

# Question marks surround Sabres' future

by **MATT KRUEGER**  
Reporter

Will co-captains Chris Drury and Daniel Briere bolt Buffalo for the deep pockets of New York or Philadelphia? Will the Sabres be able to re-sign breakout winger Thomas Vanek? Will Dainius Zubrus play a full season in Buffalo in 2007? Is Teppo Numminen done in hockey? How will General Manager Darcy Regier handle the contract negotiations and staffing concerns?

That's the myriad of concerns facing the Buffalo Sabres this summer. We know, by the sheer dynamics of the NHL, that some of this year's players will leave for other cities. New players will replace them. But guessing which familiar faces will remain and which new faces will grace the locker room next year is as difficult as redirecting a 90-mph slap shot.

"Our goal is to have a great group of guys again," coach Lindy Ruff said after the Sabres' 4-3 loss to the Ottawa Senators in Saturday's Game Five of the Eastern Conference Finals. "We worked hard to come a long way in this league from where we were a couple years ago. And we've done it with a fairly young team. You miss some

of the faces from year to year. We miss the guys who were here last year that weren't here this year. I think the product of this league now is that you are going to see changes, and you won't be able to share future experiences with some guys."

Eleven Sabres will enter free agency this summer, including Drury and Briere. Both are coming off career seasons. Drury set career marks for goals (37) and points (69) and led the team with eight goals in the playoffs. Briere had career highs in goals (32), assists (63) and points (95) and was named the MVP of the All-Star Game.

So, can they both stay in small-market Buffalo even though larger teams like the Rangers and Flyers will throw crates of money at both players?

"Yeah, that would be ideal," Drury said. "Obviously, it's a thrilling place to be playing hockey right now. The fans have embraced this team so much. I certainly hope to be wearing a Sabres jersey next year."

Briere also said he wants to come back.

"I would love to," he said. "I didn't hide my feelings all year. I'm hoping I'm still going to be here next year. I have no clue what's going to happen. There hasn't been any dis-

cussions, as far as a contract goes, and I didn't have any talks with my agent yet about the game plan. But it's a different situation. I think everybody understands that. But my biggest wish right now would be to be part of this team with Chris next year."

Drury earned \$3.1 million this year, while Briere topped the payroll with \$5 million. Both could cash in on the free agent market for contracts worth \$7 million or \$8 million.

The Sabres' front office holds a policy of no contract negotiations during the season, so both players have had to wait until now before anything could be addressed. That's a sticking point for Briere, who went to arbitration with the team last summer before signing his one-year contract.

"I wish something would have been done earlier in the year for either me or Chris," Briere said. "The tough part is now nobody knows what's going to happen. I still think it's possible, but I don't know what the team's plans are. And I'm sure they're going to talk about it in the next few days and decide what's best for the team."

Buffalo will also have to decide on the futures of unrestricted free agents Nummi-

nen, Zubrus, Adam Mair and Ty Conklin and restricted free agents Vanek, Derek Roy, Daniel Paille, Nathan Paetsch and Andrew Peters.

Numminen was one of Buffalo's most reliable defensemen in the playoffs, logging 24 minutes of ice time in Game Five against Ottawa. Zubrus, a trade-deadline acquisition from Washington, brought some size and physicality to the Sabres, but could end up as a rent-a-player. Vanek had a breakout season with 43 goals, 41 assists and a league-leading plus-47 rating. Roy centered one of the NHL's most dangerous lines with Vanek and Maxim Afinogenov and set career highs in goals (21), assists (42) and points (63). Paille and Paetsch were crucial stopgaps during the regular season, filling in for injured players. Peters is the team's enforcer.

"There's a great chance that we're not going to be a group anymore," Drury said. "After nine months, that's hard to take. We know there are going to be changes here, which is hard, because you build friendships. You battle with guys. But, ultimately, I guess that's just the job we do."

e-mail: mkrueger@beenews.com

## Playoff matchups set in Buffalo In-line Hockey Group

Buffalo In-line Hockey Group concluded its winter 2007 regular season on Saturday, May 19 and the first round playoff matchups are set.

### Major Division

#### Bandits 10, Sabres 7

This game for last place in the division saw Dennis Xenos (Amherst) and Doug Smith (Cheektowaga) have big Bandit scoring days. Zac Pronti scored four times for the Sabres.

#### Aces 16, Flyers 4

Calvin Waley (Cheektowaga) scored six times and Brad Owen (Tonawanda) had seven goals to push the Aces into a tie for fourth place. Josh Grant (Tonawanda) had all the scores for the Flyers.

