



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' youngsters haven't yet answered the call

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

November 18, 2016

The Sabres are expected to welcome two forwards from Rochester on Saturday. They might be guys who've already been in Buffalo. They might be players making their first appearance.

Either way, they'll be counted on to contribute. So far, they haven't.

The injury-riddled Sabres have called up five forwards from Rochester this season. They have combined for two goals and one assist in 25 games. Numbers like those won't make anyone forget about Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly or even Nicolas Deslauriers.

The Sabres need help from everyone, especially with the Pittsburgh Penguins coming to KeyBank Center.

"This is not just an audition or you get your few games and see how you do," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Friday. "There should be a recognition of the level and the compete that they need to play to be successful for us to be successful.

"Some are making the most of the opportunity. Some are just dipping their foot in the water and seeing what it's like to play in the National Hockey League."

The Sabres continued their minor-league carousel Friday by sending forwards Nick Baptiste and Evan Rodrigues back to the Amerks. They played Friday night, so it's unlikely they'll be recalled for a third game in three days. That leaves Cole Schneider, Cal O'Reilly, Justin Bailey and Alex Nylander as the prime candidates.

O'Reilly and Nylander have not yet been in Buffalo. Schneider (one assist in two games) and Bailey (no points in two games) have made appearances, joining Baptiste (two goals in 12 games), William Carrier (no points in seven games) and Rodrigues (no points in two games) as the season's recalls.

The young players are not the main reason Buffalo is on a six-game winless streak, but they're also not doing much to get the Sabres out of the slide.

"Even the guys who just came in from Roch, we've got to find a way to win," Carrier said. "We're part of the team. When the team is winning it's partly us. When the team is losing it's partly us, too. We need to find a way as a team."

The veterans are clearly frustrated by the rough stretch, which features skids of 0-3, 0-4-2 and 1-5-2. But the rookies feel it, too. Even though they haven't been with the team all year, they're fully invested.

"I'm a professional," Baptiste said Friday before being sent down, "and I take it just as hard as everyone else does. I hate losing. That's the biggest thing in my life that I hate doing is losing, so it's not fun right now."

It's good that the call-ups are developing a disdain for losing. They are learning other valuable lessons, albeit the hard way.

Baptiste and Carrier couldn't connect on a pass during the closing seconds of the second period Thursday, and Tampa Bay capitalized for a 3-1 lead. It led the Lightning toward a 4-1 victory.

"Any plays that you mess up, it could end up in your net, and chances are it's going to end up in your net," Carrier said. "Every turnover I've seen here, or most of them, they get a good scoring chance out of it, a Grade A opportunity or a goal, so you don't want to give them any of those. Once you create one in the offensive zone, you've got to bury those."

While there is pressure on the youngsters to produce, the veterans are trying to make sure they don't hurt the team in the process.

"The biggest thing is you play a certain way," captain Brian Gionta said. "At times when you're struggling, somebody wants to go out there and be a difference maker, and you have to do it together as a group. You can't be individualized. You can't have one guy try to skate it end-to-end and change the momentum of the game."

Added right wing Kyle Okposo: "We have to make sure we're playing the right way. We can't press. You have to stay the course and make sure you're doing the little things right because that's where you're going to get more opportunities.

"We've played the right way for a while, then for whatever reason we have a couple minutes where we don't. We give them opportunities, and they end up in the back of our net. With our team, we just can't do that. We have to make sure we're doing the right things all the time."

That means everyone.

Injuries matter, but no excuse for slovenly Sabres

By Jerry Sullivan
The Buffalo News
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For all this time, I've been asking readers to submit questions for discussion. But lately, I've found that a great way to drive the mail flow is by asking the questions myself. What can I say? I'm a little slow on the uptake.

Two days ago, I posed this on Twitter: Are injuries an excuse for the Sabres? Within an hour or so, I had 10 responses. They ran the gamut, which is great. This isn't a haven for monolithic views, but a forum for vigorous debate.

Here's what people had to say about the Sabres, who have lost six straight in the midst of a brutal run of injuries.

@csbabcock: Injuries only an excuse when your GM gives you no depth and a horrible backend. Team still two years out, even if healthy.

@Buffalodad: Injuries are part of it, but I don't see a coach getting the most out of his players.

@afman3333: We can't trade anyone or fire the coaches, so let's fire the Buffalo media to shake things up!

@braves9: "Injuries aren't an excuse" is what all teams say. The fact is, good players matter and make a difference.

@BuffChris11: You could argue top five players are out -- Jack, ROR, Ennis, Bog, Kulikov. Of course it matters.

@jlorimer71: Even with injuries, team should be better. No excuse for not competing. #tank2.

@rbenny43: I agree. Guys need to step up. This team has no compete. I don't see sense of urgency on ice.

Rick Smith: Sabres lacking chemistry and confidence. Shake things up with players and/or coach.

