gonna be a tough opponent, tough weekend for us and we've gotta be ready for it."

Of course the Sabres have their Friday night home showdown against the Penguins at First Niagara Center. Then they immediately jump on a bus to Toronto to take on the Maple Leafs at the ACC on Saturday night. A back-to-back weekend that, if they continue their winning ways, could help Roy's desire to catch even more teams ahead of them in the playoff standings.

But with most the stress on just getting in to the playoffs, Tyler Ennis knows they've come too far to let the postseason slip through their fingers.

"Yeah, we've got to finish it," the forward said. "We've done a really good job to get ourselves to this point and battled hard and played really good hockey. We're almost there but we can't look back right now, we've got to keep going and just continue to get better."

The Sabres presently sit in eighth place with 86 points, just two points behind seventh place Ottawa and two points ahead of ninth place Washington.

The Capitals are on the road in Boston on Thursday evening, whereas the Senators next play in Philadelphia against the Flyers on Saturday night.

[Twitter: @JoeB WGR](#)

Maine hockey linemates, roommates Brian Flynn, Spencer Abbott agree to pro contracts

Larry Mahoney
Bangor Daily News
March 30, 2012

ORONO, Maine — Spencer Abbott and Brian Flynn comprised two-thirds of the highest-scoring line in Division I men's hockey this past season along with Joey Diamond.

Abbott and Flynn, who were free agents, are also roommates.

But they will be adversaries this weekend after both agreed to National Hockey League amateur tryout contracts Wednesday.

Left wing Abbott signed with the Toronto Maple Leafs and center Flynn said he will put his name on a Buffalo Sabres contract Thursday morning.

They will report to their respective American Hockey League franchises, the Toronto Marlies and the Rochester Americans, and it just so happens Toronto will visit Rochester for games Friday and Saturday.

Abbott finished the season as the leading scorer in Division I with 62 points on 21 goals and 41 assists in 39 games. He also leads the country in points per game (1.59), assists (41) and assists per game (1.05).

[The Hockey East Player of the Year](#) is one of 10 finalists for the Hobey Baker Award, which is given to the nation's top Division I player. The New England hockey writers selected him the Most Valuable Player and Best Forward in the region.

Abbott was a Hockey East first-team selection as was Flynn.

Abbott's plus-15 rating was second on the team behind Flynn's plus-18.

A player is awarded a plus one if he is on the ice when his team scores an even-strength or shorthanded goal and a minus-one if the opponent scores.

Flynn notched 18 goals and 30 assists in 40 games and his 48 points left him in a ninth-place tie.

His 0.75 assists per game tied him with teammate Will O'Neill for 17th in the country.

O'Neill signed with the Winnipeg Jets earlier this week.

"I'm very excited," said Flynn, who will sign a \$92,500 signing bonus and will get a two-way contract that will pay him a salary based on whether he plays in the NHL or AHL.

Abbott also signed a two-way contract.

“It’s a great organization. I’ve always wanted a chance to play in the NHL, and now I’m going to be one step closer,” said Flynn.

He said the Sabres “showed a ton of interest in me” and that Buffalo would be an “awesome place to play.”

He will undergo a physical exam Thursday morning before joining his new teammates.

Abbott could not be reached for comment.

Flynn concluded his career with 156 points (69 goals, 87 assists) in 153 games, good for 11th on Maine’s all-time scoring list.

Abbott, who scored a goal in [the NCAA Northeast Regional Tournament loss to Minnesota-Duluth](#) after missing the previous game with a head injury, wound up tied with Guy Perron for 17th on the school’s all-time scoring list with 146 points (54 & 93) in 151 career games.

“It’s great. I’m really proud of both of them,” said Maine coach Tim Whitehead. “They’ve earned everything they’ve received. They’ve been an integral part of our team for four seasons and there’s no underestimating the impact they’ve had on their teammates and the program. I was very pleased they stayed for their senior years and they took their games to another level.”

Amerks Hall of Fame will welcome Rick Pagnutti and Darcy Wakaluk

Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

March 30, 2012

For two guys whose primary responsibility was preventing goals, Rick Pagnutti and Darcy Wakaluk were also pretty good at scoring them.

Pagnutti played defense for the Rochester Americans for four seasons, from 1972-73 through 1975-76, and was a two-time American Hockey League All-Star.