#### Berets 15, Blues 3

John Lyons (Amherst), Austin Newman (Tonawanda) and Adam Rainey (Tonawanda) scored all of the Berets goals to lock up third place and a first round match-up with the Flyers. Scott McLaughlin (Amherst) led the way for the Blues, who will face the Aces in the playoffs.

#### Raiders 6, Mean Machine 4

The Raiders once again played an outstanding defensive game to finish an undefeated regular season. Taylor Setlock, Scott Sciolino and Nick Durante (all from Tonawanda) led the way. The Raiders get the Sabres and the Machine meet the Bandits in the first round.

### Junior Division

#### Demons 12, Raiders 6

The combination of Kevin Eberth

(Cheektowaga) and Jesse VanDyne gave the Demons first place and a first round bye. Nick Antoniadis (Amherst) continued his second half surge along with Jim Krolikowski (Amherst) to pace the Raiders.

#### Good Fellas 11, BlackHawks 2

Evan Dressel (Amherst) and Brian Cutting (Amherst) exploded for the second place Fellas.

#### Gray Ghosts 13, Heat 1

Tommy Adolf of the Heat opened the scoring for the Heat but the Ghosts responded with the next 13 goals. Zac Carlisle (Tonawanda) and

Brandon Fox (Amherst) led the way.

In other BIHG news, Justin Banaszak and David Campuzano have been selected to play for Team New York in the August "State Wars" tournament. "State Wars" is governed by the United States Roller Hockey Commission and is a competitive geographically structured national in-line hockey event with players who are considered to be the elite players in each state at respective age divisions. Banaszak and Campuzano were two of eight players in New

York State who were born in the 1990 and 1992 age divisions to be selected by USRHC to play on this team. The national tournament takes place in Chicago, Ill.

Campuzano, a freshman at Grand Island High School, is a seven-time BIHG Most Valuable Player and MVP for other Western New York hockey leagues. Campuzano is a previous USA Hockey Magazine "Player of the Month" award winner. Banaszak is a senior at Lancaster High School who also made the New York team last year.

## Amherst softball on win streak

by **PATRICK J. NAGY**  
Reporter

For nine consecutive games, the Amherst softball team couldn't win. Now they can't stop winning.

The Lady Tigers improved to 7-11 overall and 3-9 in ECIC Division II with a 4-3 home win over Lake Shore on Tuesday, May 15 and a 3-1 road victory at Sweet Home on Wednesday, May 16.

Amherst came back to win both games. Trailing 3-2 in the bottom of the seventh inning against Lake Shore, Jessica Banning hit a sacrifice fly to score Abby DeFrancis, who led off with a single, and Kelly Dixon drove in Liz Reid, who reached by error, for the winning run.

"We couldn't have executed in the bottom of the seventh any better," said Amherst coach Mike Chatelle.

Eva Lankes scored in the first on an error and Dana Ruh crossed home on a fielder's choice in the fourth for Amherst's other two runs.

Mollie Lang was 2 for 2 with a RBI, two walks, and a stolen base. Sam Sweeney was 1 for 3 with a single.

Banning tossed a two-hitter, striking out nine batters.

Down 1-0 against Sweet Home, Amherst scored twice in the second. Banning beat the tag in a run

down and Sweeney singled in Becca Masters, who singled to get on base. Dixon tripled in the sixth, plating Reid. Reid was 2 for 3 at the plate. DeFrancis also singled.

Banning earned her fifth win of the season against Sweet Home, firing a complete game five-hitter with two strikeouts. The defense behind Banning was solid with no errors.

Amanda Cannizzo scored in the first for Sweet Home. She was 2 for 4 with a single, double, and run scored.

Amherst closes out the regular season with three non-league games. Two were already played (at Lancaster on Monday, May 21, home against West Seneca West on Tuesday, May 22) before The Bee went to press. The Lady Tigers host Clarence at 4:45 p.m. on Wednesday, May 23.

### Sweet Home

Sweet Home lost to Williamsville East, 6-3, on Monday, May 21.

Nadia Durno (2 for 2), Cannizzo (2 for 4, RBI), Natalie Vazquez (1 for 3, RBI), and Jillian Reeser and Marissa Pinkowski added hits. Pinkowski, Kelly Weber and Rachel Cimerman scored the Lady Panthers runs in the bottom of the seventh.

Taylor Klun hit a home run for East.

e-mail: pnagy@beenews.com



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