Richard Schara: Injuries are part of problem. Evander Kane is an issue. Sabres' record with Kane in lineup 25-46. Without Kane 15-13

Ed Jacobs: Watching Sabres. Don't like what I see. Soft, slow, disorganized, disinterested. Cause for concern?

Sully says: You all make reasonable points (I'm sure the media could do a better job of finishing their checks.) It's hard to judge a team when it's missing five top players (full names Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Zach Bogosian, Tyler Ennis, Dmitry Kulikov). That doesn't mean you can't take them to task, either.

I'm sorry, there's no excuse for scoring eight goals in seven home games, six of them losses, or for losing consecutive games by a 4-1 score. They're not deep or fast enough; the defense isn't nearly good enough, and the Sabres don't play with enough of an edge, regardless of where they are in their development.

It was nice to make Pat Kaleta a youth hockey ambassador. What they really could use is someone to give opposing skaters a rude welcome on the ice, the way Kaleta did as a player. They're just not that difficult to play against.

People treat GM Tim Murray like some hockey savant for executing a tank job and collecting draft picks. But in his biggest move, he overpaid badly for Kane, who has embarrassed the franchise off the ice and been a disappointment on it. Kane seems to be going through the motions, as if he doesn't expect to be in Buffalo long.

The notion of a second tank is ludicrous. The Sabres should be a lot more competitive when they get Eichel and the others back. But a lot of fans overestimated their chances this season. I had them as an 88-90 point team before the injuries hit. They'll be fortunate to get to that point now.

As Bucky pointed out in his column Friday, good teams rise above injuries. Look at Tampa Bay. Bylsma could tell you how his Penguins team lost both Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin for an extended period -- and got better.

I'm not expecting anything that dramatic, and I don't expect miracles. But fans deserve more than what the Sabres have given them so far this year.

@EdShelly1 asks: Bills started the season near the top of "dead cap" money list. Could be why reserves are so thin. That's on D. Whaley. Do you agree?

Sully: Of course. As I've said before, the Bills have the salary structure of a team that made a playoff run and is now paying for it on the cap. That's on the general manager, who made profligate financial decisions on such players as Marcell Dareus, Charles Clay, LeSean McCoy and Cordy Glenn.

When your salary cap is top-heavy, you pay for it down the roster. Whaley made some great adds on the cheap (Zach Brown, Lorenzo Alexander), but couldn't afford to upgrade the roster at spots like wide receiver or safety. Chris Hogan and Bacarri Rambo weren't that expensive, but had to be sacrificed.

The Bills will have 23 free agents after the season, the most in the NFL. They have to decide whether to keep Tyrod Taylor at a \$27 million hit next season. Stephon Gilmore wants to be paid like an elite cornerback. A lot of bodies will be leaving, and if you think they're thin now, wait until 2017.

@ringo1256 asks: Should the Bills pursue an interest in Tony Romo if he's available?

Sully: In a word, no. Why would they want a 37-year-old quarterback who is coming off a serious back injury and has three years left on his contract at an average salary of \$18 million? And if he was released and had a choice, why would Romo pick Buffalo?

Going after Romo would mean they had given up on Tyrod Taylor. I don't think Taylor is a true franchise quarterback, but Romo isn't the answer, either, at this stage of his career. It would be moving on from one flimsy hope to another.

That would be typical Bills -- taking another team's leftovers and trying to sell tickets by squeezing what little magic remains from an NFL relic. They did that with Drew Bledsoe and Terrell Owens. Where did it get them?

Roy Brenner asks: Has Marcell Dareus ever played a full season? Is there any interest from other clubs to trade for him? What do you think his value is?

Sully: Dareus missed only two games in his first five NFL seasons, including the 2015 opener because of an NFL suspension for violating the substance abuse policy. He missed two starts at the end of the 2013 season for being late.

This season, he has played in only one of the Bills' nine games -- the first four for another marijuana suspension and four for hamstring and groin injuries. He's listed as questionable for Sunday's game in Cincinnati.

Considering the financial hit and the personal baggage, it's hard to imagine anyone trading for Dareus. He has five years left on his contract at a shade over \$16 million a year. The Bills are probably stuck with him. They didn't give themselves an out for off-field behavior in his extension, despite his numerous mis-steps.

Tom Schobert asks: So, who is the early favorite to be the #1 pick in the 2017 NHL draft?

Sully: Is this some allusion to the Sabres tanking and getting the top pick? Go ahead and dream, Tom. The clear No. 1 is Nolan Patrick, a versatile center for the Brandon Wheat Kings. Patrick is yet another "generational" player who has been targeted as the top selection in the '17 draft for some time.

Patrick is the son of Steve Patrick, who was the Sabres' first-round draft choice in 1980 (20th overall) and played five seasons in Buffalo from 1980-85. Steve Patrick also played junior for the Wheat Kings in Steve's native Manitoba.

How times have changed. Twenty of the first 21 picks in that '80 draft were Canadians. Only nine of the first 21 (and one of the first nine) in the 2016 draft were from Canada.

