



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*December 4, 2015*

## **Coyotes-Sabres Preview**

By Kevin Chroust

AP

December 4, 2015

Offense is coming as easily as it has in a year for Buffalo, and Arizona has been terrible defensively for not just the last two games but much of the season.

The teams meet Friday night in Buffalo, where the Sabres have a shot at a scoring plateau they haven't reached in nine seasons, while the Coyotes play the third of a five-game trip trying to hold an opponent under five goals.

Buffalo (10-12-3) last scored four goals in three straight from Dec. 11-15 as part of a four-game winning streak and hasn't done it in four straight since it had 30 over five consecutive contests in 2006-07 - also the last season the club won a playoff series.

The Sabres, however, didn't fully capitalize on the latest effort, falling 5-4 in a shootout at Detroit on Tuesday following 4-1 wins over Carolina and Nashville. To coach Dan Bylsma, it showed his team has the firepower to recover after falling behind 2-0 and 3-1 before forcing overtime.

"We got down, with their first shot, and they get another on a faceoff play that caroms in off their player and over our goalie," Bylsma told the team's official website. "When you're down 2-0, you have to go after it, and I think you saw that in how the game was played up and down the ice. We had to fight back."

Evander Kane scored twice and has four points in the last two games - equaling his total in the first 13 - and Rasmus Ristolainen's three assists gave him 12 points in his last 12 games after totaling five in his first 13.

"We did fight, but we didn't get it done," said Kane, who scored once on the power play to help the Sabres to a 4-for-9 mark in the last two games.

Linus Ullmark was in goal, so the streaking Chad Johnson figures to face the Coyotes. Johnson faced the Hurricanes and Predators to improve to 3-1-1 with a 1.28 goals-against average and .954 save percentage in his last seven games. He beat Arizona on Feb. 24, making 27 saves in a 5-1 win while with the New York Islanders.

That fits right in with the Sabres' success against the Coyotes. Johnson's current team has averaged 3.20 goals during an 8-1-1 span in the series, and Ristolainen scored in both meetings last season.

After Thursday's 5-1 loss in Detroit, the Coyotes (13-11-1) are now one of five teams surrendering at least three goals per game. It was their second straight allowing five and fourth in their last nine to bump their season average to 3.00.

They fell behind 3-0 in the first period two nights after the Predators piled on four in the third, so Arizona allowed seven goals in a 40-minute span.

Mike Smith gave up the three first-period goals before being replaced, dropping him to 7-7-1 with a 3.49 GAA and .887 save percentage over his last 17 games.

Coyotes captain Shane Doan has missed the last five games with a lower-body injury, but coach Dave Tippett said there was a chance he could return Friday.

They got Steve Downie back after he missed 10 games with an upper-body injury, and the forward assisted on Jordan Martinook's goal.

"He made a good play on our goal," coach Dave Tippett told the team's official website. "He hadn't played in 10 games so it was good to get him back in there."

## **Sabres excited for return of World Juniors**

By Mike Harrington  
Buffalo News  
December 4, 2015

The last time the World Junior Championships were in Buffalo, Marcus Foligno was a 19-year-old one day hoping to crack the Sabres' roster. He was a former fourth-round draft pick, better known as the son of former Buffalo captain Mike Foligno.

But as one of the standouts of Team Canada, Foligno quickly learned what a hockey crowd in Buffalo could be during the 2011 tournament.

"It was just amazing," Foligno recalled Thursday after word spread that Buffalo has been chosen to again host the event in 2018. "The whole tournament itself was crazy, hectic but it was a lot of fun with great memories. The skill and talent you play against was great European players. It definitely got me out there and more confident as a player, letting me handle situations better."

Foligno recalled how then-HSBC Arena was filled with Canadian fans, with the crescendo rising to its highest points during the semifinal win over Team USA and the gold medal loss to Russia.