In his first season in the red, white and blue Amerk sweater, he scored 18 goals, a franchise record for defensemen that still stands 39 years later.

Wakaluk was the backup goalie to Daren Puppa on the Calder Cup team of 1986-87 and won the AHL award for best team goaltending along with David Littman in 1990-91. He played in three Calder Cup finals.

But he's also in the league record book for becoming the first goalie in AHL history to score a goal, and his 17 career assists are an Amerk record.

Tonight their accomplishments will become further entrenched in franchise history when they are inducted into the Amerks Hall of Fame. On-ice ceremonies will start around 7:25 p.m., with puck drop for the Amerks game against the Toronto Marlies around 7:45 p.m.

"I'm very humbled," said the 66-year-old Pagnutti, who lives in his native Sudbury, Ontario. "Me and my wife (Mary Ann) loved it there."

Pagnutti arrived in Rochester for the 1972-73 season, though he had no guarantees of a roster spot when he got to town.

While the Amerks were an independent team with no direct affiliation to the NHL, coach Don Cherry had managed to finagle players from a couple organizations.

"I didn't know where I was going to play and I called Don," Pagnutti recalls, "and he said, 'I've got 40 guys in camp so you've got three days to make the team.'"

Pagnutti obviously did enough in camp to earn a contract. By the end of the year he was a second-team AHL All-Star.

One of his best memories is from 1974-75, when the Amerks ousted the Nova Scotia Voyageurs in a six-game playoff series.

"They had a star-studded Montreal Canadiens lineup and that was when John Wensick (the Amerks' legendary tough-guy) and Gilles Lupien (of Nova Scotia) used to go at it all the time. It was a lot more physical back then."

Gift helps veterans put dreams on the ice

Disabled use hockey as part of recovery

Jay Tokasz

The Buffalo News

March 30, 2012

Brent Billings had never heard of sled hockey when he received an email inviting him to a clinic in February at Bud Bakewell Ice Rink in Riverside Park.

Five clinics later, Billings is hooked — and thanks in part to the Buffalo Sabres Foundation, the Sabres Alumni Association and National Fuel, he will be among 26 area veterans headed to Dallas next month to participate in the USA Disabled Hockey Festival.

The Sabres, the alumni and the utility company are donating \$270,000 over three years to support two new hockey teams for disabled veterans through the Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare Systems.

Billings, who suffered a serious wrist injury that ended four years of service in the Navy, including a deployment in the Persian Gulf, is part of the newly created Buffalo Sabres Sled Vets.

The sled team and a traditional stand-up skating team known as the Buffalo Sabres Warriors were created as a way to help local veterans recover both physically and emotionally from wounds suffered in battle.

“For some it might be the camaraderie, getting them out of the house,” said Pamela Kaznowski, recreation therapy supervisor for the VA Western New York Healthcare System. “It brings them back just to feeling good again.”

Participants range in age from a 23-year-old double amputee to a 69-year-old Vietnam veteran who lost both his legs in that war. The sled team also has a couple of paraplegics, said Kaznowski.

“They’re competing just like anyone else,” she said. “They all have different abilities. They’re able, they’re just able-bodied in different ways.”

The stand-up team was created for veterans who have disabilities that don’t keep them from skating.

Cliff Benson, chief development officer of the Buffalo Sabres and president of the Sabres Foundation, said team officials became interested in doing more for area veterans following the team’s tour of Landstuhl Regional Medical Center in Landstuhl, Germany, in October, as part of a European trip.

The Sabres met several wounded American soldiers during their visit — an experience that Benson termed “sobering to say the least.”

The gift will pay for equipment, uniforms, ice time and tournament and travel costs.

Western New York is considered a hotbed for sled hockey. Four local players were part of the 15-member team that captured a gold medal at the 2010 Winter Paralympics in Vancouver.

Norm Page of Lancaster, who serves as national sled hockey representative for USA Hockey, helped run the first clinic for disabled veterans, along with Hasek's Heroes and members of the gold-medal team.

Billings was still getting accustomed to the challenge of steering a sled, but he's committed to sticking with it.

"It's kind of hard to turn, and stick handling is tough," he said.

But the program already has introduced him to new friends.

"Just being part of a group again is fun," he said.

Rob Ray, the popular former Sabres enforcer, said the alumni were proud to be associated with the effort.

