

NHL

Kaleta makes crazy debut for Sabres

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

For Patrick Kaleta, his move up to the NHL was more like running away to join the circus than advancing in his career.

The Town of Evans native didn't get to pick the way he made his debut, but given the choice, he probably wouldn't have gone with the slobber-knocker the Buffalo Sabres and Ottawa Senators engaged in Thursday night.

With a huge, 12-player fight that saw 100 penalty minutes doled out, three players ejected, and the goalies dropping the gloves, Kaleta was right in the middle of things throwing haymakers.

"I'm not going to shy away from anything," the 20-year-old winger said after the game. "I've gotten into my share of physicalities. It doesn't really bother me. If I get a mark or something, it just adds character."

After Chris Neil's questionable hit knocked Buffalo captain Chris Drury out of the game with a concussion, Kaleta was sent over the boards with resident bruisers Andrew Peters and Adam Mair. Everyone in the building knew a fight was coming, but the melee that followed was beyond anyone's imagination.

Even before the puck was dropped to restart play, Kaleta started shoving and mouthing with Dany Heatley. And as soon

as the puck hit the ice, the Sabres went to work drawing every Senator on the ice into a fight.

Kaleta, Peters, Mair, Toni Lydman and Henrik Tallinder squared off with Heatley, Jason Spezza, Mike Comrie, Anton Valchenkov and Chris Phillips. But it was the sight of goalies Martin Biron and Ray Emery squaring off that really sent the HSBC Arena crowd into full-blown hysteria.

Then Peters went after Emery and the coaches got into such a heated verbal duel that many expected them to start trading punches. The fight was so big, it became the talk of the NHL for the next several days. And for the guys involved, it was one of those surreal moments you can't expect to happen.

"It didn't matter who was thrown on the ice," said Biron, who admitted he wasn't in a hurry to fight anyone again. "I think everybody wanted to be there and be able to respond to the hit and to the situation. You can only send five guys, but these guys did a great job. It's not an easy job. You have a kid coming up like Kaleta, joining Mair and Petey. That was big for all three of them to be able to respond."

Peters, Biron and Emery got ejected.

"Nothing was said," Peters said. "They put the three of us on the ice, we're an energy line, and we decided to take matters into our

own hands."

Sabres coach Lindy Ruff said he was proud of Kaleta, Peters and Mair for backing up their captain and that the response was fitting.

"You can't respond any other way," he said. "I'm so proud of those guys. It was a little bit too much emotion. I don't condone the tail end of it with Andrew. But you get caught up in the emotion and the players did the right thing."

The brawl, which earned Ruff a \$10,000 fine from the league, overshadowed a great game between two Northeast Division rivals and Kaleta's strong NHL debut.

After officials cleared the ice of gloves and sticks following the brawl and play resumed, it wasn't long before Kaleta, nicknamed Klatsy by his teammates, earned his first NHL point. With 1:37 remaining in the second period, Kaleta assisted on Clarke MacArthur's goal, which put Buffalo on top, 4-3.

Aside from that point, Kaleta made his presence known by delivering hits every opportunity he got. On his first shift, with Peters and MacArthur, Kaleta laid a pretty good shot on Joseph Corvo to the right of Buffalo's net. Late in the period he drilled Tom Priessing into the boards.

"I thought he played great," Ruff said of Kaleta. "He got a point in his first NHL game. He handled the puck well. He tried to go through the end of the rink once. And I think that that's the type of emotion that he brings to the game. And I think that type of emotion on any team is a welcome emotion. What a great night for him, what a great game to be involved with. I don't know if we can copy that on one DVD for him."

Growing up in Angola, Kaleta watched the Sabres just like every other kid. But the Lake Shore High School graduate got a real



Patrick Kaleta



Buffalo Sabres winger Patrick Kaleta tries to get position on Ottawa's Joe Corvo during Thursday's Northeast Division game at HSBC Arena. The Town of Evans native made his NHL debut in the game.

Photo by Patrick McPartland

treat when he drove up from Rochester to join the big club for Thursday's game. Buffalo wore the classic jersey for the game with that familiar crossed-sabres logo the team wore when Kaleta first started watching the team.

"When I first walked in and saw the jersey hanging here, I sat down in my stall, looked around and kind of soaked it all in for a bit," Kaleta said. "It's just great to wear the Buffalo Sabres uniform, and I'm going to remember it for a long, long time."

Kaleta, much like his boyhood idol Michael Peca, drew an instant response from the crowd. When he first stepped on the ice, the fans went nuts. When he got a mini-breakaway and shot on goal in the third, everyone held his breath, hoping to see the kid finish off the Gordie Howe hat trick — goal, assist, fight.

