

Commentary

Sabres' management on track with summer priorities

Buffalo Sabres' managing partner Larry Quinn has set his table for the summer offseason. He's not ordering steaks off the grill, but he's trying to put together a five-star menu on the roster that will have Sabres' fans feasting on a Stanley Cup.

A day after the team finished out of the playoffs following two seasons of advancing to the Eastern Conference finals and last year's Presidents' Trophy campaign, Quinn announced that the team is focused on signing starting goalie Ryan Miller and right winger Jason Pominville to long-term contracts. Miller and Pominville are slated to become free agents in 2009. Quinn has also stated that winger Paul Gaustad, who will become a restricted free agent this summer, is another high priority.

Getting them signed this summer will prevent problems during the season like the Sabres saw the past two years with Chris Drury, Daniel Briere and Brian Campbell. Losing those three players has forced Quinn and the rest of the management team to change its policy on not negotiating during the season.

As much criticism as Quinn has received the past couple of years, and a lot of it was deserved, this time, he's got the right idea. Signing Miller, Pominville and Gaustad to long-term contracts is a necessity. The

Sabres need to lock up the young talent and build a core around which management can craft a winner.

Miller, Pominville and Gaustad, combined with Thomas Vanek and Derek Roy, who both signed long-term contracts last summer, have the ability to lead the team to new heights in the coming years.

"With the core group of guys like Ryan and Jason, and Derek and Thomas in there, that's a group that can win every year," Gaustad said during Monday's locker clean-out. "And I'm excited about that."

Miller will easily be the most difficult to sign, since the 27-year-old is looking at a substantial pay raise from the \$3.5 million he'll earn next season. He's taken his share of criticism this year for a dip in his stats — his save percentage fell from .911 last year to .906. — but Miller has yet to peak. He's spent just three seasons in the NHL, so we still haven't seen his best. Even in a year when he set a franchise record for starts (76) and faced the second-most shots in the league (2,104), Miller's goals-against average

dropped from 2.73 to 2.64.

Miller is the backbone of the team and needs to be signed.

Pominville has quickly become a go-to guy on the ice and in the locker room. The 25-year-old finished second on the team with a career-high 80 points and led the Sabres with his plus-16 rating. He'll become a restricted free agent next year, so it should cost as much to sign him to a new deal, unless another team tries to steal him, like Edmonton did with Vanek last summer.

Gaustad, who earned \$750,000 in 2007-08, tops the list of this year's free agents, which also includes Teppo Numminen, Dimitri Kalinin, Steve Bernier, Jocelyn Thibault, Daniel Paille, Nolan Pratt and Michael Ryan. The 26-year-old evolved into a formidable center this year and sparked the offense on the high-scoring line with Pominville and Jochen Hecht.

Miller, Pominville and Gaustad are key ingredients, if the Sabres want to dine on championships.



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Amherst

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The Lady Tigers fell to Bishop Ludden, 15-14, last Friday night and Liverpool, 18-11, on Saturday morning.

"Ludden was a game we could have won," said Battaglia. "However, there was a stretch where they beat us to the ball often and that created a gap that was difficult to overcome."

Veterans on the team posted some great stats. Gowen led the attack with five goals and six assists. Simon added five goals and one assist. Daisy Timlin chipped in three goals and had a strong performance in the midfield, Battaglia said.

Poleon had a 50 percent save percentage in net.

Against Liverpool, Simon led all scorers with five goals, Daisy Timlin scored four times and added an assist, and Gowen had a goal and seven assists. Bullock had a goal in each of the games.

Battaglia feels traveling out of Section VI to play non-league games offers three main benefits.

"First of all, it offers the team a chance to spend some

time on the road and in the hotel," she said. "We try to work in some fun team activities and meetings. It gives the players a chance to blend off of the field. Secondly, it provides a measuring stick, a chance to see where we are and what we need to work on as well as the chance to see lacrosse played outside of the Buffalo area. Finally, it provides a motivation for the season by getting the first games in with a different start."