"It was almost like a showcase for myself with the fans," he said. "They were awesome and we had fans from all over the place. A lot of Canadian fans came down for the USA vs. Canada game. It was outstanding, loud the whole game. Something I'll never forget. There were a lot of red jerseys. We knew it was in Buffalo and on American soil but being part of Team Canada we had a lot of Canadian fans and they showed their support big time."

Many Sabres have played in the World Juniors on their way up to the NHL. Sam Reinhart tied with Connor McDavid for the scoring lead in the tournament last year as Canada beat Russia in the gold-medal game in Toronto.

His linemates in the tournament were Arizona prospects Max Domi and Anthony Duclair, and the trio will be opponents Friday night in First Niagara Center as the Sabres meet the Coyotes.

"It's been fun watching each other and how everyone's careers have progressed over the past year," Reinhart said. "It makes it fun to look at the schedule and know you've got some buddies that you can catch up and reminisce with and compete against them again. We've had a lot of experiences together. It will be exciting going up against each other."

All three have blossomed this season. Reinhart has six goals – third on the Buffalo roster – and nine points. Domi has eight goals and a team-high 21 points for Arizona, second among NHL rookies, while Duclair has eight goals and six assists.

"I had a blast. It was one of the best times of my life," Reinhart said. "And I remember watching it on TV when it was in Buffalo and I know how good the crowd could get. That will be exciting."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma was serving as a television analyst for last year's tournament games in Montreal and was blown away by how well Reinhart's line played.

"Sam Reinhart on the ice with Domi and Duclair was the best line in the tournament. I don't think there's any question about it," Bylsma said. "There was obviously a lot of talk about Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel surrounding that tournament but they were the best line."

"There was a lot of speed on that line with Duclair and Domi on the wings. I thought Sam was the steady influence in the middle in distributing the puck and playing on the right side of the puck."

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen scored the gold medal-winning goal in overtime for Finland over Sweden at the 2014 World Juniors in Malmo, Sweden.

"It's a great tournament, very special in my country," said Ristolainen. "It's getting bigger and bigger every year. This year they are there in Finland so it's huge there and I have some good memories from a couple of years ago that I'm going to remember all of my life. Great fans in Buffalo. I bet pretty much all the games are going to be packed here. It's going to be good for the city."

Ristolainen's "Golden Goal" and his wild celebration after lives forever on YouTube as well as in the annals of Finnish hockey.

"Someone had to score if you wanted to win and it was me. I remember more the win," he said. "That was one of the better couple days in my life. There was a huge celebration with the team and the families and it was a nice experience."

## **Sabres notebook: Girgensons asks for no All-Star votes**

By Mike Harrington  
Buffalo News  
December 4, 2015

Don't get the wrong idea. Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons said Thursday he loves the support from his homeland of Latvia. And obviously from Buffalo too.

But his message when it comes to the All-Star Game this year is pretty much thanks-but-no-thanks.

That was the message he tweeted Wednesday, telling folks in Latvia not to vote for him for this year's All-Star Game. With a clear push from his home country, Girgensons was selected for last year's game in Columbus but doesn't want a similar situation for this season's game in Nashville.

"All due respect to fans, it's just something that you have to deserve," Girgensons said Thursday in First Niagara Center. "How it went last year, I don't want to repeat that. It's a lot of pressure on me and something that's not earned right now.

"It was mixed emotions, different emotions," he said. "It's not something I got too much satisfaction out of and something I don't want to repeat this year."

Girgensons has just two goals and two assists this season but his rating in 21 games is just minus-1. The Sabres clearly missed him defensively and on faceoffs when he missed four games due to an injury last month.

"I don't think I've played bad. I've stuck with it," he said. "My offensive production hasn't been where it was last year but I think I've done a pretty decent job overall. I hope I can get more chances at scoring and making plays."

