



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres-Avalanche Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo

AP

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The Colorado Avalanche intended to sign talented forward Ryan O'Reilly to a contract extension in the offseason. Instead, they decided the best move was to deal him.

Off to a strong start in Buffalo, O'Reilly returns to Denver looking to help the Sabres win four straight on the road for the first time in four seasons Wednesday night.

One season after O'Reilly set career highs with 28 goals and 64 points, he posted a personal-best 38 assists in 2014-15. Although he blossomed while spending his first six seasons in Colorado, the club felt it would be too expensive to keep him long-term.

The Avalanche wound up sending O'Reilly and fellow forward Jamie McGinn to Buffalo on June 26 in exchange for young defenseman Nikita Zadorov, forward Mikhail Grigorenko, the rights to J.T. Compher and the No. 31 pick in the draft.

"In the salary-cap era you have to make tough decisions sometimes," general manager Joe Sakic told the NHL's official website in June.

Signed to a seven-year, \$52.5 million extension in July, O'Reilly has made an immediate impact by leading Buffalo (19-23-4) with 17 goals and 39 points. He's a big reason the Sabres are 12 points shy of matching their league-low 54 from '14-15 and have already surpassed last season's nine road wins with a 10-9-2 mark.

"He's got tremendous hockey sense," Sabres general manager Tim Murray said of O'Reilly, who turns 25 next month. "I think his hockey sense is off the charts. I think he makes everyone around him better."

Playing for his third club, McGinn is fourth on the team with 21 points. He gave Buffalo a 2-0 lead Monday at Arizona after O'Reilly assisted on Jack Eichel's goal in the 2-1 victory. O'Reilly has six goals and nine assists in the last 12 road contests.

The Sabres have yielded 10 goals to go 4-1-0 following a six-game losing streak in which they were outscored 21-8. A winner in five of seven away from home, Buffalo last won four straight on the road to open the '11-12 season.

"We can win," said Eichel, the second overall pick in 2015 who has three goals and six assists in six road games. "We know that."

Buffalo hopes its improved road play can end an 0-2-2 slide at Colorado (23-21-3), where the Avs have scored 16 times while winning four of their last five.

Colorado has not gotten much of a return on its end of the O'Reilly trade with Grigorenko recording 12 points in 40 games and Zadorov seeing action in 14 while spending most of his time in the AHL. Fighting for a wild-card spot in the Western Conference, the Avs split a two-game trip after Monday's 2-1 victory at Winnipeg.

Carl Soderberg had a goal with an assist and Semyon Varlamov made 36 saves after yielding four goals in each of his prior two starts. The Avs have given up three goals in three games but will need to improve on their 8-14-1 mark against the East.

"(Monday) was an important game for us. We need to continue," coach Patrick Roy said. "It is important because we're not doing so well against teams from the East for some reason."

Jarome Iginla's 13th goal Monday is Colorado's only power-play score in 11 chances over its previous five. The Avs, however, have killed all 12 penalties in the last four.

The Sabres have converted 25 percent (8 for 32) of their opportunities with the man-advantage in the last nine contests.

Buffalo's Chad Johnson has a 1.34 goals-against average in his last three starts.

O'Reilly back where his career began

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 20, 2016

DENVER – Though mountains dominate the landscape in Denver, there's a long stretch of flat land between the airport and downtown. It allowed Ryan O'Reilly to stare out his bus window at the place he called home for most of his adult life.

The memories flooded his mind as he saw the city skyline, and he was happy to be back.

"I feel like it's the city where I kind of turned into a man," O'Reilly said Tuesday. "Coming in so young and all the experiences I've had here, it's just such a great time. There's so many good relationships that I had here whether it was teammates and just friends in the city. It's definitely something I missed."

He'll find out soon whether the fans in town missed him. The center will lead the Sabres into Wednesday's game against Colorado, the first meeting between the teams since June's blockbuster trade that brought O'Reilly and Jamie McGinn to Buffalo in exchange for Mikhail Grigorenko, Nikita Zadorov, J.T. Compher and a draft pick.

