

NHL

Sabres look toward collective goals, future

by ELIZABETH TAUFA
Reporter

Riding an intense win in their season opener in Raleigh, N.C., the Sabres entered HSBC Arena to the cheers of 18,690 fans Friday night and began their home opener against the Montreal Canadiens.

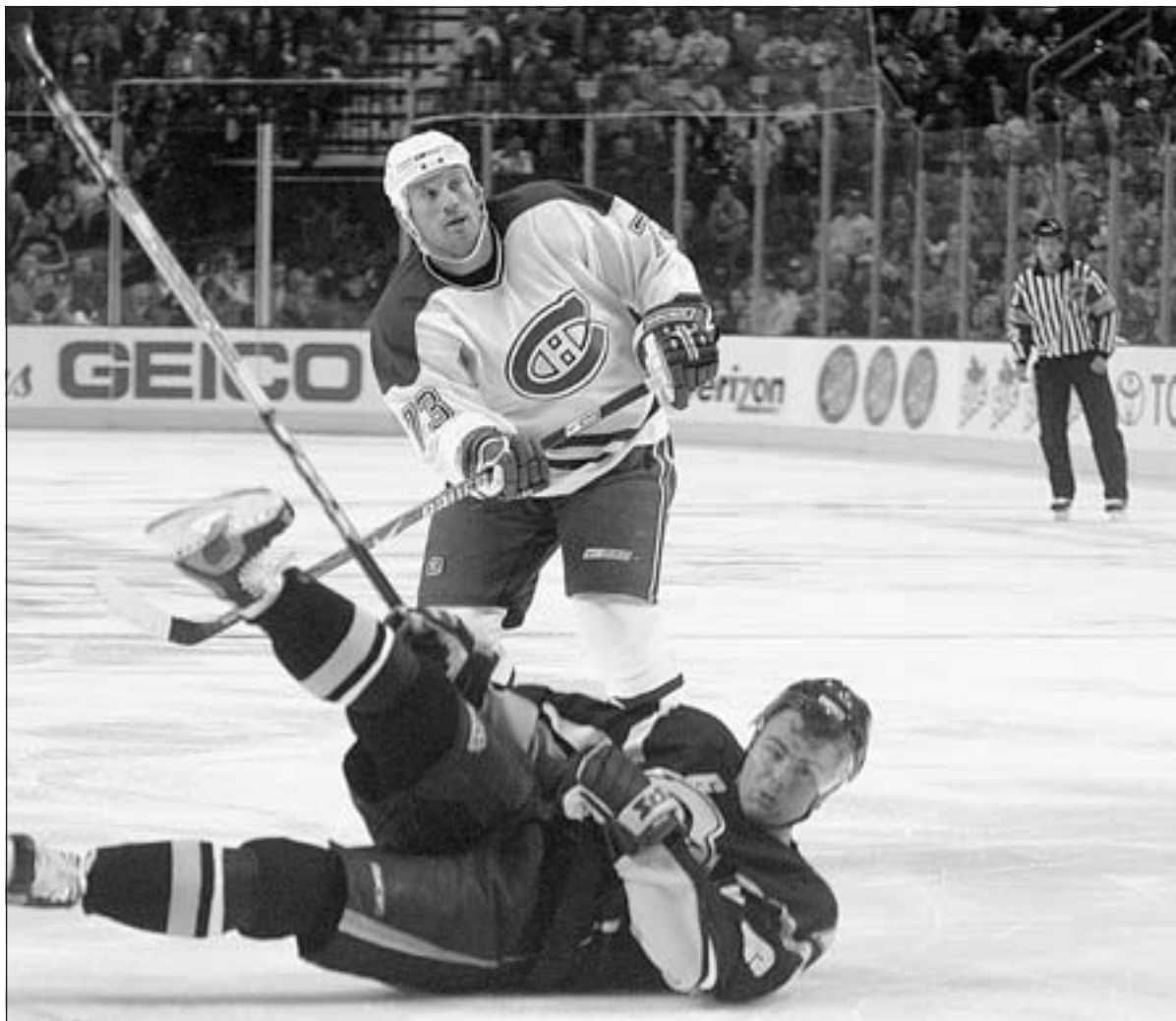
For the second game in a row, the Sabres took the game to a shootout ending. Finding themselves at the losing end of a 4-2 game going into the final period, late goals by Daniel Briere and Maxim Afinogenov (who scored with 14.9 seconds left in regulation) tied the game. Goals were also scored by Jiri Novotny and Jason Pominville. Thomas Vanek scored the lone goal in the shootout to win the game.

The game's intense ending was reminiscent of last year's playoff run, as was the game in Carolina. Coach Lindy Ruff acknowledged that although the win in Carolina was good for the team, there are still aspects of the Sabres game that need help. He also acknowledged that every game is emotional for him and for the team.

"As a team we were disappointed with our start the other night in Carolina ... I'm hoping that that enthusiasm will get our team to the same type of level," he said.

Ruff also recognized the expectations for the Sabres to be contenders for the 2007 Stanley Cup.

"Those expectations are great,



New Buffalo Sabre defenseman Jaroslav Spacek stepped in right where the departed Jay McKee left, blocking the shot of Montreal's Michael Ryder to help

the Sabres win their 2006 home season debut this past Friday, 5-4. The Sabres won all three of their games to date, including two by shootout.

Photo by Mike Lynaugh

but, for us, we're shortening everything up to one game at a time," Ruff said. "I really like our

team, but we've got a lot of work to do. Our expectations in the long term are the same as any

other team, and that is to win the Cup. Short-term focus is very important for our club."

Forward Andrew Peters agreed.

"We have our expectations as a team and we have a good team. As cliché as it sounds, we just have to take it one game at a time," he said.

Since the opening game of last season, several stars have emerged on the team. However, goalie Ryan Miller, who had 23 saves and gave up no shootout goals, noted that, once in the locker room, the team has a collective goal.

"We talked about goals — even last year — how we wanted to approach things," Miller said. "We aspire to be a great team. We proved we were a good team last year, but to be a great team you have to have expectations and you've got to rise to it and you've got to accept the challenges that come along with it. I think everyone in here has that understanding."

Miller also noted that the 2005-06 season helped the team learn what wins games and how they can play effectively together.

"Last year we were a young team and had to learn how to win," he said. "There's a (learning) curve this year too, but we're in a better position to handle it than we were last year and I think as long as we move forward with good maturity we're going to be all right."

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