Inside the Sabres: Injuries have Murray thinking cap

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

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Tim Murray has a daily routine.

"My first stop is the trainer's room – every day," the Sabres' general manager said. "Who can play? Who can't play? Who's available? Who's not available? What do I have to call up?"

Then Murray goes upstairs and has Assistant GM Mark Jakubowski calculate the salary cap. Whether the Sabres summon Justin Bailey, Nick Baptiste, Cal O'Reilly or Dan Catenacci depends on how close Buffalo is to the cap ceiling – and the team has been mighty close.

"This is what we do every day," Murray said.

It's not fun, and it's certainly not expected. Murray had no plans to spend to the cap, but injuries have affected the off-ice routines as much as the on-ice product.

"We're a cap team because of injuries," Murray said. "We're paying 27 people. Ideally, we would like to have 21 people on our team. We're paying 27 people NHL salaries that are on the cap.

"One injury is easy. Two injuries is OK. But if you have 27 guys on your roster, you're into unknown territory, so we're trying to make the best of it."

Because of the volume and magnitude of injuries, Murray and Jakubowski have had to develop circus skills. They juggle money. They walk a financial tightrope.

The thing they can't do is clown around. One misstep would be costly.

"We're right against the cap," Murray said.

Normally, a cap team is a contender. Back in 2006-07, the Presidents' Trophy-winning Sabres couldn't let rookie Drew Stafford practice because it would have put them over the threshold.

This year's team is not a contender, but it's in the same predicament as the club from a decade ago. On the surface, that's troubling news. But, as Murray explained, it's simply because of injuries.

NHL teams don't benefit from the cap-relieving device known as long-term injured reserve until they need to exceed the ceiling, so every injured player is on Buffalo's cap. That includes forward Cody McCormick, who hasn't played in almost two years because of blood clots, and defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, who is day-to-day. Jack Eichel, Tyler Ennis, Ryan O'Reilly, Zach Bogosian and Nicolas Deslauriers are also hurt, giving the Sabres seven guys out of the lineup.

Those absences have led to as many as five call-ups per game. Even though the erstwhile Amerks are on the low end of the salary scale, having that many in Buffalo adds up.

For example, the Sabres needed forwards Evan Rodrigues, William Carrier and Baptiste, plus defensemen Taylor Fedun and Justin Falk on Thursday against Tampa Bay. The quintet has a combined cap hit of \$3.5 million. According to the daily salary calculator at CapFriendly.com, their additions put the Sabres at \$72,662,024 – just \$337,976 under the cap of \$73 million.

Because the NHL calculates the cap every day, being that close to the ceiling impacts which minor-leaguer gets the call and how long he gets to stay.

"There was a day last week where Catenacci makes \$575,000, and he was the only forward we could have brought up if there was a sickness or an injury," Murray said.

Potential bonuses are also tying the hands of Murray and Jakubowski. Entry-level contracts are flush with incentives, some easily attainable and some not. So even though Internet salary sites may list Baptiste's cap hit as \$718,333, the Sabres have to budget \$1 million or so for the year.

"We're a team that has young guys that have a capability of earning huge bonuses in Eichel and Sam Reinhart, and even Baptiste and Carrier and these guys have smaller bonuses," Murray said. "We don't know if they're going to earn them yet. You have to predict that and you have to account for it. That's what we're doing right now.

"Basically, from the start of the year we're going on the assumption they're going to reach their bonuses, so that's how we are calculating our cap and that's how we are using players."

Ignoring potential bonuses would have a huge impact. For example, if the Sabres are stuck near the cap all season and merely budget base salaries, year-end bonuses could push their payroll to \$75 million. That \$2 million cap overage would be subtracted from next season's cap allowance. So if the cap remains at \$73 million, the Sabres would have only \$71 million to spend.

"It's a big impact if you go over," Murray said.

That's why the GM's daily routine features trips to the trainer's room and encounters with calculators.

Sabres Notebook: Ristolainen may switch sticks; turkey drive

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

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The scene has replayed itself at least a half-dozen times this season. Rasmus Ristolainen attempts a slap shot, and his stick snaps in half.

The Sabres defenseman may have had enough. He ditched this year's stick during practice Friday and went back to the one he used last year. He was going to spend the day thinking about which one he'll use Saturday when the Sabres host Pittsburgh.

"I'm not sure what I'm going to do," Ristolainen said in KeyBank Center.

Ristolainen practiced with a Bauer Nexus after using a Warrior Covert for the opening 17 games. He broke a white Warrior during the morning skate Thursday, then snapped another at night against Tampa Bay. It's happened often, usually during a power play.

"It's frustrating," Ristolainen said. "It's not good that I've broken them so many times this year when I had some good opportunities. I put a lot of power on it."

Ristolainen, who scored nine times last season, is still looking for his first goal of the year. It doesn't help when some of his best chances crumble in his hands.