"You try to put it behind you, but I heard them," Kaleta said of the impressive fan support. "It was a great feeling just to be out there in front of my hometown crowd and on my favorite team growing up. Words can't explain

how good it felt."

"I heard a couple pounds on the glass, but whenever I play, I try to just focus on my game. I'll see whoever I need to see afterwards. I knew this game was going to be a big game for myself, and I just tried to stay focused."

Even though he spent more time in the penalty box — he took a 10-minute fighting penalty from the brawl — than on the ice, Kaleta played a good game and earned the appreciation of his coach.

"He handled the game extremely well," Ruff said. "I'm extremely proud of the way he played, and he's got to be extremely proud of the way he handled the game too. It was not easy. I went to Clarke MacArthur and told him to go to the young guy and tell him to relax and play a little."

Yes, it was a wild game all around from the brawl to the shootout victory. And its one Kaleta won't forget.

"Hopefully, I can get this one on tape, so I can watch it in a couple years," he said.

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Seventeen of the world's 27 PTR master professionals were present in Hilton Head, S.C. for the 2007 Professional Tennis Registry's International Tennis Symposium. Pictured from left, Pete Collins, Todd Miller,

Jean Mills, Bob Helton, Clive Carrigan, Scott Tharp, Jorge Andrew, Roy Barth, John Antonas, Alex Rossi, Ken Deltart, Leo Alonso, Luciano Botti, John Raker, Ajay Pant, Kirk Anderson and Louie Cappi.

Miller named to international tennis committee

Longtime Amherst Hills Tennis Club Director and head professional Todd Miller was appointed to the Master Professional Selection Committee last week in Hilton Head, S.C.

The selection committee also named its 26th and 27th master professionals — Alex Rossi and Roy Barth. Rossi, from Santiago, Chile, formerly was coach of the

ATP world No. 1 ranked Marcelo Rios. For the past 31 years, Barth has been director of the world's No. 1 rated tennis resort, Kiawah Island, and was a former tour player, competing at Wimbledon as well as other Grand Slam events.

Miller received international status when he was named to the world's 25th Professional Tennis Registry Master Professional.

The PTR is comprised of over 12,000 coaches and professionals in 123 countries.



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Sports briefs

Williamsville North High School graduate James Piazza went 2-for-4 with a RBI in the University at Buffalo's 6-2 loss to Nevada on Saturday. Williamsville East grad Zach Anderson threw 1.1 innings of relief, while allowing one run.

Williamsville North High School graduate John Bauman was part of the University at Buffalo's third-place men's distance medley relay team at the Mid-American Conference Indoor Track Championships on Friday. The team finished in 10:14.13. Another UB competitor, Williamsville East grad Brian Heim, was fifth in the 400-meters (49.05). The next day, Bauman and Heim helped UB's 4x400-meter relay team place fourth in 3:18.05.

Sophomore Jeannine McNamara, a Williamsville resident and Williamsville East High School graduate, was eighth in one-meter diving (333.40 pts., 347.90 in prelims) for Cortland State College at the SUNY-AC swimming and diving championships on Feb. 10 at Erie Community College's Burt Flickinger Center. Cortland finished second overall.

Fireman's Bowling

Team	Wins	Losses
Harris Hill	108	60
Ellicott Creek	101	67
North Bailey	99.5	68.5
Main-Transit B	94	74
Swornville	93	75
North Amherst	84	84
Main-Transit C	79	89
Main Transit A	79	89
Snyder	75	93
East Amherst	74.5	93.5
Getzville	62	106
Egbertsville	59	109

200 Games/550 Sets

M. Gaiser 247, 236, 203 — 686; AJ Shisler 259, 218 — 668; M. Stafford 243, 222, 203 — 668; B. Goodwill 237, 200 — 628; A. Yambor 242, 223 — 628; C. Stephan 238, 201 — 615; M. Bandelian 244 — 609; S. DiPasquale 241 — 604; J. Gesel 235 — 601; S. Saxer 235 — 612; D. Hutchinson 237; P. Schara 223; R. Bieger 216; J. Abbarno 216 — 558; J. Daniels 211; K. Allen 211; T. Hutchinson 208, 204 — 565; N. Frase 209; B. Hitzges 207; J. Clouse 206, 200 — 598; B. Van Patten 205; R. Cumpston 204; PJ Abbarno 203, 202 — 557; B. Krebs 202; secret score winner Mark Crossier 133

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