



Buffalo Sabres

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Penguins-Sabres Preview

By Nicolino DiBenedetto

AP

February 21, 2016

An illness to Marc-Andre Fleury has Jeff Zatkoff on alert again, but the Pittsburgh Penguins might be more concerned about what's happening at the other end of the ice.

With their starting goaltender unknown, the Penguins look for some offensive improvement in order to continue their dominance of the Buffalo Sabres on Sunday.

Fleury has been terrific of late, going 3-1-1 with a .942 save percentage over his last five games. He was unable to keep that strong stretch going Saturday, falling ill and pressing Zatkoff into an unexpected start. The backup made 16 saves in a 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay, despite Pittsburgh (29-19-8) holding a 39-20 shot advantage.

"That's my role," said Zatkoff, who is 2-6-1 with a 2.96 GAA over his last 10 games. "That's my job to be able to come in and give the team a chance and to give him a night off. Unfortunately we didn't get it done. I didn't get it done."

Zatkoff may find himself in the same situation Sunday since Fleury's status is unknown. However, Zatkoff had a career-high 50 saves in a 4-3 win over Buffalo (24-28-7) on Oct. 29.

The Penguins have averaged 4.14 goals during a seven-game winning streak over the Sabres, part of a stretch of 16 wins in their last 20 games against Buffalo.

Pittsburgh hasn't come close to that kind of production lately, particularly on the road. The Penguins have tallied just 16 times during a 2-2-3 stretch away from home.

Improving on that might be tougher with Evgeni Malkin (lower-body injury) possibly out for an eighth straight game overall. Sidney Crosby has just two points over the last five games, both coming in Thursday's 6-3 win over Detroit.

Facing the Sabres should get him untracked. Crosby has 47 points in 29 career meetings. He had two assists against the Sabres in October.

The Penguins are currently sitting in the Eastern Conference's last wild-card spot, and while Buffalo is 11 points behind it's showing some signs of life lately. The Sabres have outscored opponents 15-6 during a 3-0-1 stretch after beating Columbus 4-0 on Friday behind Robin Lehner's 38 saves.

Lehner is 4-4-2 with a 2.30 GAA and .932 save percentage on the season, but he's 2-0-1 while stopping 97 of 99 shots while starting three straight games.

That should be reason enough for him to get the nod again.

"He's an engaged goalie," coach Dan Bylsma said. "Maybe the most engaged goalie I've been able to coach and he was engaged (Friday). He was certainly on his game, he was strong."

Bylsma's other option is Chad Johnson, who has a 3.50 GAA while going 1-2-1 over his last four games. He had 26 saves at Pittsburgh in October.

Sam Reinhart has six goals over the last eight games, matching his production from his previous 24. The surge has also given him a team-leading 18 goals, ranking third in the NHL among rookies.

"I think it shows a lot to the support I've had," Reinhart told the team's official website. "I think there's lots of guys in our locker room that can chip in, we have a lot of depth in that sense, and I think at any given time anyone can be a guy who puts the puck in the net."

After slow start this season, Crosby playing as well as ever

By Mike Harrington
Buffalo News
February 21, 2016

Rumors of Sidney Crosby's demise have been greatly exaggerated.

It's really nothing new. It's happened from time to time the last few years as the Pittsburgh Penguins superstar has morphed into a 10-year veteran who is now 28 years old.

"Always does," Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Saturday in HarborCenter. "It's not the first time that a question about not scoring a goal in two or three games has arisen. And talk about where he's at, where he's gone, where he's come from, if he's playing his best or if he's not the same."

Bylsma, of course, knows all about the scrutiny of Crosby from his 5½ seasons of coaching No. 87 in Pittsburgh. When the Penguins hit town Sunday for a nationally televised game in First Niagara Center, Crosby will be on the rebound from one of the slowest starts of his career to someone who is yet again in the NHL's top 10 in scoring.

Crosby had no points in eight of the first nine games this season and had just nine points in his first 18 games. He had a minus-10 rating by Thanksgiving. Like many of the Pens, he simply wasn't responding to coach Mike Johnston but started to find his game when Johnston was jettisoned and Mike Sullivan was hired Dec. 12.

Crosby has 44 points in his past 37 games and entered Saturday with 14 in February, one off the NHL lead held by Anaheim's Ryan Getzlaf. Crosby did not post a point in a 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay, leaving his season totals at 25 goals and 55 points in 56 games.

