

NHL

Road trip a welcome sign for Sabres

by MATT KRUEGER
Reporter

The Buffalo Sabres may be the hottest ticket in town, but the past week provided less than exciting results for the fans at HSBC Arena.

With three straight losses to Colorado (3-2), Minnesota (5-1) and New Jersey (3-2), the Sabres left the fast lane they had been traveling in and merged with the other teams in the league.

Buffalo had been 9-1-1 in its previous 11 games, before hitting this little bump in the road.

But after Saturday's frustrating loss to the New Jersey Devils, in which the Sabres faced a defensive trap that many more teams will throw at them in the playoffs, the mood in the locker room was not one of desperation. Instead, the Sabres shrugged it off and almost welcomed the adversity.

"It's not going to ruin the season," said goalie Ryan Miller, who took the loss in all three games. "I think you learn lessons. I'd rather go through it. We've got a lot of new faces in here. We need to go through a stretch like this, because they weren't here the last time we had to bounce back and rattle off some big games in a row. Those guys are part of it right now. It's up to everybody to get out of this."

The skid wasn't bad enough to drop Buffalo out of the top spot in the Eastern Conference, but as of Tuesday, the Sabres were just one point ahead of New Jersey. Buffalo (44-19-5) had long held the best



Buffalo defenseman Nathan Paetsch clears out the puck in front of a sprawling Ryan Miller during the

Sabres' 3-2 loss to New Jersey Saturday at HSBC Arena.

Photo by Mike Lynaugh

record in the league, but Nashville (46-18-6) Anaheim (42-17-11) and Detroit (43-17-9) have all sped past the Sabres.

Buffalo now faces a four-game road trip, which was scheduled to start Tuesday in Pittsburgh, after The Bee went to press. And the Sabres are hoping a few wins will erase that poor showing at home.

"Before that we had a great

homestand," defenseman Nathan Paetsch said. "Then we had three games when we lost two of them by one goal. Besides that, we were on a roll before these last three games. The road is going to be a fresh start for us. It'll be nice to get out there and get together and bond a little."

Against New Jersey Saturday, the Sabres ran into that defensive trap that seems boring to many

fans in this high-scoring new age of the NHL — New Jersey has scored fewer goals than 13 of the other 14 teams in the Eastern Conference and has allowed the second fewest goals in the league. That trap, perfected by New Jersey, is similar to what Buffalo saw against Colorado and Minnesota.

"Teams are going to play like that against us," Paetsch said.

"Obviously, they're going to want to control our offense. We've scored the most goals in the league, so they're trying to find ways to beat us. We just have to find a way to work through that defensive shell teams are putting up against us."

Buffalo had opportunities against New Jersey, including a four-minute power play in the second period, but couldn't quite solve the defense or goalie Martin Brodeur, who leads the league in wins and shutouts and is second in save percentage and goals-against average.

Only Dainius Zubrus's wrist shot from outside the left circle in the first period, and Daniel Briere's tip-in on Paetsch's shot, found the back of the net.

"The effort was good (Saturday)," winger Jason Pominville said. "We missed a few good opportunities, and we just have to make sure we capitalize on them and keep doing the simple things. I'm sure we'll be fine."

With just five goals in the past three games, the Sabres fell well below the five-goal average they had the two weeks prior to the homestand. But you can bet on the Sabres bouncing back and generating that high-powered offense again.

"We've done it before," Paetsch said. "This team is very resilient. We've been playing hard and we're trying to work through it. Pucks are going to start going in for us."

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UBAM hires former Buckeye standout Michael Tomes

The UB Amherst swim club (UBAM) has again strengthened its coaching staff by hiring former Ohio State Buckeye standout Michael Tomes.

Coach Tomes will be UBAM's lead junior and assistant senior group coach. "We are excited to add an individual on to our staff who has such an impressive swimming background," said UBAM head coach Flynn Burroughs. "Swimming is in his blood. He makes our club instantly better and I am looking forward to working with him."

Born in Cincinnati, Ohio, Tomes started swimming competitively at age 5 for the M.E. Lyons YMCA Anderson Barracudas. Tomes attended Anderson High School in Cincinnati where he was a state qualifier all four years and state finalist three years in a row. While in high school with the Barracudas, Tomes helped lead the team to four straight men's team YMCA national titles.

Tomes received a scholarship to the University of Evansville and was elected most valuable swimmer his first two seasons. He transferred to Ohio State University and in his senior season, was a finalist in the 500- and 200-yard freestyle at the Big Ten Championships. He finished his career third all-time in Buckeye history in the 500 free (4:25.5) and sixth all-time in the 200 free (1:37.7).

Tomes' twin brother, Martin, also swam for Ohio State and now coaches at Friends Aquatic Club in Philadelphia, Pa. He has three sisters, an older sister, Emily, who swam for the University of Evansville, and two younger sisters, Megan and Laura, who swim for the University of Tennessee.

Tomes first started coaching while in high school over the summers for a Coldstream Country Club. After retiring from swimming, he coached at Terrace Park

Swim Club along side his mother, Sue, who has been a swim coach for more than four decades starting at the age of 16.

He graduated from Ohio State with a degree in health sciences: health and wellness and is living in Buffalo to attend graduate school at the University at Buffalo for

a master's degree in exercise science.

The UB Amherst Swim Club (UBAM) is a national goal oriented, US age-group Swim Club that practices at UB, as well as the Williamsville School pools. For more information, visit www.UBAMswimming.com.

Sports brief

Geneseo State College's Pat Occhiuto (Williamsville, Williamsville East), Katie Price (East Amherst, Williamsville East), Dan Spada (Williamsville, Williamsville East), Haley Spangler (Williamsville, Williamsville South) and Joe Walter (Snyder, Nichols) were named to the State University of New York Athletic Conference's Commissioner's List or All-Academic list for the fall 2006 season.

Occhiuto, a junior economics major who plays on the men's soccer team, made the Commissioner's List as did teammates Spada, a sophomore accounting major and Walter, a

sophomore. Spada also made the All-Academic list. Price, a freshman women's soccer player, and Spangler, a junior biology major on the field hockey team, were named All-Academic.

To qualify for the All Academic List, a student must be a varsity athlete, completed the entire season and have a minimum 3.3 grade point average for the semester in which they competed.

To qualify for the Commissioner's List, a student must be a varsity athlete, completed the entire season and have a minimum cumulative grade point average of 3.3 based on three semesters at the institution.

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