During a news conference, Ray even issued a challenge to a group of sled-hockey playing veterans in attendance.

"Maybe we can put something together — my guys versus your guys," said Ray.

Responded one of the vets: "You bet."

jtokasz@buffnews.com

Sled hockey in WNY gets major boost

Jacquie Walker

WIVB

March 29, 2012

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres will help wounded veterans in need of physical rehab using what they know best: hockey!

We have a strong corps of very accomplished sled hockey players in western New York. Thursday's announcement means more veterans with physical and emotional challenges will get to try hockey.

The Buffalo Sabres Foundation, the Sabres Alumni Association, and the National Fuel Gas Foundation are committing \$90,000 a year for the next three years to a program aimed at helping veterans heal through hockey. They'll be working with the Veterans Affairs Western New York Healthcare System to use both sled hockey and traditional stand-up hockey as a force for rehabilitation.

Buffalo VA Hospital Medical Director Brian Stiller said, "To give us the opportunity to add more to what we do, just goes without saying that the importance of a community serving veterans and I thank you."

The money that's flowing into this new program will be used for equipment, ice time, and uniforms as well as tournament and travel costs.

The program is open to any western New Yorker who has served in the military. To learn more about how you can get involved with the Buffalo Sabres sled vets program, contact Pam Kaznowski of the VA Western New York Healthcare System at 716-862-6814 or pamela.kaznowski@va.gov

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Sabres Host Party in the Plaza Tonight for Fan Appreciation

WGRZ

March 29, 2012

BUFFALO, NY - The Buffalo Sabres will be hosting a Party in the Plaza tonight as part of their Fan Appreciation night.

The party, which begins at 5pm, is open to everyone.

Those without tickets to the [game](#) can stay and watch it on two large video screens that will be set up outside.

And those lucky enough to get in the game will have the chance to win a big giveaway.

"The big thing we are doing we are giving away jerseys. It's a promotion we've done in the past the players literally take off the jersey and give it to a fan that's there that was picked throughout the night," says Mike Gilbert, Sabres VP of Public Relations.

The Buffalo Sabres 50/50 Raffle, that benefits the Sabres Foundation, will also have a guaranteed pot of \$25,000.

Isles complete home-and-home sweep of Penguins

NHL.com

March 30, 2012

[Josh Bailey](#) and [Kyle Okposo](#) upstaged [Sidney Crosby](#) and [Evgeni Malkin](#) on Thursday night.

Bailey had the first five-point night by an Islander at the Nassau Coliseum in more than 15 years and Okposo scored twice to reach the 20-goal mark for the first time in his career as New York completed a home-and-home sweep of Pittsburgh by beating the Penguins 5-3.

No Islander had scored five points in a home game since Niklas Andersson did it on Dec. 10, 1996.

"It's always sweeter to get them when you win," said Bailey, the ninth player taken in the 2008 NHL Draft, when asked about the biggest game of his four-year NHL career. "We did a lot of little things right, played good defense and found a way to score some goals. That's a recipe for winning."

The second loss in three nights to the last-place team in the Atlantic Division dealt another blow to the Penguins' hopes of catching the New York Rangers for first place in the division and the Eastern Conference. Pittsburgh now trails the Rangers by five points; each team has five games remaining.

[Al Montoya](#), the likely starter for the rest of the season with [Evgeni Nabokov](#) sidelined by a lower-body injury, made 26 saves.

For the second straight game, the Islanders held [Sidney Crosby](#) off the scoresheet. Crosby left the game early in the second period when defenseman [Dylan Reese](#)'s clearing pass hit him in the face. He left a bloody trail on the ice before being helped to the dressing room, but missed only about eight minutes of playing time before returning.

The Islanders, who won their third in a row, scored 10 goals in the back-to-back wins against the Penguins without a point from their top line of [John Tavares](#), [Matt Moulson](#) and [PA Parenteau](#).

"The wins that we've had recently, it's been the secondary scoring," coach Jack Capuano said. "It's good to see some of the guys who struggled earlier in the year are scoring some goals for us."

The recently formed trio of Bailey, Okposo and [Frans Nielsen](#) has more than picked up the slack.

"The three of us seem to mesh pretty well together," Bailey said. "It's worked well for a short period of time, and we want to finish the season that way."