"Clearly right now, he's at his best and one of the best in the world," Bylsma said. "When you looked at Sid playing his best, he's just extremely focused on playing hockey and really not being bothered by any other situation, just going out there and letting 'er go. When he's going with speed and has got the creativity going in his game, there's no question he's the hardest to handle in the world."

Although continuing to ply his trade in Pittsburgh, Crosby remains the face of hockey in Canada. There were rumblings about what role he would play in this fall's World Cup, but even when he was slumping, Hockey Canada leadership said Crosby would be named to the team when the first 16 slots are announced March 2. The way he's playing now leaves no doubt.

"He's a polarizing figure – throughout Canada – in the media," longtime linemate Chris Kunitz told the Pittsburgh Tribune-Review last week. "When you're the guy under the bright light forever, people see that as being good and bad. I think that's why there was so much backlash at the beginning of the year when he struggled – if you want to call it that."

Crosby's resurgence included a career-high seven-game goal streak, including a hat trick Feb. 2 against Ottawa. That was part of a run of seven goals and 12 points in four games.

"The biggest thing I've found over the year is chances," Crosby told the Pittsburgh Post-Gazette earlier this month. "If you're getting chances, I feel like it's just a matter of time. If the chances are there, I'm not too worried about the puck going in. I think, for the first time, I experienced that there weren't many chances. And when that doesn't happen, then you've got to find a way to create that confidence in a different way."

The Penguins have done that in part with the acquisition of puck-moving defenseman Trevor Daley from Chicago. And after the combination was water and oil in October, Phil Kessel was moved back on Crosby's line with Kunitz Thursday and the trio had three goals in a win over Detroit.

"I'm not saying confidence is not a part of it, because it is, but I think there's other ways you can get it," Crosby said. "If you're solely looking for confidence in the form of scoring then when you're not, what are you going to do out there? You've still got to be effective. I've always felt like I still had an impact even when I wasn't scoring."

"You have to be aware of where he is at all times. He's one of the best players in the world, if not the best," said Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian. "It's something where you have to keep him in front of you. He's got a lot of speed. Defensively, you have to keep a good gap, be physical with him."

The Penguins have won seven straight games against Buffalo, their longest run in the series since the Sabres entered the NHL in 1970, and have outscored the Blue and Gold, 29-6. Crosby, meanwhile, has feasted on the Sabres in his career. He has had a point in 26 of his 29 meetings with Buffalo – and has 47 points in those games, with 14 goals and 33 assists.

The Sabres fell into an early 2-0 hole during their only previous meeting, Oct. 30 during Bylsma's return game to Consol Energy Center. In the end, Buffalo suffered a 4-3 loss in a game that saw the Sabres outshoot the Pens, 53-29.

"We're going to have to play solid defensively right from the start and hopefully catch them on a few instances," Sabres winger Sam Reinhart said Saturday. "We're definitely confident no matter who we're going against. We feel that if we're at our best we can compete with anybody and win a lot of games."

The Sabres will again have red-hot Robin Lehner in goal. He's 2-0-1 with a .980 save percentage and a 0.65 goals-against average over his last three games, stopping 97 of 99 shots. He's on a career-long shutout streak of 117 minutes, 50 seconds.

Sabres' Eichel talks the talk, and walks the walk

By Jerry Sullivan
Buffalo News
February 21, 2016

Sunday is Hockey Day In America, a celebration of the sport in the USA. How better to start the festivities than by watching Jack Eichel, the best American prospect to come along in years, go up against the Penguins and red-hot Sidney Crosby?

"I'm excited about it," Eichel said after practice Saturday at HarborCenter. "It's always a great day for our sport in our country, a great way to celebrate it. It's also a big test for us, a big game for our team."

Eichel was in an upbeat mood. The Sabres had won in Columbus the night before, giving them points in eight of their last 10 games. Heading into the last seven weeks of his rookie NHL season, the 19-year-old from Boston is in a good place.

His team is playing better. Sunday, the Sabres will try to win a third straight home game in regulation for the first time since March 2011. Despite the team's struggles, the players have stuck together and become a close-knit bunch.

It hasn't always been easy, as Eichel admits. No matter how people warn you – and living with veteran Matt Moulson was a big help – the NHL is a culture shock for a kid. But after running into one of those rookie walls in December, Eichel settled into a groove and has scored 25 points in 25 games since Christmas.