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The last time the Arizona Coyotes were in First Niagara Center was on March 26 and it was one of the most bizarre games in Sabres' history. Arizona won it in overtime, 4-3, in a game that made national news because Sabres fans openly cheered for the visitors to win as the teams were battling for 30th place overall.

Buffalo tied the game in the late going on a Brian Gionta goal after a Shane Doan turnover and could have won in regulation had Zach Bogosian scored with 1:47 left after he got in alone on Arizona goalie Mike Smith. Instead, the Coyotes won on Sam Gagner's power-play goal after 56 seconds of OT.

The Sabres finished two points behind Arizona, so a Bogosian goal producing a regulation win would have created a three-point swing and in the standings. As it turned out, that could have put Buffalo out of the running to land Jack Eichel.

Things are different this year. The Sabres are 10-12-3 while the Coyotes are the surprise of the West, holding the last playoff spot. They were 13-10-1 entering Thursday's game in Detroit.

"Both organizations are moving up and trying to have a lot more success," said Sabres forward Sam Reinhart. "They have a lot of young guys and skill up front and we're going to be ready for it. It will be an exciting game."

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Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said winger Tyler Ennis (upper body) and defenseman Mark Pysyk (lower body) are both now on a week-to-week basis for a return.

Neither is practicing with the team, although the coach didn't classify either as suffering a setback. Ennis has missed the last four games while Pysyk has sat out the last seven.

Tim Schaller has been returned to Rochester, where the Amerks have a back-to-back Friday and Saturday. Schaller had two assists in six games for Buffalo.

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Bylsma had high praise for Arizona defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson, calling the 24-year-old Swede the most underrated blueliner in the NHL.

"He should be a Norris Trophy candidate every year," Bylsma said. He's an elite player who may not get the accolades from where he plays and from playing out in the West but he's a dangerous player. One we don't see much, but one we have to be aware of."

Ekman-Larsson entered Thursday's game with six goals and 10 assists and is tied for fourth in the league on defense in goals. He led NHL blueliners last year with 23 goals.

## **Coyotes, coming off loss, visit Sabres**

By Sean McCullen

NHL.com

December 4, 2015

### **COYOTES (13-11-1) at SABRES (10-12-3)**

#### **TV: FS-A PLUS, MSG-B, BELL TV**

**Season series:** The Arizona Coyotes and Buffalo Sabres split two games last season. Five Arizona players scored a goal. Buffalo forward Brian Gionta and defensemen Rasmus Ristolainen and Andrej Meszaros each had two goals.

**Coyotes team scope:** Arizona has lost the first two of its five-game road trip after a 5-1 loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday. Goalie Mike Smith could make his third straight start and second in as many nights after he was replaced by Anders Lindback to start the second period in Detroit. Smith allowed three goals on 16 shots. "Just a momentum change," coach Dave Tippett said. "Two goals in the last minute. Just tried to create a momentum change." Lindback made 26 saves.

**Sabres team scope:** Buffalo has won two of its past three games but will be looking to bounce back after blowing a one-goal lead in the third period of a 5-4 shootout loss to the Red Wings on Tuesday. Ristolainen had three assists and has 14 points in his past 16 games. "He has great ability, skating ability, size (6-foot-4, 207 pounds)," coach Dan Bylsma told the Sabres website Thursday. "Really, the growth has been in his defending. You can look at his point total and see where he's at on our team ... to say he's doing a lot of good things, but I see more of the growth on his defensive game. ... He's playing against the best players every night, and he's taken that as a challenge and he's improved his game in a lot of areas in that regard and it's been big for our team." The Sabres assigned forward Tim Schaller to Rochester of the American Hockey League on Thursday; he had two assists in six games after being recalled Oct. 26. Forward Tyler Ennis, who has missed four games with an upper-body injury, and defenseman Mark Pysyk, who has missed seven games because of a lower-body bone bruise, are week-to-week, Bylsma said.