Okposo extended his goal-scoring streak to four games and put the Islanders ahead to stay at 16:36 of the second period when his pass to the front of the net deflected off the skate of Pittsburgh defenseman Daryl Engelland for a power-play goal and a 2-1 lead. Bailey made it 3-1 two minutes later when he slid a breakaway backhand past [Marc-Andre Fleury](#) for a shorthanded goal.

Okposo reached the 20-goal mark at 5:52 of the third period when he slammed home a perfect feed from Bailey for a 4-1 lead.

"They're pretty opportunistic," Fleury said. "Sometimes we controlled the play very well, then they'd come down in our zone. They have a good group of forwards and they're dangerous around the net making those little plays in front. They got a few (goals) like that tonight."

Goals by [Jordan Staal](#) at 8:20 and [Evgeni Malkin](#) at 18:29 cut the Isles' lead to one, but Bailey iced the win by taking the puck away at his own blue line and hitting the empty net with 4.7 seconds remaining.

Bailey had three assists in the Isles' 5-3 win at Pittsburgh on Tuesday, giving him eight points in two games.

The Islanders, now 5-1-0 in their last six, swept a home-and-home series against the Penguins for the first time since November 1986.

"We have a young team and guys are learning how to win every day," said 39-year-old Isles forward [Jay Pandolfo](#), who set up Bailey's shorthanded goal with a spectacular diving play. "It's good to see."

New York opened the scoring at 11:07 of the first period when [Marty Reasoner](#) scored for the first time in 71 games dating to March 8, 2011, when he was a member of the Florida Panthers. Reasoner, a free-agent signing by the Isles last summer, raced down the slot and whipped a perfect feed by [Mark Streit](#) past Fleury.

Pittsburgh tied it 8:37 into the second period on a shorthanded goal by [Pascal Dupuis](#), who outworked Streit in the Isles' zone and snapped a shot from the left circle past [Al Montoya](#).

Malkin, the NHL scoring leader, became the first player this season to reach the 100-point mark when he scored from the slot with Fleury on the bench for a sixth attacker.

After back-to-back losses to the Islanders, a team they've dominated in recent years, the Penguins will try to get back on track when they head to Buffalo to face the red-hot Sabres on Friday.

"When things go your way for a while, it's tough to be losing like that," Fleury said. "Got to learn from it and just try to put it behind us and be ready for tomorrow night."

Staal said it's more important for the Penguins to get back to playing well again, rather than focusing on catching the Rangers.

"We've got to worry about our game," he said. "The standings will be the standings. We want to win games. Right now, we're not playing our best hockey and we're losing games. That's definitely something we've got to address first."

Penguins' chances of catching Rangers slipping away after another loss to Islanders

Dave Molinari

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 30, 2012

UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- First place in the Eastern Conference still is a mathematical possibility for the Penguins.

Fifth place, however, has become a clear and present danger.

Being swept by the New York Islanders in a home-and-home series, including an 5-3 defeat Thursday night at Nassau Coliseum, has cost the Penguins any realistic hope they had of stealing the top seed in the conference from the New York Rangers.

And it has put them in very real peril of slipping into fifth place behind Philadelphia, which would give the Flyers home-ice advantage if, as seems likely, the teams meet in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Scouting report

- **Matchup:** Penguins vs. Buffalo Sabres, 7:38 p.m. today, First Niagara Center, Buffalo, N.Y.
- **TV, Radio:** Root Sports, WXDX-FM (105.9).
- **Probable goaltenders:** Brent Johnson for Penguins; Ryan Miller for Sabres.
- **Penguins:** Have won at least one game in Buffalo in 10 of past 11 seasons. ... C Evgeni Malkin has three goals, three assists in two games against Sabres in 2011-12 ... Are 7-6-2 in second game when playing on consecutive days, which they are doing for final time this season.
- **Sabres:** Are 20-11-8 at home, including 6-2 victory Feb. 19 against Penguins. ... RW Drew Stafford has six goals, eight assists in past eight games. ... Have scored first in 25 of their 38 victories.
- **Hidden stat:** Ten of Penguins' past 14 games against Sabres have been decided by one goal.

The Penguins own a two-point lead on the Flyers and, like Philadelphia, have five games remaining. Two of those will be played at Consol Energy Center, where the Flyers' all-time record is 4-0.

"You look at the standings, and see how close it is," defenseman Zbynek Michalek said. "If you go into a few games' slide and [the Flyers] are winning, they can catch up to us easily. They're

not far behind us.