"I don't know what it is," Eichel said, who is second among NHL rookies in scoring. "I could try to say a lot of things. Just my attitude. I think I've changed overall. I come to the rink a lot happier every day and I just try to enjoy everything. That's what you should do. I've been lucky to get in a lot of really good situations.

"I'm just trying to simplify things," he said. "Using my speed. Consistency. That was a big thing at the beginning of the year. I'd have a good game, then not have two good games and then have a good game. I'm just trying to bring it every night."

There is a stunning simplicity to Eichel's game. When he speeds into the offensive zone, advancing on the opposing goaltender, you can sense the trepidation in the opposition. He has a gift for making the difficult look easy.

But this is the NHL, where it's difficult to score. The sport can be an endurance test of missed chances and disappointment. Eichel has a plus-12 rating in victories, minus-25 in losses. He's never experienced losing to this degree.

"For me, the frequency of the game was a bit of an adjustment," he said. "That Christmas break really helped me, going home and settling things down, seeing my family and spending time at home for the first time since August.

"Then you only go a month or so and you get the All-Star break. So they kind of separate the breaks pretty well. They were both needed for me to mentally and physically rejuvenate. It's been pretty good since Christmas."

Eichel knows you can't take every loss to heart in the NHL. It'll eat you up. Nowadays, when you walk into the Sabres dressing room you'll often hear his voice rising above the din, helping to keep his teammates loose.

"He's nice and loud," defenseman Zach Bogosian said with a laugh. "He fits in great with our group. Everyone fits in. It's fun. Jack is obviously a very, very high-class player and if you get a chance to know him, he's a very good person. He's energetic, charismatic, fun to be around. He fits in fine."

In a high-energy locker room, who's the funniest guy, Eichel was asked?

"Probably me," said Eichel. "Yeah. I'm always talking. I consider myself one of the louder guys in the locker room, because it seems like I'm always saying something, usually messing around or picking on Jamie McGinn.

"I'm always talking on the bench during the game, too. I'm a competitive guy and I get really into things, so I like to be vocal and try to get guys going."

Eichel might tease McGinn, but he was quick to praise his linemate for making things easier on the ice. He said he feeds off Zemgus Girgensons and Moulson. He said playing on the power play has helped him get more engaged in the game.

This sounds like a highly touted teenager, a budding superstar, understanding the value of being a good teammate. Eichel has the blend of supreme physical ability and infectious personality that creates leadership in hockey.

Eichel will almost surely be a captain one day. And make no mistake, just because he's happier these days doesn't mean the losses are easier to take. You've seen him during the difficult moments in games. Losing crushes the kid.

"It's part of the hockey culture," Eichel said. "Competitiveness and wanting to win. I don't take lightly to losing and I guess I put a lot of pressure on myself. When I don't perform up to my standard I definitely don't take lightly to that.

"It's something I've tried to work on. You can't be too hard on yourself. You play 82 games. It's a hard season, a lot of travel. It's a lot of a lot. It's definitely a mental grind. I've tried to learn to kind of forget the past night and focus on the next day. That's something the older guys have helped me with."

Many of the great players and coaches say they hate losing more than they love winning. Eichel said you can include him.

"Yeah, I like to think so," he said.

Losing is what got Eichel here. But listening to the kid gives you hope that a new hockey day is coming, and that losing is acceptable no more.

Sabres GM ‘Trader Tim’ charging up the cellphone as deadline nears

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
February 21, 2016

As Tim Murray heads toward his third NHL trade deadline in seller mode, a few things can be learned by looking back at his first two:

- He brings in players with one year left on their contract, giving the Sabres an asset to ship out at the following deadline.
- He’s fond of acquiring draft picks.
- He likes making deals.

Since Murray’s mindset this season mirrors the previous two, the final days leading up to the Feb. 29 deadline should be interesting for fans and nerve-racking for players.

“Trader Tim” has made 16 deals since being hired as Buffalo’s general manager in January 2014. He’s shipped out 20 players and nine draft picks while taking in 21 players and 11 picks.

Nine of those 16 deals have come at or near the deadline (excluding the Evander Kane trade, which was a hockey deal despite its proximity to the league’s annual swap meet). The deadline deals, as expected for a rebuilding team, were heavily weighted toward acquiring picks. Murray has acquired 11 players and nine picks at the deadline while shipping out 12 players and three picks.