## Five reasons for the Sabres' quick turnaround

By Craig Custance

ESPN

December 4, 2015

After the Buffalo Sabres' shootout loss to the Detroit Red Wings, Evander Kane received a text from his dad.

The message: You're finally starting to look like yourself.

"He's probably right," Kane said.

Kane had two goals against Detroit and got involved in a battle with Henrik Zetterberg that escalated into a scrap with Justin Abdelkader and Brendan Smith. He used his speed in overtime to take the puck the length of the ice before drawing a penalty, and he nearly ended the game on the ensuing power play, stopped only by the post.

It was just about total domination and could have marked his true arrival to the Sabres. Coming off a knee injury that sidelined him earlier this season, he looked completely healthy and ready to repay the faith shown by Sabres GM Tim Murray, who sent a huge package to the Winnipeg Jets to acquire him last season.

"You've seen his speed, skating when he's been in our lineup almost immediately," coach Dan Bylsma said. "Today, you saw it; it was dominant."

It was a loss, but this one game captured why the Sabres' rebuild is moving at a fast pace after last season's bottoming out. If Kane is the player Murray expects, that's a game-changer.

But it's not just him. If you haven't checked in on what's happening in Buffalo this season, here are a few more things you might not realize about this season's Sabres:

### 1. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen is really good

Maybe you already knew this. Maybe you saw his play start to take off near the end of last season and realized that the No. 8 overall pick in 2013 was on the verge of potential stardom. As one scout pointed out on Tuesday, the Sabres' disaster of a season in 2014-15 hid the fact that they had some excellent young players coming.

Ristolainen is the best example of that. He had three assists on Tuesday night, giving him three points in a game for just the second time in his career. Bylsma uses him everywhere, with his ice time nearly four minutes more this season than last, at 24:15.

"We're asking a lot of him and what he does for us. He's playing against other teams' best players night in and night out in every situation. He's been pretty dynamic for us," Bylsma said.

Typically it takes a few years for the game to slow down for a young defenseman, but that appears to be happening right now for Ristolainen. He's skating with Josh Gorges, and Gorges is seeing a calm and poise in Ristolainen's game that defies his NHL inexperience. The gold standard for NHL defenseman development is 300 games. Ristolainen is at 137 and has impressed Gorges with that poise.

"[It's] composure, not just with the puck," Gorges said when we chatted on Tuesday. "It's positioning without the puck. The way he moves his stick, the little details of his game that allow him to do the bigger-picture things. You see him, when he goes back for a puck, he's not just going to throw it away. He's calm, cool, collected; he takes the time to find the right guy. His ability to skate -- that makes him dangerous out there."

### 2. Assistant coach Terry Murray deserves some of the credit too

Bylsma has transformed a team that controlled just 37.5 percent of the shot attempts last season to one that is now at 48.6 percent. It's going to get better too, as the players mature and GM Murray fills out the roster.

But Bylsma has had help.

Los Angeles Kings players still talk about the importance Terry Murray had in laying the foundation for their understanding of the game. Drew Doughty mentioned it again in a conversation a couple of weeks ago. Gorges said Murray has been instrumental in providing the structure that allows young players like Ristolainen to make decisions at a fast pace.

"It's really about the details of the game," Gorges said. "We've really hammered home this year where you should be in every situation. 'When the puck goes here, where's your next move, your next position?' Supporting the play, supporting your partner -- for D-men, the game is too fast, things happen way too quick to get the puck, take a look and then think. You don't have that luxury to know where your next play is. To have that communication factor is what [Murray] has really harped on, and it has been a big help to us this year."

### **3. Kane is better-suited playing with Ryan O'Reilly than Jack Eichel**

When Eichel was drafted, it was easy to pencil him right into the Sabres' lineup centering a line that would include Kane on the wing. It was perfect. There would be so much speed in that duo, plus Kane plays with an edge that would help protect the young center.