O'Reilly has a pretty good idea how the welcome in Pepsi Center will go.

"I don't think it'll be a great one," he said, "but I'm happy with the way everything worked out. I'm happy in Buffalo now."

Despite having plenty of fond memories, there are more than a few bad ones for O'Reilly. In this case, money is the root of the evil. He held out in 2013 and signed a two-year, \$10 million offer sheet with the Calgary Flames that the Avs matched. He told longtime Denver reporter Adrian Dater of Bleacher Report this week that the big deal caused locker-room friction, most notably with fellow star Matt Duchene.

After another bitter negotiation during the summer of 2014, it seemed like a matter of time before O'Reilly would play elsewhere.

"It was out of my control," O'Reilly said after practice in Big Bear Ice Arena. "It was the business side of things."

The 24-year-old doesn't have to worry about business matters until 2023, thanks to the seven-year, \$52.5 million extension the Sabres gave him after the trade. It made him the highest-paid player in franchise history.

"It's a huge honor, but with that comes a lot of responsibility," O'Reilly said. "I know I have to work even harder and grow my game even more because there's that pressure there. They hired me to do a job. I don't think they gave it to me on what I've done but on what I'm going to do."

All he's done so far is become the Sabres' most productive player and their lone All-Star. He leads the team with 17 goals and 39 points in 46 games. He's won 57.5 percent of his faceoffs (seventh in the league) while leading all NHL forwards in ice time at 21:55 per game.

"Ryan loves the game of hockey, and he's going to give 100 percent effort every time he's out there," McGinn said. "He's fell in love with Buffalo. He loves how the fans treat him, and he loves the area. He's settled in, but that doesn't change him. He continues to work hard every day and continues to be better. Last one off the ice every day, and he's our most skilled and he's our leader."

"We're all taking pages out of his book. That's why he's such a great player is he continues to strive forward and get better."

O'Reilly still sees plenty of room for improvement. His overall rating of minus-8, for example, includes a minus-9 for home games.

"There were a lot of times I could have impacted the game more," he said. "We're a group that's learning together and growing together, and at times we've had some success. Our power play's been great this year. Obviously, there's ups and downs like every year, but I'm definitely not satisfied and need to do more.

"It's been a great transition, though. It's a hockey town. We have a great group of guys here. Obviously, having the extended contract and being there for a while and being seen as more of a leader, it's just a way to expand my game and grow as a player and a person. It's been great that way."

O'Reilly, who has a history of leading by example, says he's still learning to inspire teammates through his words as well.

"Time and time again, I'm trying to find new ways to say the right things," said O'Reilly, whose father, Brian, is a life coach in the business of motivating people. "I try to keep guys focused and say the right things, but again that's something that will continue to grow. After games, before games, during games, I've always got to find new ways to help the team."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has no doubt O'Reilly will help the team during his return to Denver, where he spent the first six seasons of his career.

"Hopefully," Bylsma said, "he shows them exactly what they've missed."

Sabres notebook: Lehner wants to match Johnson's play

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 20, 2016

DENVER – Professional athletes have an inner drive that pushes them to excel. Robin Lehner acknowledges he's got outside pressure on him, too.

Fellow Sabres goaltender Chad Johnson has propelled Buffalo to two straight victories, stopping 59 of 61 shots. Buffalo visits Colorado on Wednesday, with Lehner set to start. He knows there's a push to keep up with Johnson.

"One hundred percent," Lehner said Tuesday after practice in Big Bear Ice Arena. "He's worked very hard. He stuck with it. I'm very happy for Chad. He's a really good goalie, and you need to have a few good goalies in the system to succeed."

Johnson knew from the start he'd compete with Lehner for playing time. Because of Lehner's ankle injury, the competition didn't start until the fourth month of the season. But it's on now.

"I want to play as much as possible and contribute and be a factor for this team and this organization," Johnson said. "My mindset coming in right away was to play with Robin, compete with him and push each other and make each other better and help this team."