"I can't really go out there and think if it's going to break now or not," Ristolainen said. "I just go and shoot. If it breaks, you can't do anything about it, so I've got to think about what I'm going to do with my sticks going forward."

Zemgus Girgensons, the Sabres' lone All-Star under coach Ted Nolan, continues to struggle with Dan Bylsma on the bench. He has one goal, three assists and a minus-5 rating in 17 games. He had seven goals and 11 assists in 71 games last year.

While Girgensons' lack of offense is noticeable, Bylsma expects more at both ends of the ice.

"On our scoring-chance ledger, he has not gotten enough," Bylsma said. "But he hasn't gotten enough because he's giving up too many on our ledger. He's got to be able to play on both sides of the puck and play good defensively for us before he's going to think about how many scoring chances he needs to get to score more goals."

The Sabres are again expected to play without center Ryan O'Reilly (oblique) and defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (lower body). Neither practiced, though O'Reilly had an off-ice workout and remains day-to-day.

Kulikov is still dealing with pain caused during the preseason when he was checked into the door of Toronto's bench, which opened on contact. He will miss his fifth straight game.

"I don't know if we've clarified exactly what's going on with him other than he flared up his lower back with the hit into the boards," Bylsma said. "Hoping he would progress a little quicker back to playing and getting back on the ice than he has, but he's in a day-to-day, few-days timeframe."

The Sabres, Tops Friendly Markets and Entercom Buffalo are teaming up for their annual "Turkeys for Tickets" drive Monday morning. For every 20-pound turkey donated to the Buffalo City Mission and Food Bank of Western New York, the Sabres will hand the donor two tickets. There is a four-ticket maximum per person.

The drive brought in more than 2,000 pounds of turkey last year.

"We feel it's important to do our part to help ensure that all families in our community have a chance to enjoy a warm Thanksgiving meal," Sabres President Russ Brandon said. "Our fans have been very generous with their donations since we began the Turkeys for Tickets program, and we're happy to bring it back for another year."

Donations can be made from 7-9 a.m. Monday in the KeyBank Center surface lot on Baltimore Street; Tops in Tonawanda (890 Young St.); and Tops in West Seneca (355 Orchard Park Road).

"This much-needed event will help us provide over 5,500 Thanksgiving meals that will be delivered to those who are elderly, shut-in and impoverished in Western New York," said Stuart Harper, CEO and executive director of the Buffalo City Mission.

Fans who use the Thruway to get to the arena may need to find an alternate route Saturday due to two ramp closings. The ramp that leads from I-190 South to I-90 East and the ramp from I-90 East to I-190 North will be closed all weekend. ... It was a good thing no one was sitting in Section 312 during Friday's practice. A sound panel fell from the ceiling and landed in the seats, a sign that the sky may really be falling on the Sabres.

Sabres' Josh Gorges takes pride in facing opposition's best

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – About 20 times tonight, Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges will jump over the boards to take on arguably the toughest task in hockey, trying to stop Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby.

Gorges will probably spend around 20 minutes defending Crosby and his linemates, a stiff challenge the 12-year veteran embraces.

To Gorges, the dynamic Crosby is the NHL's best player, someone to measure yourself against.

"He just does things no one else can do," Gorges said Friday after the Sabres prepared for the Stanley Cup champions. "You know you're in for a long night. There's just no easy shift. There's no time to relax or even take a breath. He's going to push your best."

At his best, Gorges, 32, is a first-pair defenseman capable of shutting down the opposition's top talent with Rasmus Ristolainen, his partner the last two years.

Gorges and Ristolainen quietly put together perhaps the Sabres' best performance this season Oct. 16, helping stifle the ultra-talented Connor McDavid throughout a convincing 6-2 win. No other opponent has held the Edmonton Oilers star to zero points and just a single shot on goal this season.

"I take a lot of pride in going out there every night and trying to shut down the best players in the game," Gorges said inside KeyBank Center. "It doesn't happen every night, and good players make good plays. But you get those games when things are going the right way. It feels good afterwards, but you also know that a lot of that was based on how forwards were playing."

Like the rest of his teammates, Gorges has also struggled at times. The entire defense has endured some rough nights. When you've lost six straight games (0-4-2) like the Sabres, usually little is working right.

The undrafted Gorges has played 700 NHL games because he showcases a passion and tenacity like few others. In the recent past – think the disastrous 2014-15 campaign, his first in Buffalo – Gorges often became too wrapped up in his responsibilities as one of the team's leaders.

Over time, however, Gorges, who Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has called "crusty," has learned to handle tough situations differently.

"There are times when you need to blow a gasket and let people know where you're at is not OK," Gorges said. "There's also times – and that's where I feel like I've gotten better, I'm still learning on that – yeah, keep things a little bit more in control and a little bit more subtlety and subdued to get your message across."

Toward the end of Friday's practice, Bylsma and Gorges had a long on-ice chat.

"Josh is going to lay it on the line every night with what he's got," Bylsma said. "He's going to compete and battle. He's a guy you want to be in a foxhole with, with the way he competes and desperately, desperately wants to win hockey games.