As it turns out, the duo of Kane and O'Reilly is a better one for the Sabres. According to [hockeyanalysis.com](http://hockeyanalysis.com), when Kane and O'Reilly are on the ice together at even strength, the Sabres control 58.7 percent of the shot attempts. When Kane is with Eichel, that number drops to 50.0 percent.

Kane mentioned O'Reilly's passing as one of the main reasons the two have clicked so far this season.

"He's a guy that has some real good vision on the ice and can pass the puck really well on his backhand, on the rush, that can really help," Kane said. "Especially being a left winger, I'm on his backhand side, so him being able to use both his forehand and his backhand as a winger, that's a good attribute to have as a centerman. He's able to make those little plays, has a good stick, creates turnovers. For me, that works well because I can get open and he can get me the puck."

### **4. Sam Reinhart is the Sabres' most improved player. It might not be close**

We'll let Bylsma explain: "Sam, last year, and I only watched it on video -- it was a physical and speed issue in the game. Even to start this year, where he's come from and where he's improved since Sept. 1 in his skating is significant. And his shot was -- nobody is going to tell you it was anything but not good when he started the season. He's worked diligently, hard. He's got a good shot right now. It's improved so much. It's hard to believe how much it has improved and the pace in which he's played has improved so much that, the season could end four months from now and Sam not having improved any more and he'd [still] be the most improved player on our team."

## **Sabres' Rasmus Ristolainen developing into star**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
December 4, 2015

BUFFALO – No one could believe the number that has been attached to Rasmus Ristolainen's stat line all season: zero.

In 606 minutes, 12 seconds on the ice spread over 25 games – that's a team-high 24 minutes, 14 seconds a contest – the Sabres' ace defenseman hasn't taken a penalty.

"Zero?" Josh Gorges, Ristolainen's defense partner, asked incredulously Thursday before saying he was "impressed" and "surprised."

When informed Ristolainen has zero penalty minutes, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma looked stunned.

"Really?" he asked following practice inside the First Niagara Center.

Bylsma then tapped the podium – knock on wood – and said he was worried about Ristolainen getting his first penalty tonight at home against the Arizona Coyotes.

Incredibly, Ristolainen hasn't been whistled for an infraction since March 20, a 35-game run.

"I still try to play hard and work hard and win the battles," Ristolainen said, "but I guess I've done a pretty good job."

That clean, efficient play, of course, illustrates Ristolainen's rapid development in his third NHL season. The 6-foot-3, 201-pound Finn might be taking his first steps into stardom.

Consider: Ristolainen has already compiled four goals and 17 points while showcasing a physical game and maintaining his poise against the competition's top talent every night.

Ristolainen's last outing, Buffalo's 5-4 shootout loss Tuesday in Detroit, might've been the best of his 137 NHL games. He recorded three assists – he was originally credited with a fourth – while skating a career-high 27 minutes, 55 seconds.

Ristolainen, the eighth overall pick in 2013, joked earlier this season he would like to play 60 minutes.

"Didn't feel bad," Ristolainen said about his playing time Tuesday. "It's not how much you want to play; it's how many minutes you earn."

Gorges, who has played beside Ristolainen all season, believes "the potential is definitely there" for his partner to develop into a star.

"He's kind of the guy for us right now we lean on in every situation," Gorges said.

Stardom, Bylsma believes, "is a big word to put on anybody."

"But I think he's a big-time player," he said. "We're going to count on him to defend and be out against the best players in the world every night. I don't know if that's going to be stardom, but that's what we're counting on him to do."

The Sabres count on Ristolainen for a lot more than defending. He's only three points behind center Ryan O'Reilly for the team lead. Rookie center Jack Eichel's 12 points rank third.

Ristolainen, who had 20 points in 78 games last season, is on pace for 56, a gaudy number for a defenseman in this low-scoring era. A Sabres defender hasn't hit the prestigious 50-point mark since Garry Galley had 54 in 1995-96.