"We have to start getting some points in the bank and secure home-ice advantage, for sure."

There was a distinct urgency in Michalek's tone. One far more evident than most of his teammates had shown in the game.

The Penguins (47-24-6) have made a habit of rebounding well from subpar efforts. Thursday night, though, they seemed more intent on replicating their lackluster showing in a 5-3 loss 48 hours earlier at Consol Energy Center.

"We talked about it a lot and we expect it from the guys to have a better effort ... it just wasn't there," center Jordan Staal said. "We have to definitely find a way to get our game back and do the things we need to do to win games."

Similar sentiments were expressed by center Sidney Crosby, whose game might best be summed up this way: Getting smacked on the left side of the nose by a Dylan Reese clearing attempt early in the second period -- and still bleeding from his nose after the game -- might be his fondest memory of the game.

"We didn't do a lot of good things and paid for it again," Crosby said. "We made some mistakes and they capitalized."

That was particularly true of Islanders center Josh Bailey, who followed up a three-point game Tuesday by scoring two goals and setting up the other three. Give him a few more games against the Penguins, and the Islanders might be hoisting Bailey's No. 12 into the rafters alongside those of guys such as Bryan Trottier and Mike Bossy.

Penguins coach Dan Bylsma opened the game with new line combinations, putting Crosby between Chris Kunitz and Pascal Dupuis, Steve Sullivan and James Neal with Evgeni Malkin and having Staal flanked by Matt Cooke and Tyler Kennedy.

That the Penguins scored one of their goals while killing a penalty and another after replacing goalie Marc-Andre Fleury with an extra attacker late in regulation accurately reflects how the reconfigured units fared.

Bylsma, though, seemed confident after the game that those lines can be productive.

"Evgeni with James Neal and Steve Sullivan can be a very effective line, at both ends of the rink, against any group," he said.

"Kunitz, Crosby and Dupuis can be a top line in the league, with the way they play and Jordan Staal, Matt Cooke and Tyler Kennedy can be on the ice and play against any other line in the league. That's what we know we can get from those three lines."

Marty Reasoner of New York scored the only goal of the opening period, but Dupuis negated that with a short-handed goal at 8:37 of the second. That goal, his 24th, extended Dupuis' scoring streak to 12 games, matching the longest in the NHL this season.

Kyle Okposo put the Islanders back in front with a power-play goal at 16:36, however, and Bailey made it 3-1 two minutes later.

Okposo got what proved to be the winner at 5:52 of the second, and after goals by Staal (8:20) and Malkin (18:29) injected a bit of suspense, Bailey sealed the victory with an empty-netter at 19:55.

And so the Islanders got a victory that could help to sustain them through another spring without playoffs, while the Penguins received another reminder of how their game must be upgraded. Quickly.

"We're not playing our best hockey and we're losing games," Staal said. "That's definitely something we have to address."

Penguins notebook: Starting goalie vs. Sabres unclear

Dave Molinari

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

March 30, 2012

UNIONDALE, N.Y. -- Coach **Dan Bylsma** hasn't announced who will be in goal tonight for the Penguins when they play the Buffalo Sabres at First Niagara Center.

He even said Thursday that he "will consider" calling on **Marc-Andre Fleury**, who faced the New York Islanders Thursday at Nassau Coliseum, three times in less than four days, as the Penguins follow up the games against the Islanders and Sabres with one at home at 12:30 p.m. Sunday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

Still, the front-runner to start at the First Niagara Center appears to be veteran **Brent Johnson**, who missed 17 games with an undisclosed injury before backing up Fleury Thursday night.

Johnson, who has not played since Feb. 19 in Buffalo, took part in the game-day skate at Nassau Coliseum, then stayed on the ice for some additional work.

If the idea was to determine whether his sweat glands still function, he passed the test, because the perspiration was pouring off him when he returned to the locker room.

"I got a good [workout Wednesday] and a really good one [Thursday]," he said. "If I get a chance to play [in Buffalo], I'm going to take it.

"It's just a game where I have to step in there, if I do get a chance to play, and help the guys get a [victory. The Sabres] are playing really well, so I think it would be a really good challenge for myself."

Fleury, predictably, said he had no reservations about making all three starts "if they want me to play," but conceded that "it's a lot of games."