After making 26 saves during Monday's 2-1 victory in Arizona, Johnson improved his numbers to 12-12-2 with a .920 save percentage and 2.36 goals-against average.

"I feel good all year," he said. "It comes down to results. As much as performance is one thing, results is another. We're getting good results. I'm getting good results. It's fun."

Lehner, who will make his third start of the season, is eager to get in on the wins. He gave up three goals in Friday's 4-1 loss to Boston, then watched Johnson beat Washington and Arizona.

"The team's playing better," Lehner said. "Watching us play lately, it's been a lot more consistent through 60 minutes. We've been playing good hockey. We weren't very happy with the Boston game, but we had a big bounce back. It's good."

Lehner said his ankle continues to improve and felt fine in the days following his first start since October.

"I feel better every day in practice, so I'm excited," he said. "It's been a good start on me coming back, and hopefully I can get it better."

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After missing two games with an upper-body injury, Josh Gorges may be ready to return to the Sabres' lineup.

"He's been better in successive days, so there's a good chance we can see him," coach Dan Bylsma said.

If Gorges returns against Colorado, the debate will be which defenseman to take out.

"That game against Arizona, we gave up eight or nine scoring chances, and that might have been our fewest of the year," Bylsma said. "As a group, we played pretty well defensively in that game, so yeah, they'd be making it hard for me."

The other question for Bylsma is where to put Gorges. He's been paired with Rasmus Ristolainen for most of the season, but Ristolainen and Zach Bogosian have excelled together in Gorges' absence. The other pairs of the last two games were Jake McCabe-Cody Franson and Mike Weber-Mark Pysyk.

Weber has helped the Sabres' penalty killers go on a 15-for-16 run. Buffalo was 5 for 5 against the Coyotes, with Weber skating a game-high 6:17 while shorthanded.

"We have an eight-second rule where we're just trying to all-out pressure," Weber said. "If they have three guys in the corner, we're going with three guys. It's a little bit of a swarm mentality, and we've been able to get a lot of clears down the ice."

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Ristolainen was still sporting a few scratches on his face and ear after being involved in a postgame melee with the Coyotes. Ristolainen traded punches with fellow standout defenseman Oliver Ekman-Larsson before Coyotes captain Shane Doan inserted himself in the fight.

"We battle, and sometimes those things happen," Ristolainen said. "I love it. It tells that we're a close team. Everyone sticks up for each other, and we never take any back steps."

Bogosian started the fray by throwing numerous haymakers at Arizona rookie Anthony Duclair.

"Those are always fun, more fun when you win the actual game," Bogosian said. "You always want to have each other's back."

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It didn't show up on the score sheet, but the Sabres are crediting equipment manager Dave Williams with a helper on their opening goal against the Coyotes. Jack Eichel's stick shattered when he attempted a slap shot, and he quickly skated to the bench for new lumber. Williams was quicker, having it ready for Eichel when he got there.

The handoff came just as the puck neared the blue line, and Eichel kept it in and scored a few seconds later.

Said Bylsma: "An assist to Dave Williams for getting Jack the stick as the puck was coming around the wall there."

Former Avs center Ryan O'Reilly leads the Buffalo Sabres to Denver

By Mike Chambers

Denver Post

January 20, 2016

WINNIPEG, Manitoba — Avalanche players usually don't look beyond the upcoming game. But with Ryan O'Reilly and Jamie McGinn returning to Denver on Tuesday, dinner plans and discussions were imminent.

"I'm sure I'll see them. I'm sure we'll grab some dinner and talk about the season," Avs center Nathan MacKinnon said Monday before Colorado's 2-1 victory at Winnipeg.

MacKinnon and defenseman Tyson Barrie, among others, were close friends with O'Reilly and McGinn, who were traded to Buffalo on June 26 for the Sabres' Nikita Zadorov and Mikhail Grigorenko, Michigan captain J.T. Compher and a second-round draft pick.