Here’s a look back at the deadline deals, starting with Murray’s inaugural 2013-14 season:

- Ryan Miller and Steve Ott to St. Louis for Jaroslav Halak, Chris Stewart, William Carrier, a 2015 first-round pick and 2016 third-rounder.

Carrier, 21, recently had a stretch of nine points in 10 games with Rochester. The Sabres traded the first-round pick to Winnipeg.

- Halak and a 2015 third-round pick to Washington for Michal Neuvirth and Rostislav Klesla.

Klesla never reported to Buffalo. The Capitals used the pick to move into the second round.

- Matt Moulson and Cody McCormick to Minnesota for Torrey Mitchell and second-round picks in 2014 and 2016.

The 2014 second-round pick was traded to Los Angeles. Buffalo sent the 2016 second-rounder to Montreal for Josh Gorges.

- Brayden McNabb, Jonathan Parker and second-round picks in 2014 and 2015 to Los Angeles for Nicolas Deslauriers and Hudson Fasching.

McNabb is a top-four defenseman with the Kings. Fasching leads the University of Minnesota in goals as a junior.

2014-15

- Jhonas Enroth to Dallas for Anders Lindback and a 2016 third-round pick.

It would have been a second-rounder if Enroth won four playoff games. He didn't.

- Stewart to Minnesota for a 2017 second-rounder.

Murray was determined to get that round for the pending unrestricted free agent.

- Mitchell to Montreal for Jack Nevins and a 2016 seventh-rounder.

Nevins is a minor-league enforcer.

- Neuvirth to the New York Islanders for Chad Johnson and a 2016 third-round pick.

Johnson is one of the Sabres' available UFAs this deadline.

- Brian Flynn to Montreal for a 2016 fifth-rounder.

The pick is one of 11 the Sabres are scheduled to take in this year's NHL Draft, which will be held in Buffalo. While the Sabres certainly want to keep the fans who attend the selection show entertained, 11 picks is likely too many. It can create future contract chaos in terms of the number of players and those eligible for pay days at the same time.

The additional assets could allow Murray to throw in picks with his players in order to secure a higher selection. None of the pending UFAs – Jamie McGinn, David Legwand, Mike Weber, Carlo Colaiacovo and Johnson – are worth more than a third-round pick based on past trades of players with similar resumes, but throwing in a mid- to late-round pick could entice a team to go bigger.

Bogosian banged up but set to play Sunday

By Mike Harrington
Buffalo News
February 21, 2016

Save for a few stitches above his left eye, Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian is fine after getting plummeted into the end boards Friday night in Columbus by Blue Jackets forward Boone Jenner.

"My body is a little sore, a little bit of a scary moment there, but I feel good today," Bogosian said after practice Saturday in HarborCenter.

"He's got a pretty good goose egg above his eye there," said coach Dan Bylsma. "Other than how he looks with the egg on his head and the pressure of putting his helmet on over it, he was fine."

There will be no hearing for Jenner with the NHL Player Safety Department from the hit, although Jenner was given a five-minute major that was bizarrely called hooking. Immediately after the hit, all the Sabres on the ice converged on Jenner.

"We have to stick up for each other and it's a nice feeling when guys do that for you," Bogosian said. "They know that I would do that for them. It's like a brotherhood in there. You've got to stick up for each other."

A notable moment of the ensuing scrum was the way goaltender Robin Lehner engaged Columbus defenseman Jack Johnson and ripped his mask off while doing so, inviting anyone who wanted to take him on. No Blue Jackets obliged as Lehner unleashed a crazed death stare that quickly went viral.

"That should be one of those big heads to make for the fans to wear," said a smiling Bylsma. "That look he gave. I think Rob Ray said it the best – 'Don't poke the angry bear.' Yeah, that was the angry bear look."

"You never really see a goalie go after guys like that but it's a good feeling," added Bogosian. "It goes right down from our top players that we're bought into this, emotionally invested."

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While Bogosian will be able to play Sunday against the Pittsburgh Penguins, fellow blueliner Cody Franson will not. Franson took a tough hit from Scott Hartnell and did not return to the game.

"At this point, we're unsure what exactly we're dealing with," Bylsma said. "He's suffering from some neck issues from the hit as well."

Suburban Pittsburgh native Mike Weber, often a thorn in the Penguins' side, will get back in the lineup in place of Franson.