The Islanders game was Fleury's 64th appearance of the season. The preseason plan was to get him about 65 starts.

With Johnson back, the Penguins returned goalie **Brad Thiessen** to their minor league team in Wilkes-Barre.

Sabres surge

The Sabres, whose playoff prospects looked all but dead in mid-February, have charged back into eighth place in the Eastern Conference, and look like a team capable of sticking around the playoffs for a while.

The key to their resurgence, not surprisingly, has been goaltender **Ryan Miller**, who has rebounded from a poor start of his own and won 14 of his previous 18 starts.

That Miller got his game in sync did not surprise Penguins defenseman **Brooks Orpik**, who has played with him on several national squads, including the 2010 U.S. Olympic team.

"I know he was struggling a little bit in the beginning of the year, but obviously his skill level ... everyone sees that," Orpik said. "From playing with him, I know how committed he is and how hard he works."

"Everyone goes through slumps. It's just how you react to it [that matters]. Some guys, probably the slump continues and maybe multiples. In his case, it was only a matter of time until he got out of it."

Injury report

Penguins defenseman **Matt Niskanen**, who has missed the past four games because of an unspecified injury, is not scheduled to play tonight.

Neither is injured center **Joe Vitale**, who hasn't been in a game since March 17.

Both, however, were on the ice during and after a game-day skate and could be back for the Flyers game, according to Bylsma.

Defenseman **Kris Letang**, who got an undisclosed injury in the 5-2 victory Sunday against New Jersey, did not accompany his teammates on this two-game road trip and also is out until at least Sunday.

Christian Ehrhoff, who leads the Sabres in average ice time (23:03) and is their highest-scoring defenseman (32 points), is out indefinitely after his left knee was injured in a 5-1 victory Tuesday in Washington.

Return planned

Islanders defenseman **Dylan Reese**, an Upper St. Clair native, is scheduled to be an unrestricted free agent this summer, and said Thursday he has not had conversations with management about a new contract.

He made it clear, though, that he would like to re-sign with New York.

"It's not something that we've talked about, but it's something that I hope," he said. "I want to be part of this organization."

"I'm happy with my development over the year, and the way the team has come together. It's a fun group to be a part of."

Reese, 27, is playing out a two-way contract that pays him \$635,250 in the NHL, \$60,000 in the minors.

He played for the Pittsburgh Hornets and the Pittsburgh Forge of the North American Hockey League before attending Harvard.

Penguins stumble against Islanders again

Josh Yohe

Pittsburgh Tribune-Review

March 30, 2012

UNIONDALE, N.Y. — Sidney Crosby's nose injury did not require stitches. The same can't be said of the Penguins' recent performance.

Crosby missed part of the second period after taking a puck to the face as the Penguins were again surprised by the Islanders, this time in a 5-3 setback at Nassau Coliseum.

The Penguins have lost consecutive games to the Islanders and trail the New York Rangers by five points for the top spot in the Eastern Conference. Each team has five games remaining, and the Penguins will host the Rangers on April 5.

Barring a Rangers' collapse, the Penguins now appear a very strong bet to begin the Stanley Cup playoffs against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"The standings will be the standings," center Jordan Staal said. "We want to win games. Right now, we're not playing our best hockey, and we're losing games. It's something we need to address."

Crosby was held scoreless for a second straight game and left the ice at the 1:43 mark of the second period. While skating toward the left corner in New York territory early in the second period, Crosby was struck in the nose by defenseman Dylan Reese's clearing attempt. Reese, an Upper St. Clair native, was about 10 feet away from Crosby when he launched a clearing attempt that struck the Penguins' captain in the face.

Crosby has a large welt on the left side of his nose.

"We didn't do a lot of good things," Crosby said. "We paid for it again. We made some mistakes, and they capitalized on it."

The Penguins were hungry to play better defensively following a multitude of high-scoring games in recent weeks. They didn't succeed, and perhaps in paying so much attention to defense, were unable to generate their normal offensive attack.

"It was a bit better," said Crosby of his team's defensive work. "But we didn't produce enough offensively. It's still something to work on."

Again, the Penguins made numerous mistakes, something that hasn't been a characteristic all season.

They allowed a short-handed breakaway goal and were guilty of many turnovers.

"I didn't see a lot of response," coach Dan Bylsma said.