"That's where ... his frustration is at right now. That's where his leadership is at."

Gorges is clearly at home beside Ristolainen, 22, an emerging star he has skated beside almost every minute since the start of last season.

It was believed Bylsma might switch up his top pair this season, using newcomer Dmitry Kulikov with Ristolainen. But Kulikov was injured after joining training camp late following the World Cup of Hockey.

Meanwhile, Ristolainen, another World Cup participant, only practiced late in camp because he hadn't signed a contract yet.

"Separated them for, I don't know, 35 seconds or so," Bylsma said about Gorges and Ristolainen. "I did it for part of one game and then started the next game with it. Injuries forced that to change. ...

"It hasn't necessarily been my intent the whole time (to keep them together). When Risto started the season with us, he had not had training camp with our team, hadn't really practiced with another guy and (I) felt like it was best to have those two together."

Ristolainen has said playing beside the gritty Gorges feels like "home," a feeling his friend shares.

"You know where the guy is going to be, even if it's as simple as a five-foot difference compared to somebody else," Gorges said. "You know his tendencies and it makes making that play a little easier."

Having a partner 10 years younger also makes everything a little easier.

"He's got this joy, this excitement about coming to the rink and playing hockey and doing what he does," Gorges said. "It helps not a real old guy, but an old guy remember the joys of the game and why we play this game and how much fun it is. We've gotten to be pretty close friends."

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Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly, out of the last three games with a mid-body injury, didn't practice Friday or even skate on his own, Bylsma said. O'Reilly is day-to-day but is doubtful for tonight's tilt.

Meanwhile, Bylsma said the lower-back injury Kulikov suffered late in the preseason has flared up. Kulikov, out the last four games, has been getting treatment. Bylsma said the Russian is "in a day-to-day, two days timeframe."

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The Sabres sent rookie forwards Nick Baptiste and Evan Rodrigues back to the Rochester Americans on Friday afternoon. Both played for the AHL club hours later.

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Crosby has nine goals and 27 points in 16 career games at KeyBank Center.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly still sidelined

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 18, 2016

BUFFALO – A couple of quick updates from KeyBank Center, where the Sabres practiced this morning after Thursday's 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay:

– Top center Ryan O'Reilly, out of the last three games with a mid-body injury, didn't practice today or even skate on his own, coach Dan Bylsma said. O'Reilly is day-to-day but is doubtful for Saturday's game against Pittsburgh.

– Bylsma said the lower-back injury defenseman Dmitry Kulikov suffered late in the preseason has flared up. Kulikov, out the last four games, has been getting treatment. Bylsma said the Russian is "in a day-to-day, two days timeframe."

Update: The Sabres have sent forwards Nick Baptiste and Evan Rodrigues to the Rochester Americans. The AHL club hosts the St. John's IceCaps tonight.

Crosby, Pens aim to continue winning ways vs. Sabres

The Associated Press

November 18, 2016

Sidney Crosby raises his game another to level when the calendar reads November. The Buffalo Sabres know how dangerous he can be regardless of what month it is.

Crosby looks to continue his high-scoring ways and help the Pittsburgh Penguins extend some lengthy winning streaks over the Sabres when the teams face off on Saturday night in western New York.

The accomplishments by "Sid the Kid" are well-documented-- two-time Hart Trophy winner as league MVP, two-time Art Ross Trophy winner as league scoring leader, and a two-time Stanley Cup winner among many others.

Over the course of 11-plus NHL seasons, November has clearly been Crosby's time to shine even brighter. His power-play goal in Friday night's 3-2 overtime win against the New York Islanders was the 73rd of his career, far and away the most he's had in any month.

Crosby also assisted on Kris Letang's game-winner 1:24 into the extra session.

"When he's got time and space, he's going to hurt you," Letang said of Crosby, whose career numbers against Buffalo are eye-popping.

In 31 games, Crosby has 14 goals and 35 assists, helping the Penguins to a 22-7-2 record. In 17 career games at KeyBank Arena, Crosby has nine goals and 19 assists leading them to a 12-4-1 mark.

Pittsburgh (11-4-2) has won nine straight from the Sabres by a combined 37-13 score, thanks in large part to 15 assists from Crosby, and six in a row in Buffalo by a combined 26-11 count with Crosby contributing 12 assists.

Crosby has 11 goals in 11 games after missing the first six with a concussion, and is one goal shy of 350 for his career. Despite the delayed start to his season, Crosby is tied for second in goals, one behind rookie Patrik Laine of the Winnipeg Jets for the NHL lead.

After Matt Murray defeated the Islanders, Marc-Andre Fleury may get the chance to bounce back from some recent subpar play. In his last three appearances, including two starts, Fleury has surrendered 11 goals in just over 162 minutes for a 4.06 goals-against average.

But Fleury has hardly struggled versus the Sabres. In 26 career starts, Fleury is 19-5-2 with 2.18 goals-against average and four shutouts, and he's won seven straight starts in Buffalo, posting a 1.43 GAA and .950 save percentage with two shutouts.

