

Commentary

Calgary goalie's actions have no place in professional sports

It's been said time and time again, but when it comes to professional sports and sportsmanship, the National Hockey League has everyone else beaten hands down.

Where else do you see every player on one team congratulate every single player and coach on the opposing squad at the conclusion of a playoff series? The show of respect everyone gives is something you don't find anywhere else, and it's even more satisfying knowing that everyone gave heart, soul and body — whether it was to block shots, punish skaters with checks into the wall, or just ramping up time on the ice because it was in the best interest of the team.

Honestly, can you envision the players of the National Basketball Association, who are worried more about their "street cred" or where their next endorsement deal is coming from, lining up to celebrate the accomplishments of their peers? And how out of place would it be to see the other 42 NASCAR drivers lining Victory Lane to wish the winner well for beating them? (Actually, in all fairness, it might not be all 42 other drivers, but there does seem to be a little more respect for their peers among NASCAR drivers than in most other sports — as long as tempers don't flare when on-track road rage incidents lead to post-race "discus-

sions" with league officials.)

But still, it's hard to envision any other professional sport putting on the display of sportsmanship that the teams competing for the Stanley Cup do. That tradition is one of the things that makes the chase for the Cup one of the most exciting in all of professional sports. It's also what makes the actions of Calgary Flames backup goalie Jamie McLennan this past Saturday so despicable.

The eighth-seeded Flames, battling the Western Conference's top-seeded Detroit Red Wings for the chance to advance to the semifinals, were pretty much done, trailing 5-1 with less than five minutes to play in the third period when McLennan came into the game and promptly lasted all of 18 seconds before being ejected and ultimately suspended for five games for slashing Detroit's Johan Franzen in the stomach.

It doesn't matter what the score, it doesn't matter what the situation — there is no place in hockey for McLennan's actions. What he did was inexcusable, regardless of whether or not Franzen was hurt by his actions. Can you imagine Ty Conklin coming into the

game to relieve Ryan Miller, then turning around and trying to hack the Islanders' Jason Blake, Miro Satan, or anyone on any team for that matter? Yeah, me neither.

I know goalies are under tremendous pressure because of the nature of their jobs, but guess what. They're professional athletes for a reason. It's a shame guys like McLennan and the Islanders' Chris Simon don't seem to understand that there's more to being a professional athlete than having skills that 99 percent of the world's population would love to have. (Simon was not on the ice during the Sabres' 4-1 series victory over the Islanders because he was serving part of his 25-game suspension for slashing the N.Y. Rangers' Ryan Hollweg across the chin.)

A five-game suspension isn't going to send the message that plays like McLennan's slash, plays with clear intent to injure, aren't going to be tolerated. One thing's for sure: plays like that aren't exactly putting the NHL's penchant for sportsmanship on display. It just makes guys like McLennan look like clear-cut candidates for anger management courses.



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Break gives Sabres time to depressurize

by **MATT KRUEGER**
Reporter

It wasn't enough time to take a fishing trip or really do much of anything outside of the everyday grind of practice and preparation, but the Buffalo Sabres did earn a small respite by knocking off the New York Islanders Friday night.

By sending New York back to the Island with a 4-3 win in Game Five, Buffalo garnered a little "me" time for each player. Had the quarterfinal series gone a full seven games, the Sabres would have pulled a quick turnaround with almost no time to celebrate before moving on to the next challenger.

"You want to win in as short a time as possible," said second-year winger Jason Pominville, who scored his second goal of the playoffs with his second-period netter Friday. "But they were a team that was hot coming in and playing well. We expected a battle, and we had to battle for every game. Every game besides one were one-goal games. The rest is always nice."

Considering the way the series against the Islanders went for the Sabres, you can understand why the players were so happy to end it in five games. The Islanders needed a late-season charge just to qualify for the playoffs and they were rewarded by meeting the Presidents Cup winners. Ana-



Ryan Miller shakes hands with Rick DiPietro at center ice after the Buffalo Sabres eliminated the New York Islanders Friday night from the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Photo by David F. Sherman

lysts and reporters predicted this to be a breeze for the Sabres, but those five games were anything but lopsided.

After the Sabres took Game One, 4-1, three of the next four games were decided by a single goal. And the one that wasn't, Game Four, was a two-goal win for the Sabres.

And as hard as New York played in the third period of Game Five Friday, scoring three goals and nearly sending the game to overtime, Buffalo was happy to not have to deal with those pesky Islanders for Game Six in New York.

"We certainly didn't want to go back to the island and give them a chance to force Game Seven," said co-captain Chris Drury, who had four goals and an assist in the series. "We were glad to get it done (Friday)."

"We didn't want to go back there," added co-captain Daniel Briere, who had one goal and four assists in the series. "And, obviously, everybody's going to say that. But you don't want to let them hang around. You don't want to let them believe that they have a chance to come back."

By responding to New York's penchant for coming from behind and putting away the Islanders with the same composure that led them to a franchise-record 113 points in the regular season, the Sabres demonstrated their ability

to fight.

"I think we can be happy with the way we battled," said goalie Ryan Miller, whose circus-like save with nine seconds to go preserved the win Friday. "That was a very tough series. I think that the way the Islanders entered the playoffs and the way we played every game, there wasn't a lot of separation. We fought for everything we got, and we're happy with this series. We had to work, and I think that will serve us better, going forward, than if it had gone easily."

That battle was exactly why the few extra days of rest was so helpful. The legs got a chance to regenerate a little and the nerves settled. Any bumps and bruises also had time to heal.

"I think it's very important any time you can get rest," coach Lindy Ruff said. "Every series is a grind, and an extra day here or an extra day there is important."

Some of the guys stayed home to relax, while others enjoyed the warm weather of the weekend with walks outside or games in the back yard, but the mindset never got too far away from the ice and what lies ahead for the Sabres. With one New York team out of the way, another one waited in the wings.

The Sabres now match up with the New York Rangers for the second round of the Stanley Cup

(Please turn to page 26)

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