Overall, Ristolainen ranks 10<sup>th</sup> in scoring among NHL defensemen.

Still, despite the offensive surge, Bylsma has seen the biggest growth in Ristolainen's defensive game.

"He's playing against the best players every night," Bylsma said. "He's taking that as a challenge and he's improved his game in a lot of areas in that regard. It's been big for our team.

"I don't know how I view the points. I don't think they're a result of some good play with the puck. They're not a result of him being a fantastic offensive defenseman or a risk-taker. They've come right in the midst of playing against other teams' best players."

Gorges has seen other signs of maturation, including in Ristolainen's communication skills.

"The biggest thing about your partner is if he communicates or not, and I think that's something that even from last year to this year, the start of this year until now, I mean, I hear him every shift – he's talking, he's yelling, he's letting me know," Gorges said. "That makes my job so easy out there. You don't have to think, you don't have to look. You listen to your partner."

Gorges also likes his partner, someone he calls a "good guy."

"He loves the game," he said. "He comes with a lot of passion every day. He loves being at the rink, and I think when you have that enthusiasm at that age with as good as he is, he can only continue to get better and better."

Gorges added: "He makes my life easy out there."

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Bylsma said winger Tyler Ennis (upper body) and defenseman Mark Pysyk (lower-body bone bruise) are week-to-week.

Meanwhile, goalie Robin Lehner, out since suffering a high-ankle sprain, opening night, has progressed recently and is doing better, Bylsma said.

Lehner has a stall in the dressing room again and is out of a walking boot. His return, however, could still be weeks away. The Sabres said Lehner would miss six to 10 weeks when he was injured Oct. 8.

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Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons said he had "different" and "mixed" emotions telling Latvian fans in a tweet Wednesday not to vote for him for the NHL All-Star Game again this season.

Girgensons, who has struggled this season, was voted in a year ago thanks to some rabid support in his home country.

"It's not something I got too much satisfaction out of, so I don't want to repeat that this year," he said.

Will the fans listen?

"I don't know," he said. "That's up to them. It's something that is not in my satisfaction. That's totally different. That should be deserved."

## World junior memories special for Sabres youngsters

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
December 4, 2015

BUFFALO – Eleven months ago, on the grand stages of Montreal and Toronto, Sabres winger Sam Reinhart showcased why he's regarded as one of hockey's top prospects, starring for Team Canada during its run to world junior championship gold.

"I had a blast, one of the best times of my life," Reinhart said this afternoon, shortly after it was announced Buffalo would host the tournament again in 2018.

Two years ago in Sweden, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen's overtime winner clinched gold for Finland.

"It's a special tournament, especially in my country Finland, it's getting bigger and bigger every year," said Ristolainen, whose country will host the tournament next month.

It could be the biggest tournament yet in Buffalo, with an outdoor game reportedly planned, likely between Team USA and Canada. The site of Friday's news conference – the 18-yard-line of Ralph Wilson Stadium, an NFL venue that hosted the 2008 Winter Classic – gave that away.

"It'll be awesome," Reinhart said about the tournament returning to Buffalo.

Stay tuned for more world junior details.

In other news, following a day off, the Sabres practiced today about an hour inside the First Niagara Center. Coach Dan Bylsma said winger Tyler Ennis (upper body) and defenseman Mark Pysyk (lower-body bone bruise) are week-to-week.

Meanwhile, goalie Robin Lehner, out since suffering a high-ankle sprain opening night, has "gone through a good period through the last little bit where he has progressed and is doing much better."

Lehner has a stall in the dressing room and is out of a walking boot. His return, however, could still be weeks away.

**Update:** The Sabres sent forward Tim Schaller to the Rochester Americans this afternoon.

## **Ristolainen shows improvement on both ends of the ice**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 4, 2015

After coming off the ice from his first practice of Training Camp, Rasmus Ristolainen smiled when he was asked where he'd most like to improve in his third NHL season. His answer, albeit a general one, was concise.