As an added bonus, the team got the chance to watch a Syracuse University-Georgetown girls lacrosse game (Syracuse won 18-3).

Amherst opened league play against the team it beat last year for the section title, East Aurora, on Tuesday but the result was unavailable before The Bee went to press.

"We are anxious to get some games in against local opponents to get a feel of our potential," said Battaglia. "Coach Kristy Grossman has been spending considerable time with the defense and working in the team style of 'D' that she encourages. Our attack has a general base,

however, needs some fine tuning."

Amherst Central 2008 Schedule

4-10 at South.....	4:30 p.m.
4-18 Fairport.....	noon (Stadium)
4-21 at Lancaster.....	4:30 p.m.
4-23 at Eden.....	4:30 p.m.
4-25 Iroquois.....	6 p.m. (Stadium)
4-29 East.....	7 p.m. (Stadium)
4-30 at Springville.....	4:30 p.m.
5-6 South.....	4:30 p.m. (Kings)
5-7 at Nichols.....	4:30 p.m.
5-9 at East Aurora.....	4:30 p.m.
5-10 Eden.....	10 a.m. (Kings)
5-13 at Iroquois.....	4:30 p.m.
5-14 Springville.....	4:30 p.m. (Kings)
5-15 at East.....	4:30 p.m.
5-19 Hamburg.....	6 p.m. (Stadium)

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Winning

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The Tigers totally dominated Nichols, jumping out to a 5-0 lead after the first quarter thanks to unselfish passing and accurate shooting.

Rich and Cooper each netted four goals. Rich added six assists to lead the Tigers with 10 points. McNally made six saves to earn the shutout.

Monahan and Doerflein each picked up eight ground balls.

Amherst trailed Niagara-Wheatfield but ran off three straight goals to take a 3-2 lead into half-time.

Two early goals to open the second half, including an unassisted goal by Smith gave Amherst a 5-2 advantage.

The Tigers built a 6-2 lead only to see Niagara-Wheatfield tie the

score at 6-6 with nearly three minutes to play in the fourth quarter.

Henn said his team answered with three unanswered goals to close out the scoring. He said the highlight goal was a fastbreak tally in which senior defenseman Jon Tarrant picking up a ground ball in the defensive end, made an accurate outlet pass to Rich, who fed Doerflein on the doorstep.

Doerflein led Amherst with five goals and one assist. Junior attacker Jordan Davis grabbed 11 ground balls.

Amherst outshot (19-7) and out-groundballed (42-19) North. Cooper (three goals, four assists), Doerflein (two goals, two assists) and sophomore midfielder Brian Lawson (three goals) were the big

scorers for the Tigers.

Amherst trailed Orchard Park the entire game. The closest the Tigers could get was 7-5 in the middle of the third quarter.

Amherst did not make plays when they had to.

"We slid too early and had no fill," said Henn.

Amherst got killed in the face-off circle, only winning seven of 28 opportunities. OP also grabbed 55 ground balls to Amherst's 30 and outshot the Tigers, 38-11.

Doerflein had four goals and an assist to lead the offense. Rich added two goals and one assist.

Amherst played at Frontier on Tuesday but the result was unavailable before The Bee went to press. They play Bishop Tim-

on-St. Jude at 7:30 p.m. on Thursday at Amherst.

Amherst Central 2008 Schedule

4-10 Bishop Timon St. Jude 7:30 p.m.	5-1 at W.S. East.....	5 p.m.
4-19 Webster-Schroeder.....	5-5 at Sweet Home.....	5 p.m.
4-23 Grand Island.....	5-7 South.....	6 p.m.
4-29 at Iroquois.....	5-9 East.....	6 p.m.
	5-12 at Hamburg.....	5 p.m.
	5-16 Lake Shore.....	6 p.m.
	5-20 at Canisius.....	5 p.m.

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Sports brief

Sweet Home senior Katie Gambles signed a Letter of Intent and earned a full scholarship in February to run cross country at the University of North Alabama this coming fall. Gambles was team MVP for Sweet Home last fall. She will study criminal justice in college.

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