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Bylsma said Ryan O'Reilly was banged up Friday in Columbus, so the club's No. 1 center took a maintenance day Saturday and stayed off the ice.

"I suspect he'll play. You're probably not going to be able to pick it out," Bylsma said.

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The Penguins used backup goalie Jeff Zatkoff for Saturday's 4-2 loss to Tampa Bay, a key game in the Eastern Conference playoff race, because starter Marc-Andre Fleury became ill prior to faceoff. It's not known whether

Fleury, who has a 2.35 goals-against average and .922 save percentage in 42 games, will be to able to play here Sunday.

Zatkoff got the win in the Pens' first meeting against Buffalo on Oct. 29, making a career-high 50 saves on 53 shots in a 4-3 Pittsburgh victory.

Sabres' Eichel set to make national TV debut

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

February 21, 2016

BUFFALO -- It already has been a memorable first NHL season for Buffalo Sabres rookie [Jack Eichel](#), and now he'll get to show off his skills for the first time before a national audience on Hockey Day in America.

Eichel will lead the Sabres against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday (12:30 p.m. ET; NBC, SN) at First Niagara Center. In a career already highlighted by an NCAA championship at Boston University and being selected second in the 2015 NHL Draft, it will be a big moment for the 19-year-old from North Chelmsford, Mass.

"It's always a great day for sports in our country and a great way to celebrate it," Eichel said. "I'm excited about it. It's a big test; it's a big game for our team. You know, the Pens have been playing really well lately so it's going to be a tough test for us. But I'm excited about it and anxious to get the get the game going."

The Sabres have won three of their past four games and two straight in regulation at home. The last time the Sabres won three consecutive home games in regulation was March 2011, when they won four straight. A big reason for the Sabres' recent success is Eichel.

Since Dec. 17 he has eight goals and 27 points in 27 games. His 41 points this season are second among rookies, behind Chicago Blackhawks forward [Artemi Panarin](#), entering games Saturday.

"Looking at Jack's year, you look at games 20 through 40 and there was a bit of a dip in his game," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "There was the frequency of the games, the number of the games he was playing. He had the break at Christmas time and came back, and since that time we're looking at roughly a point-per-game pace and probably a much higher level of consistency in his play from game-to-game."

A rough start for a player with the kind of expectations facing Eichel could have made his season a lot more difficult in some situations. Fortunately for Eichel, he's part of a young team that has rallied around each other through a season in which the players have come together while learning new systems from a new coach.

"Jack's a very, very high-class player," Sabres defenseman [Zach Bogosian](#) said. "If you get a chance to get to know him he's a funny person. He's energetic, charismatic; he's fun to be around."

Getting back in the hunt for the Calder Trophy as the NHL Rookie of the Year hasn't been easy for Eichel, who has had to learn on the fly what it's like to be a professional.

"I don't know what it's been," Eichel said. "Just my attitude, I think, I've changed overall. I just might come to the rink a lot happier every day and just try to enjoy everything and that's what you should do. And I've been lucky to get in a lot of really good situations. Power plays helped a lot (he has six power-play goals). It gets you engaged in the game and it gets the puck on your stick."

"But you know, I've been lucky. I mean, I play with [[Jamie McGinn](#)] a lot and he does so many good things for me and opens so many things up for me, and obviously playing with [[Zemgus Girgensons](#) and [Matt Moulson](#)]; those are guys that I think feed off me and I feed off them. So I'm just trying to simplify things and use my speed. Just consistency; I think that was a big thing at the beginning of the year. I'd have a good game and then not have two good games and then have a good one. So I think I'm just trying to bring it every night."

Eichel has brought it every night recently; he has a four-game point streak and at least one point in five of his past six games. Now he'll get to bring it to a national audience for the first time as one of America's top talents.

Jack Eichel, rest of Sabres have become close-knit group

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 21, 2016

BUFFALO – Within minutes Friday, screen grabs of Robin Lehner's fierce eyes – wide and hellbent on sending a message – started spreading all over the Internet after the goalie's emphatic response to an ugly hit on Sabres teammate Zach Bogosian.

"That should be one of those big heads and make it for the fans to wear," coach Dan Bylsma joked Saturday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against superstar Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins.

By Saturday afternoon, a shirt featuring Lehner's stern look was for sale.

Kidding aside, Bylsma loved his team's strong reaction after the Blue Jackets' Boone Jenner hit the defenseman head-first into the end boards with 8:30 left in the Sabres' 4-0 win in Columbus.