O'Reilly, McGinn and Zadorov are pegged to play in Wednesday's game between the Avs and Sabres at the Pepsi Center in the trade's first head-to-head comparison. Grigorenko has been a healthy scratch the past three games.

O'Reilly — nicknamed Factor — is Buffalo's 2016 NHL all-star and McGinn is having an excellent bounce-back season after missing most of last season with a serious back injury.

"They're good guys and I'm happy for them. They're doing well," Barrie said. "Me and Factor and Ginner were pretty tight. Great teammates, great guys, and it will be fun to face off against them for the first time. I'm looking forward to it."

O'Reilly, who is Buffalo's No. 1 center, leads the team with 17 goals and 39 points. McGinn, who often plays left wing on O'Reilly's line, is fourth in scoring with 21 points (10 goals).

In playing all 46 games for the Sabres, O'Reilly already has matched the 17 goals he scored with the Avs in 82 games last season.

"He's playing unbelievable for them," MacKinnon said of O'Reilly. "They're not doing very well, but if he wasn't playing as good as was they'd be worse off. Same with Ginner. He's been playing awesome too. I'm happy for those guys."

MacKinnon, 20, is living in O'Reilly's Denver-area condo.

Avs forward Cody McLeod also was close with fellow Irish-blooded O'Reilly and McGinn.

"I haven't talked to them — nothing as of right now," McLeod said. "They were good friends and stuff like that, and we're on opposite sides now. That's the plan. They're friends, but when the game starts we're not friends on the ice."

O'Reilly and McGinn were traded because the Avs thought they couldn't sign O'Reilly beyond this season, when he could have been an unrestricted free agent. O'Reilly was seeking an eight-year, \$64 million extension with Colorado. After the trade, he signed a seven-year, \$52.5 million deal with the Sabres.

O'Reilly, Sabres face Avalanche for 1st time since deal

By Michael LoRe

NHL.com

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SABRES (19-23-4) at AVALANCHE (23-21-3)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, ALT

Season series: The Colorado Avalanche swept two games from the Buffalo Sabres last season. Rookie goalie Calvin Pickard made 28 saves, and forward Alex Tanguay had two goals in Colorado's 5-1 win at First Niagara Center on Dec. 20, 2014. Right wing Jarome Iginla had three assists in a 5-3 win at Pepsi Center on March 28. Iginla had six assists, and center John Mitchell and Tanguay each had two goals and an assist. Sabres defenseman Andrej Meszaros had two goals.

Sabres team scope: Center Ryan O'Reilly and left wing Jamie McGinn will play at Pepsi Center for the first time since being traded by Colorado to Buffalo on June 26. "It feels like forever ago that I was here," O'Reilly told the Sabres website Tuesday. "It's amazing, I feel like this is the city where I turned into a man kind of, coming in so young and all the experiences I had here." O'Reilly leads the Sabres with 17 goals and 39 points. Goalie Robin Lehner will make his third start of the season. He made 27 saves in a 4-1 loss to the Boston Bruins on Friday in his first start since sustaining a right high-ankle sprain in the season-opener on Oct. 8. Defenseman Josh Gorges, who has missed the past two games with an upper-body injury, could return. "He's been better in successive days, so there's a good chance we can see him," coach Dan Bylsma told the team website. The Sabres have won four of their past five games after a 2-1 win at the Arizona Coyotes on Monday.

Avalanche team scope: Goalie Semyon Varlamov, who had 36 saves in a 2-1 win against the Winnipeg Jets on Monday, will start. Center Mikhail Grigorenko, who was a healthy scratch the past two games, will be in the lineup against his former team. Injured defenseman Erik Johnson (knee) skated Tuesday with the healthy scratches from the Winnipeg game and is on track to return to the lineup in the next week or so, the Denver Post reported. "[Johnson is] doing better," coach Patrick Roy told the newspaper. "I think he should be practicing with us [Wednesday] for the morning skate. ... I'm confident he's going to be back soon." Johnson, who is on injured reserve, has been out since he was injured Jan. 4 against the Los Angeles Kings.