The Penguins have now permitted 25 goals in their past six games. Bylsma pointed out before the game that he isn't concerned about his team's play in its territory, but rather, believes puck management issues are to blame for his team's bloated goals against totals in recent games.

Again those problems were very much on display.

Center Evgeni Malkin, who scored his league-leading 100th point on his 47th goal — which ties his career-high — was guilty of a turnover while the Penguins were on the power play that led to Josh Bailey's goal. Bailey recorded two goals and three assists.

Malkin wasn't the only Penguins' player to make a mistake, as the power play again looked lost without injured defenseman Kris Letang.

"We expected a better effort," said Staal, who scored his 24th goal. "It just wasn't there. We need to find a way to get our game back."

The Penguins return to action Friday night against the red-hot Sabres in Buffalo.

Scoring summary

First period

Islanders, 1-0 (11:07): The Islanders pinned the Penguins in their territory for almost a minute before D Mark Streit circled around the net and found open C Marty Reasoner in the slot. He blasted a shot past G Marc-Andre Fleury.

Second period

Penguins, 1-1 (8:37): RW Craig Adams fed RW Pascal Dupuis, who buried a wrist shot past G Al Montoya's glove while the Penguins were killing a penalty.

Islanders, 2-1 (16:36): RW Kyle Okposo slid a puck toward the net that hit off D Deryk Engelland's skate and into the net.

Islanders, 3-1 (18:36): C Evgeni Malkin coughed up the puck at New York's blue line, allowing C Josh Bailey to beat Fleury on a breakaway. Fleury's poke-check attempt failed.

Third period

Islanders, 4-1 (5:52): Okposo found himself open in front of the net, took a pass from Bailey and beat Fleury.

Penguins, 4-2 (8:20): C Jordan Staal took a pass from D Zbynek Michalek, split the defense and beat Montoya with a backhand shot to the stick side.

Penguins, 4-3 (18:29): With Fleury pulled, Malkin gathered the puck in the slot and registered his 47th goal and 100th point.

Islanders, 19:55: Bailey broke past LW Steve Sullivan and scored into an empty net.

What to Watch For: Pens vs. Sabres

Michelle Crechiolo
Penguins.NHL.com
March 29, 2012

TEAM SCOPE

When the Penguins last played the Sabres on Feb. 19, Buffalo was dead last in the Eastern Conference and nine points out of a playoff spot – meaning they'd need to orchestrate a remarkable turnaround to even *consider* a postseason berth.

Well, they've done just that.

Buffalo has gone 14-2-3 since topping Pittsburgh that day and 7-0-2 in its last nine games. And the Sabres earned their season-high fifth straight win by trouncing Washington, 5-1, on Tuesday in a critical showdown as the two clubs entered the game tied in the standings. And with the statement victory, Buffalo now has a two-point cushion on eighth place in the East.

The Sabres were actually 10 points out of the playoffs on Feb. 17, two days before they hosted Pittsburgh. They're putting themselves in position to become just the second team in NHL history to overcome a 10 point deficit this late in the season, after the New York Islanders rallied from a 10-point hole on Feb. 18, 1994 to snag eighth place in the conference.

Goalie Ryan Miller had an uncharacteristically shaky first half, piecing together a 12-15-2 record, a 3.07 goals-against average and a save percentage of .899 before the All-Star break – not to mention dealing with a concussion/neck injury after being steamrolled by Boston's Milan Lucic back in November.

But Miller has since turned his season around to be the cornerstone of his team's surge. He has been absolutely red hot for the Sabres, going 14-1-3 in his last 18 games, 8-0-2 in his last 10 and allowing just three goals in his last four outings.

And the players in front of Miller have been piecing together a total team effort. On Tuesday, Cody McCormick became the 30th player to score a goal for the Sabres this season – which ties Buffalo's franchise record, set in 1986-87 and matched in 1987-88 and 1991-92.

The Sabres' top-two goal scorers this season are Jason Pominville and Thomas Vanek. But the line that's been the most productive for Buffalo as of late is Tyler Ennis, Drew Stafford and Marcus Foligno, as the trio has combined for 17 goals and 37 total points in the last nine games. Foligno has six of those tallies and four assists in eight games since being recalled from the minors, while fellow rookie Cody Hodgson has six points (3G-3A) in four games after registering no points in his first 10 appearances with the Sabres after being acquired from Vancouver at the trade deadline.