Buffalo (5-8-4) has not made the playoffs since 2011 and any hopes of ending that streak appear to be a long shot. The Sabres are 1-4-2 at home, have an NHL-low 31 goals and are at the bottom of the Atlantic Division with 14 points.

Left winger Matt Moulson said Buffalo needs to refocus on the ice.

"We talked (Friday) about concentrating on playing the right way," Moulson told the team's official website. "It seems like we're giving up a lot of odd-man rushes to some pretty skilled groups the last couple of games, so I think that's the focus. Playing the right way will lead to offensive chances and scoring chances."

A three-time 30-goal scorer, Moulson has six goals in 17 games after totaling eight in 81 games with Buffalo last season. He also has two goals and an assist in a three-game point streak versus the Penguins.

Among the Sabres struggling to score consistently is right wing Kyle Okposo. Though he's second on the team behind Moulson with five goals and has a team-best 10 points, Okposo has failed to score in six straight games, and he has just one goal at home.

"We've got to make sure we're playing the right way and we can't press," Okposo told the team's website.

While with the Islanders, Okposo had a career-best four goals in a win over Pittsburgh on Jan. 16, 2015. In five matchups since then, he's had a goal and two assists.

Buffalo center Ryan O'Reilly -- the team's second-leading scorer with nine points (four goals, five assists) -- is expected to miss his fourth straight game with an oblique injury.

However, one player who could help the Sabres' sputtering offense is left wing Evander Kane, who's been limited to six games this season after missing 11 with cracked ribs. Though Kane has just one assist so far, he's scored three goals and added six assists in his last five games against the Penguins.

Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (no points, minus-4 in 12 games) has missed the last four games with a back injury and is not likely to suit up Saturday for Buffalo.

Right winger Patric Hornqvist (five goals, eight assists, 16 games) missed Friday's contest for Pittsburgh with a concussion suffered in Wednesday's 7-1 loss to the Washington Capitals. It's not immediately known if he will be cleared to face the Sabres.

Evander Kane: 'Joke floating around the league' about Sabres offence

Sportsnet

November 18, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres fell to second-last in the Eastern Conference Thursday night, ahead of only the New York Islanders, who have a game in hand of Buffalo. The 4-1 loss to Tampa Bay marked the fifth time in their last six games that the Sabres failed to score two goals and they haven't scored three since Oct. 30.

The struggle is real and after Thursday's loss, a frustrated Evander Kane sounded off about the anemic offence and challenged his teammates — and himself — to be better.

"It must be a joke floating around the league: You score two goals against the Buffalo Sabres and you're going to win the hockey game," Kane said.

"We've got to have more guys that want to be a difference maker, want to have the puck on their stick. We've got to be harder to play against."

The Sabres definitely had their chances against the Lightning, putting 33 shots on goal and, with the score 1-0 Tampa at the time, a wide open net was suddenly taken away from Kyle Okposo by an amazing save from Ben Bishop.

"It stings. It's a 1-0 game at that point," Okposo said after the game. "I just thought he was completely out of it and wanted to make sure. I settled it for a half-second, shot it and he made a heck of a save."

Much has been made of the Vancouver Canucks' struggles on offence this season, but the Sabres are now the lowest-scoring team in the league averaging just 1.82 goals per game. Their next three games are at home against Pittsburgh, Calgary and Detroit -- all teams in the bottom half of the league in goals-against per game.

The Sabres are dying to get Jack Eichel back into the lineup.

Sabres' Girgensons needs to get more scoring chances

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 18, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Zemgus Girgensons has 34 shots on goal this season and only one goal to show for it. The former number one pick excelled under Ted Nolan scoring 15 goals in 61 games.

Nolan didn't really have much of a system and he allowed Girgensons just to go out and play. He could react without thinking.

Under Dan Bylsma, there's a very structured system and Girgensons has struggled. In 88 games under Bylsma, Girgensons has eight goals. The centerman said, "It's frustrating. I've been struggling with the whole year, but the most important thing is us playing the right way. We give teams too much against us and that limits us in the O-zone."

It seems when you ask the coach about it, Bylsma said Girgensons is still trying to learn what's expected of him, "He's still learning, but he's a determined, hardworking guy. There's not going to be a guy that works harder, he just needs to work smarter."

His head coach certainly wants more, but he wants it in a different way, Bylsma said, "On a scoring chance ledger he has not gotten enough, but it's because he's given up too many. He can't just be going out there looking to score more and he's not, he's got to be able to play on both sides of the puck

Girgensons isn't executing that plan yet, but he is listening to it, "It all has to start from the D side of the puck making sure that we don't make mistakes and let them keep coming at us. If you're tired at the end of a shift, then you can't get to the O-zone."