Sabres' O'Reilly returns to Colorado

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 20, 2016

Denver, CO (WGR 550) -- Jamie McGinn played 204 games in San Jose before being traded to Colorado so he knows about playing against former teammates. Wednesday in Denver it will be Ryan O'Reilly's first time doing it and he said he's talked to McGinn about it, "Yes, we've talked about it. He said if anything it's just a weird experience, when you have so many good friends that you played with all the time and then just watch everything turn."

O'Reilly saw the city for the first time since leaving. He said, "It was funny, it seems like forever ago that I was here and it's amazing, it's the city where I turned into a man."

Evander Kane was booed all night in Winnipeg while Zach Bogosian was cheered. O'Reilly knows the fans here aren't happy with him, "I don't know, I don't think it will be a great one, but I'm happy with the way everything has worked out, I'm happy in Buffalo now."

O'Reilly wasn't named captain in Colorado as a young Gabriel Landeskog was. He was the second overall pick in 2011 while O'Reilly went 33rd overall in 2009. He thinks Buffalo is special to him because they want him to lead the way, "My time in Denver was great, we didn't have the success that I wanted to have, but it's been a great transition, it a hockey town and getting the extended contract to be there awhile and being seen as more of a leader, it's just a way to expand my game."

O'Reilly had contract problems with the Avs and he knows the fans don't forgive him, "It's the contract issues that I've been through, but it was out of my control, it was the business side of things, but I've got some great relationships with people here, but it'll be interesting to see what happens. I don't know exactly what it will be like, but I'm not going to worry about it."

The Sabres inked O'Reilly to a seven year contract extension which starts next year. The contract will make him the highest paid Sabre ever and I wondered if after not getting the money in Colorado, was he surprised, "Yes kind of. Obviously it's a huge honor and with that comes a lot of responsibility and they've hired me to do a job, I don't think they gave it to me on what I've done, they gave me the contract on what I'm going to do."

All 22 players practiced in Colorado after the plane landed from Phoenix. Robin Lehner will start in goal for the team on Thursday.

Josh Gorges was again at practice and Bylsma said he's getting better, "There's a possibility that he could get back into the lineup, he's doing better. His days have been important for his recovery and he's been better in successive days."

Against Arizona the defense played very well in front of Chad Johnson which makes decisions even tougher for the head coach, "I think in the game we gave up eight or nine scoring chances which might have been our fewest of the year, so as a group we played pretty well, so yes, they're making it hard for me."

The players were still talking about the 6-on-5 fight that took place at the end of the Arizona game. The referees did Rasmus Ristolainen and Oliver-Ekman Larsson a huge favor by giving them 10 minutes misconducts instead of the five minutes for fighting that each so richly deserved. Since a fight was already going on, had they gotten fighting majors, they would've faced possible fines and suspensions down the road. Bogosian would also have had to been given a third man in penalty too.

O'Reilly, McGinn prepare for return to Colorado

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 20, 2016

DENVER – He hasn't returned to Pepsi Center quite yet, but Ryan O'Reilly was able to catch some glimpses of his former city as the team bus took the Buffalo Sabres to their practice at Big Bear Ice Arena, a complex located in the suburbs east of downtown Denver.

"It was just funny. It feels like forever ago that I was here," O'Reilly said. "It's amazing, I feel like this is the city where I turned into a man kind of, coming in so young and all the experiences I had here."

In actuality, it's been less than seven months since a trade sent O'Reilly and Jamie McGinn to Buffalo in exchange for Nikita Zadorov, Mikhail Grigorenko, J.T. Compher and the No. 31 pick in the 2015 Draft. O'Reilly had spent all of his six seasons with the Colorado Avalanche, beginning with an 81-game campaign as an 18-year-old rookie in 2009-10.

McGinn, on the other hand, had been traded before. He arrived in Colorado after being traded from San Jose midway through the 2011-12 season. As both players prepare to face the Avalanche for the first time since the trade on Wednesday night, McGinn has been preparing O'Reilly for what he might expect.