"Offensive zone ... defensive zone ... everywhere," he said.

Now more than a quarter of a way into the season, his answer was remarkably similar when asked what areas of his game have grown.

"I think my whole two-way game," he said. "Offensive zone's been better and then [in] the defensive zone, I think I've been helping the team more than the couple years before."

Indeed, Ristolainen appears to be budding into a top defenseman for the Buffalo Sabres at age 21. On the score sheet, it's easy to see. His 17 points – which, by the way, are only three shy of his 78-game total from last season – ranks 10th among the League's defensemen.

In Tuesday's overtime loss in Detroit, he picked up three assists and was on the ice for all four of the Buffalo's goals. He led all skaters in that game with 27:55 of ice time, and his average ice time of 24:15 leads the Sabres.

Yet, for all of the improvements Ristolainen has made in his offensive game, his coach believes that he's made even greater strides defensively.

"Really, the growth has been in his defending," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "You can look at his point total and see where he's at on our team ... to say he's doing a lot of good things. But I see more of the growth on his defensive game and what he can be as a defender. He's playing against the best players every night and he's taken that as a challenge."

"I don't know how I view the points. They're a result of some good play with the puck; they're not a result of him being a fantastic offensive defenseman or a risk taker. They've come right in the midst of playing against other teams' best players and he's done it solid and in a great way."

Bylsma said that Ristolainen has been, along with partner Josh Gorges, the team's most physical defenseman. It's an impressive statement considering the fact that he's has yet to take a penalty through 25 games.

Seven other players have played at least 20 games without taking a penalty, including Sabres forward Johan Larsson, but none of them have even eclipsed 500 minutes of ice time. Ristolainen has played 606:12. Only 13 skaters in the NHL have played more minutes.

"I try to play hard, work hard and win the battles but I guess I've done a pretty good job when I haven't gotten any penalties yet," he said.

It's wise to temper the expectations put on any 21-year-old player. But if Ristolainen keeps doing what he's doing, playing at a high level against the best the opposition has to offer, that in itself will be a feat.

"Stardom's a big word to put on any player," Bylsma said. "But I think he's a big-time player. We're going to count on him to defend and to be out against the best players in the world every night and I don't know if that's going to be stardom but that's what we're counting on him to do and he's doing a great job of it at this point of time."

As for his streak of penalty-free hockey ... well, let's hope it hasn't been jinxed.

"I don't look at it that he hasn't taken any penalties," Bylsma said. "But I'm now worried about the penalty kill, having to deal with a penalty in the game tomorrow against Arizona."

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### **SCHALLER REASSIGNED TO ROCHESTER**

The Sabres announced Thursday that the team has assigned forward Tim Schaller to the Rochester Americans, their American Hockey League affiliate.

Schaller played in six games since being recalled on Oct. 26, tallying two assists.

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### **INJURY UPDATE**

Bylsma updated the statuses of both forward Tyler Ennis and defenseman Mark Pysyk as week-to-week after both players were absent from the Sabres' practice on Thursday. Pysyk has missed seven games with a bone bruise in his lower body while Ennis has missed four with an upper-body injury.

While Pysyk simply hasn't healed the way the team originally hoped, Bylsma said that Ennis is making progress in his recovery.

"Tyler is getting better and there is some progress he's making. He has worked out off the ice," the coach said. "He's in the week range."

Goaltender Robin Lehner, who has missed 24 games since sustaining a high ankle sprain in the team's season opener on Oct. 8, is making progress in week eight of his recovery.

"He has gone through a good period over the last little bit where he has progressed and he is doing much better," Bylsma said.

"Again, dealing with a high ankle sprain with a goaltender, every time you go down you are in a tough position for a goaltender. While he's working out and he is doing well, it takes some time before he can progress to actually make a save, going down in that position."

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### **THURSDAY'S PRACTICE**

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