Lindy Ruff used to talk about his team's hope-tank and lately as soon as something goes wrong, the moping starts and the hope-tank goes down. Girgensons said, "These past couple of games have been close games until later in the game. Definitely we had chances in both games, but the other team has probably had more chances too, so it's not about us burying our chances, it's not giving them those opportunities."

Ryan O'Reilly and Dmitry Kulikov didn't practice on Friday. With that in mind and 11 goals in nine games, Bylsma wretched up his forwards. With O'Reilly's progress Bylsma said, "It probably turns to doubtful, but I haven't heard the report on him from today. He did workout this morning, but it's still day to day."

Kulikov doesn't seem to be responding to treatment. Bylsma said, "He flared up his lower back and his dealt with a certain amount of pain, he got some treatment for it five days ago and we were hoping he would progress quicker to get back to playing and getting on the ice than he has."

Friday's Lines:

Okposo Reinhart Gionta
Moulson Girgensons Kane
Foligno Larsson Rodrigues
Carrier Grant Baptiste

After practice Bylsma said he wouldn't look too much into these lines.

Report: Kane trade chatter starting to die down

By Matt Bove

WKBW

November 18, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - It seems like Buffalo Sabres fans have been talking about a possible trade involving forward Evander Kane since he got here. Recently, those talks have heated up, but according to Bob McKenzie from TSN in Toronto, if a trade involving Kane does happen -- It won't involve the Vancouver Canucks.

McKenzie did confirm that Vancouver and Buffalo talked about a possible trade, but have since stopped those talks.

The Canucks and Kane have always been linked, he's from the Vancouver area and played junior hockey for the Vancouver Giants.

So far this season Kane has only played in seven games, registering one point. Kane suffered three cracked ribs in Buffalo's season opener against the Montreal Canadiens -- returning to the lineup a month later.

Bove's Take

Evander Kane is a very talented hockey player and can take over a game with his pure skill and speed. That being said -- Kane has off ice concerns, and those questions will make it difficult for the Buffalo Sabres to get a return the organization is happy with. In the last few weeks fans have tweeted me talking about Canucks defenders Ben Hutton and Chris Tanev -- and while they are good players, would they really help the Sabres right now? Moving forward the Sabres need to bolster their blue line -- but they also need to score goals, which has been their biggest problem so far this season.

Last season Kane scored 20 goals and had 35 points in 65 games. He's off to a slow start this year, but I expect him to start producing soon. This doesn't mean I think Kane is untouchable, as a matter of fact I think Sabres General Manager Tim Murray should continue to field offers, but I don't expect anything to happen until the trade deadline.

Sabres send Baptsite & Rodrigues back to AHL

By Matt Bove

WKBW

November 18, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres announced Friday that forwards Nick Baptiste and Evan Rodrigues have been assigned to the (AHL) Rochester Americans. Not surprising, when you consider that the Americans play at home Friday evening against the St. John's IceCaps.

Buffalo will likely call Baptsite, Rodrigues or both, back Saturday when the Sabres take on the Pittsburgh Penguins at home. Less than 80 miles separate the Sabres and their AHL affiliate, making constant roster moves like this all the more common.

Friday Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma was asked how the young players on his team were responding to the NHL game.

"Some are making the most of the opportunity and some are just dipping their foot in the water and seeing what it's like to play in the National Hockey League."

I don't think this move says much about either Baptiste or Rodrigues and their compete level -- but rather is an indication that the Amerks need players, too.

Sabres look to get back to playing shutdown hockey

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

November 18, 2016

With goals having been hard to come by during the Sabres' current six-game winless streak, it's easy to point to their lack of pucks in the net as the primary cause for their lack of points in the standings. Buffalo has averaged 1.82 goals per game this season, which ranks last in the League.

There are a few factors that come into play when it comes to their scoring woes. They've played four of their last five games without both of their top two centers in Ryan O'Reilly and Jack Eichel, the latter of whom has yet to play this season due to a high-ankle sprain. The chances they have had offensively, meanwhile, have gone largely unfulfilled.

But with all the attention being paid to their scoring numbers, the team's focus on Friday remained on the chances they have been giving up defensively in recent games and the toll it might be taking on their offense.

"We talked today about concentrating on playing the right way, limiting the other team's chances," forward Matt Moulson said after practice at KeyBank Center. "It seems like we're giving up a lot of odd-man rushes to some pretty skilled groups the last couple games so I think that's the focus. Playing the right way will lead to offensive chances and scoring chances."

When the Sabres take the ice for their game against Pittsburgh on Saturday, it will mark two full weeks since they earned their last victory with a 2-1, come-from-behind effort in Ottawa. At that point, they had won four of five games and had a record above .500. In each of those four wins, they allowed one goal or less and never scored more than three themselves.

"We weren't scoring tons of goals, we were getting big goals here and there but we were playing solid through each zone," Moulson said. "That's something we definitely have to get back to."

Even during their current streak, the Sabres have played tight games that they lost due to casual moments that turn into goals against. Their message on Friday was that they need to eliminate those mistakes, even if it means opting against taking risky chances themselves.