While the Sabres are riding high, Tuesday's win was tempered by the loss of defenseman

Christian Ehrhoff. Sabres head coach Lindy Ruff said Wednesday the team's leader in minutes-played would be out for "a period of time" and declined to give any further details. Pittsburgh native Mike Weber will take his spot in the lineup.

PLAYERS TO WATCH...

SABRES: RYAN MILLER

Goalie Ryan Miller has recovered from an uncharacteristically shaky first half and is playing some scary good hockey right now. Miller has gone 14-1-3 in his last 18 games, 8-0-2 in his last 10 and has allowed just three goals in his last four outings. But you can slice his numbers any way you want. No matter which way you list them, Miller has been playing at an elite level for a long period of time. It's that simple. But that being said, Miller has been shouldering an intense workload for Buffalo since the All-Star break. He's appeared in 30 of the Sabres' last 31 games and will likely start their five remaining contests. He'll also be facing a team on Friday that he hasn't fared well against for whatever reason throughout his career (5-9-3, 3.37 GAA, .881 svpt). It will be interesting to see if Miller can sustain such a high level of play throughout the rest of the season, starting with this Penguins squad.

PENGUINS: [SIDNEY CROSBY](#)

If anyone can crack the seemingly invincible Ryan Miller, [Sidney Crosby](#) would be a good candidate. Crosby's scored some big goals on Miller during the regular season, but seems to solve the Sabres netminder on the biggest stages – i.e., the 2010 gold medal game and the inaugural Winter Classic. Granted, those are in the past, but Crosby does seem to have Miller's number whenever the two meet. Going back to the present, Crosby wasn't happy after the team's back-to-back losses to the Islanders. Look for the captain, who was just three points shy of becoming the sixth player in franchise history to reach 600 points entering Thursday's game, to lead the charge for the Penguins Friday.

ALSO OF NOTE...

Buffalo's line of Tyler Ennis, Drew Stafford and Marcus Foligno has combined for 17 goals and 37 total points in the last nine games. Foligno has 10 points (6G-4A) in eight games since his recall on March 9. Prior to this recall, Foligno had only played one NHL game. Only five other active players have scored six or more goals in their first nine career games: Teemu Selanne (8), [Evgeni Malkin](#) (8), Devin Setoguchi (7), Ilya Kovalchuk (6) and Alex Ovechkin (6).

Ennis has 22 points (8G-14A) in his last 21 games. The Sabres are 14-1-5 when Ennis records a point this season and 41-9-9 when he tallies a point in his career. Stafford has 12 points (4G-8A) in his last eight games.

Cody Hodgson is on pace to play 83 games this season, including 48 on the road. According to Elias Sports Bureau, Hodgson's 48 road games in one season would be an NHL record. The current record is 47, held by Darryl Sydor (1995-96) and Niklas Hagman (2005-06). The most road games by a player who spent part of the season in Buffalo is currently 46 (Mike Foligno, 1981-82).

INJURY REPORT

Penguins head coach Dan Bylsma had a few lineup and injury updates prior to Thursday's game in Long Island. He confirmed that [Brent Johnson](#) will be [Marc-Andre Fleury](#)'s backup vs. the Islanders. Johnson had missed the last 17 games with an undisclosed injury. With him back to full health, the Penguins re-assigned goalie [Brad Thiessen](#) to Wilkes-Barre/Scranton.

Bylsma also said that defenseman [Matt Niskanen](#) and forward [Joe Vitale](#) will not play against the Islanders or the Sabres, but will be going through good contact in practice.

"An update on my update of yesterday, which was that [Matt Niskanen](#) was not coming on the trip. He's on the trip, skating and getting contact in practice. He's progressed well. That's a good sign for him. Not playing today or tomorrow but trying to get some contact the next two days. Hopefully by Sunday (he can play). The same for [Joe Vitale](#)."

Defenseman [Kris Letang](#) did not make the trip to Long Island and Buffalo with the team. He is day-to-day with a lower-body injury.

PENGUINS:

- D [Kris Letang](#), lower body (2)
- D [Ben Lovejoy](#), knee (2)
- D [Matt Niskanen](#), upper-body (4)
- F [Joe Vitale](#), upper-body (7)

SABRES:

- F Matt Ellis, knee (8)
- F Nathan Gerbe, upper body (7)
- F Jochen Hecht, concussion (29)