Marcus Foligno immediately jumped Jenner, and in the ensuing melee, the fiery Lehner dropped his blocker and glove and tried to fight.

"I don't even think I blinked my eyes and his gloves were off ... and four other guys were in there," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said inside HarborCenter. "Our goalie sitting there, he wants to be a part of it as well. Those things go a long way."

Lehner, who called the hit "disgusting," later removed his mask and yelled at Jenner as he skated away, creating some Internet gold.

"I think that's the way we have to be as a group," Bylsma said. "I think as a group ... we need to come together."

Five months into the season, the revamped Sabres are still a work in progress, although they've won three of the last four games and have a point in eight of the last 10 contests.

In fact, if the Sabres win today without the help of overtime or a shootout, they'll have their first three-game regulation winning streak at the First Niagara Center since *March 2011*.

Whatever happens the rest of the season, the Sabres have built a strong foundation that could last for years to come. As the quick reaction to Jenner's hit illustrated, they have perhaps their tightest-knit group in a long time.

To a man, the players will say how much they care about each other.

"It's like a brotherhood in there," Bogosian said. "You got to stick up for each other."

Bogosian appreciates his teammates sticking up for him.

"They know that I would do that for them," he said. "I know Robin, you never really see a goalie go after someone. It's a good feeling. It goes right from our top players right down to everyone. We bought into this. We're emotionally invested. That's the way we have to be."

Gorges, an 11-year veteran, understands finding the right group is a difficult task.

"We're fortunate where we have a group of guys that everybody gets along," he said. "There's a genuine respect for our teammates, for each other, and I think that goes a long way. I've played on enough teams with enough guys around the league and my years going back to junior, you don't necessarily always get teams like this."

Clearly, the Sabres' veterans – Bylsma mentioned Gorges, captain Brian Gionta and Ryan O'Reilly – have mixed well with the youngsters, including rookies Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, the last two No. 2 picks.

"It's not there on every team and something this team has developed," Bylsma said about the chemistry.

Eichel's only one of about 20 players on the roster. Still, at just 19 years old, the center's already the face of the franchise. His actions and words matter.

Given his many talents, Eichel could've walked into the dressing room and acted like a cocky kid. Instead, his penchant for having fun and laughing off the ice quickly won over his teammates.

"He's nice and loud," Bogosian said. "He fits in great with our group. Everyone fits in. It's fun. Obviously, Jack's a very, very high-class player. If you get a chance to know him, he's a funny person, energetic, charismatic. He's fun to be around. He fits in just fine."

When asked who the funniest player on the team is, Eichel responded, "Uh, probably me."

"It's definitely a tight group," Eichel said. "We do a lot of things together, almost everything. It seems like everyone's pulling the right way. ... It makes it fun coming to the rink every day to see them."

He added: "I'm always saying something, usually messing around or picking on (Jamie) McGinn."

In other news, Bogosian practiced Saturday sporting seven stitches and is fine. Meanwhile, defenseman Cody Franson, who left earlier in the game after Scott Hartnell boarded him, missed the session and is out today. Bylsma said Mike Weber will replace Franson.

Bylsma said Franson's injury hasn't been diagnosed.

"At this point, (we're) unsure really of what we're dealing with," he said. "He's suffering from some neck issues as well."

Meanwhile, O'Reilly had a maintenance day Saturday and is "probable" for the Penguins, Bylsma said. Lehner will start again.

Sabres' Zach Bogosian OK; Cody Franson out

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 21, 2016

BUFFALO – Within minutes Friday, screen grabs of Robin Lehner's fierce eyes – wide and hellbent on sending a message – had emerged all over the Internet after the Sabres goalie's emphatic response to an ugly hit on teammate Zach Bogosian.

"That should be one of those big heads and make it for the fans to wear," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma joked this afternoon following practice inside HarborCenter.

Actually, there's already something for fans to wear. By Saturday morning, a shirt with Lehner's stern look was for sale.

Kidding aside, Bylsma loved his team's response after Boone Jenner hit Bogosian head-first into the end boards late in the Sabres' 4-0 road win against the Columbus Blue Jackets.

Jenner was immediately jumped, and in the ensuing melee, the fiery Lehner dropped his blocker and glove and tried to fight. Lehner, who called the hit "disgusting," later took off his mask and yelled as Jenner skated away.