"Yeah, we were kind of talking about it," O'Reilly said. "He said if anything, it's just a weird experience when you have so many good friends that you played with for a long time and just watch everything turn and you're on the other end of it now. It's an exciting experience and I'm looking forward to it."

"It's kind of nerve-wrecking for your first time," McGinn admitted. "I'm a little more calm, I've been through it. You always look forward to these games and seeing how the crowd's going to react so it should be a good-energy game tomorrow. We're excited to come out and hopefully win a hockey game."

How the crowd reacts remains to be seen, but O'Reilly admitted that he's not expecting the warmest welcome. The business side of hockey resulted in his being traded to the Sabres, with whom he agreed to a seven-year contract extension upon his arrival.

However the fans react, it won't be anything new. It was less than two weeks ago when Evander Kane and Zach Bogosian made their first return to Winnipeg, where the former was booed throughout the entirety of the contest. Buffalo won that game 4-2.

"The fans have every right. They've got to cheer for their team and we're not with that squad anymore so it's all in good fun," McGinn said. "Watching what happened with Kaner and Bogo in Winnipeg, it was a lot of fun. It gets everyone into the game and it's intense so either way it'll be fine, I've still got to do a job out there."

Both players said that they enjoyed the time they spent in Colorado, but they've also both taken quite well to being in Buffalo. McGinn said he's already "fallen in love" with the city and the organization, while O'Reilly has seen new opportunities open to develop his game moving forward.

"I think my time in Denver was great," O'Reilly said. "I did enjoy it, obviously didn't have the success that I felt I wanted to have, but I think it's been a great transition. I think [Buffalo is] a hockey town and we have a great group of guys here and I think, obviously, having the extended contract and being here for a while and being seen as more of a leader – it's just a way for me to expand my game and grow as a player and a person."

UPDATE ON GORGES

After missing the last two games with an upper-body injury, Josh Gorges participated in a full practice with the

team again on Tuesday. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said that the defenseman is a possibility to play against the Avalanche.

If Gorges does play, it means Bylsma will be faced with the difficult task of deciding which defenseman to remove from the lineup. That task became even more difficult after a stellar performance in Arizona on Monday.

"I think that game against Arizona, we gave up eight or nine scoring chances," Bylsma said. "It might've been our best of the year. As a group, we played pretty good, played pretty well defensively so yeah, they've been making it hard for me."

WEBER LEADS THE WAY ON THE PENALTY KILL

In Gorges' absence, Mike Weber has stepped up as a leader on a Buffalo penalty-kill unit that was 4-for-4 against Washington on Saturday and 5-for-5 against Arizona. All throughout the game, Weber could be seen blocking shots in front of the net or clearing rebounds before the Coyotes had a chance to strike.

"The last [few] games without Josh in there, he's been really the main guy on the penalty kill," Bylsma said. "I think he's got four big blocked shots for us on the penalty kill and, even better yet, there were some rebounds, there were some pucks in around on their power play and he was clearing out the front of the net in a big way."

Weber was quick to credit his teammates with the unit's success, too. He broke down how they got the job done against the Coyotes after practice on Tuesday.

"A four-man unit, everyone's committed, our forwards have been doing a great job with up-ice pressure and they're trying to get the pucks out of key players' hands early and forcing dumps," he said. "Once the teams kind of dump it in, it's an eight second-rule we have where it's kind of all-out pressure and we've been good with everyone getting in there and being able to get clears."

PARENTAL SUPERVISION

Buffalo used the current two-game road trip as its annual Parents Trip, where each player can bring a parent along to experience life on the road. Weber's father was one of a few parents who tagged along to practice on Tuesday, and Weber said that it was fitting that practice was being held in an ice-cold hockey barn as opposed to an NHL rink.

"It's been fun, it's always fun when you can kind of bring your folks in and share a little bit of your life with them," he said. "They all worked hard to get us to this level and obviously to come down here in a minor hockey rink where they spent most of their time freezing for us to play, for sure it's fitting."

TUESDAY'S PRACTICE

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