"I think that's the way we have to be as a group," Bylsma said. "I think as a group, as a whole, we need to come together."

Bogosian practiced today sporting seven stitches and is fine. Meanwhile, defenseman Cody Franson, who left earlier in the game after Scott Hartnell boarded him, missed the session and is out Sunday when the Sabres host Pittsburgh. Bylsma said Mike Weber will replace Franson.

Bylsma said Franson's injury hasn't been diagnosed.

"At this point, unsure really of what we're dealing with," he said. "He's suffering from some neck issues as well."

In other news, center Ryan O'Reilly had a maintenance day today and is "probable" for the Penguins. Lehner will start again.

Bogosian back on ice; Franson out for Sunday's game

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 21, 2016

Zach Bogosian was back on the ice for practice at HARBORCENTER on Saturday morning, albeit with a fresh looking scar stitched up on the left side of his face. Fellow defenseman Cody Franson, however, wasn't so lucky.

Bogosian and Franson were both on the receiving ends of hits that ended their nights in Columbus early on Friday. Scott Hartnell was assessed a boarding major for his hit from behind on Franson in the second period, while Boone Jenner received a hooking major and a game misconduct for his play on Bogosian in the third.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Bogosian already felt fine after getting stitched up on Friday night. The team remains uncertain, however, about the severity of Franson's injury beyond the fact that he will not be able to play against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday afternoon at First Niagara Center.

"He's suffering with some neck issues from the hit as well. So unsure of what exactly he's dealing with but yes, he's not going to be able to go tomorrow," Bylsma said of Franson.

The Sabres didn't take kindly to those two plays, and boy did it show on the ice. After Bogosian went down, even Robin Lehner got involved in the scuffle as he skated out of the crease and challenge Jack Johnson.

"I mean we have to stick up for each other and it's a nice feeling when guys do that for you," Bogosian said. "It's like a brotherhood in there. You've got to stick up for each other and I know Robin, you never really see a goalie go after someone but it's a good feeling. We're bought into this, we're emotionally invested and that's the way it has to be."

Ryan O'Reilly was also absent from practice on Saturday for a maintenance day, but Bylsma expects him to be ready to play come Sunday. Lehner will start again against the Penguins, while Mike Weber will return to the lineup in place of Franson.

Sunday's game can be seen at 12:30 p.m. on NBC and heard live on WGR 550 with Brian Duff and Rob Ray on the call.

THE SABRES HAVE A NEW LEADING GOAL SCORER

And he probably wasn't many people's preseason pick. In fact, Sam Reinhart began the season as a bottom six-forward, alternating line rushes in practices and was without a concrete role in the Sabres' lineup. It was even unclear if he would be in the lineup on opening night prior to an injury to Brian Gionta.

Since then, he's established all sorts of roles. He's not only a mainstay on the top power-play unit, but he's tied with teammate Jack Eichel and Philadelphia's Shane Gostisbeher for the League's rookie lead with six power-play goals. He's also been referred to by Bylsma as Buffalo's best net-front presence multiple times.

On Friday, after he rushed in to clean up an Evander Kane rebound for his 18th goal of the season, he took on one more title: Sabres' leading scorer.

"I think it shows a lot to the support I've had," Reinhart said. "I think there's lots of guys in our locker room that can chip in, we have a lot of depth in that sense, and I think at any given time anyone can be a guy who puts the puck in the net."

A couple of Sabres are hot on his tail. Eichel and O'Reilly have 17 goals each, Kane has 16 and, after a two-goal performance on Friday, Jamie McGinn has 14. Eichel's on a particularly hot streak of his own, dishing two assists on Friday to extend his point-streak to four games (1+4) and giving him 27 points in his last 27 games (8+19).

"I don't know what it is," Eichel said of his continued improvement. "I can probably say a lot of things. I think just my attitude has changed overall, I come to the rink a lot happier every day and I'm just trying to enjoy everything and that's what you should do."

For as much as the Sabres are willing to fight after a cheap shot on one of their defensemen, they're just as willing to fight in a less literal sense when it comes to winning hockey games. In spite of being 11 points out of a wild card spot, the Sabres have played some of their best hockey with a 3-0-1 record over their past four games.

"It says [something] about what we can do," Reinhart said. "I think we need to become more consistent with that, obviously we are fairly young but we want to start winning now and be successful in this League now. We're going to have to learn to keep that momentum going."