"We've got to make sure we're playing the right way and we can't press," Okposo said. "We've got to try and stay the course and make sure that we're doing the little things right because that's where you're going to get more opportunities. We've had some good opportunities, we've played the right way for a while and then for whatever reason we have a couple minutes where we don't and we give them opportunities and they end up in the back of our net."

"As a team, we just can't do that. We have to make sure that we're doing the right things all the time. If that means sacrificing a chance here or there to not give up a 3-on-2 then that's what we have to do."

The amount of quality chances the Sabres have missed as of late is difficult to explain even for the players themselves, but they seem to be in agreement that they've been "gripping their sticks" offensively. The remedy, they hope, will be getting back to shutdown style that made them successful early on.

"Personally, I always believe if you're thinking negative or frustrated about something then it's going to create negative results," Moulson said. "That could be part of it. But we just have to bear down. You're not going to get one chance a game, there's going to be numerous chances. I think right now we have a tendency to miss one chance, we're all of a sudden gripping our sticks right away."

"I think it's something that needs to stop, it will be something that'll be taken care of by playing the right way and knowing that when you're going to shut teams down you don't have to grip your stick so tight."

Medical Report

O'Reilly and defenseman Dmitry Kulikov were both absent from practice and are unlikely to play against the Penguins on Saturday. It will be the fourth-straight missed game for O'Reilly (oblique) and fifth for Kulikov (lower-back), but Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said that both players remain day-to-day.

Roster moves

The Sabres reassigned forwards Nicholas Baptiste and Evan Rodrigues to Rochester following practice on Friday afternoon. The Amerks begin a 3-in-3 set at home against St. John's on Friday night.

Bylsma said not to read too much into the changes made to the forward lines, which could mean they'll differ from what we'll see against Pittsburgh on Saturday. With that being said, here's how the lineup looked at practice on Friday.

21 Kyle Okposo - 23 Sam Reinhart - 12 Brian Gionta
9 Evander Kane - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 26 Matt Moulson
82 Marcus Foligno - 22 Johan Larsson - 71 Evan Rodrigues
48 William Carrier - 27 Derek Grant - 73 Nicholas Baptiste

4 Josh Gorges - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
29 Jake McCabe - 6 Cody Franson
41 Justin Falk - 38 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson

Bucky Gleason: Reinhart's struggle illustrates Sabres' rocky road

By Bucky Gleason

The Buffalo News

November 18, 2016

Two years ago, when the kid showed up for his first training camp with the Sabres and failed to impress, it was easy to blame youth and inexperience. Sam Reinhart needed more seasoning at the junior level. His skating would improve. His confidence would soar. Everything would be fine.

Last season, Reinhart quieted critics like me. He'll never be the NHL's smoothest skater, but he had enough speed and creativity to be effective. He had good instincts, a willingness to function around the net and allowed his extraordinary hand-eye coordination to maximize productivity.

It all came together for Reinhart, who rode his energy and intellect to 23 goals and 42 points. By all accounts, he had a strong rookie season. His coaches, teammates and fans believed he would build off a good year and continue a natural progression toward becoming a promising young player.

Now I'm back to my initial opinion, that he's a third-line forward on a good team and nothing more. He hasn't played with the same intensity, the same jam, this season that he showed while trying to prove he belonged. He looks like a player who became too comfortable after scoring 20-plus goals last season.

So what happened?

The short answer is that Reinhart has been exposed through the first 17 games. He has three goals and seven points this year, putting him on pace for 14 goals and 33 points for a full season. He has one even-strength goal. He's missing open nets. He's squeezing his stick. His confidence is shaken. Opposing teams adjusted to him.

Let me be clear: Reinhart isn't the Sabres' biggest problem and certainly not the only one this season. You can add Brian Gionta, Johan Larsson, Marcus Foligno and Zemgus Girgensons to a long list of underachievers. The defense has been so poor that it's difficult to evaluate the goaltending.

Reinhart in particular, though, is an extension of an organization that believed starting at the bottom was the best way to the top. It's not his fault that the Sabres selected him second overall in 2014 to help save the franchise. He personifies the long and winding road to NHL success, a path littered with twists, turns and potholes.

See, that's what Buffalo needs to navigate.

The Sabres are waiting for Tim Murray to scoop them up at the side of the road, but they would be wise if they stopped hitchhiking and started walking. Murray isn't coming to the rescue any time soon. The best thing they can learn from this season is there are no shortcuts to the Promised Land.

Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly could return today, and the Sabres would finish well short of the postseason. People forget that other teams are trying to improve every year, too. Buffalo is on pace for 68 points. Boston, which held the final wild-card spot Friday, was on pace for 96 points.

Do the math.

It's not happening.

The Sabres are a flawed team that's nowhere near the playoffs. People inside the organization and beyond want to blame injuries for the 0-4-2 slide, for their inability to score, for their failure in the first month. Injuries mattered because they have a weak roster and lack depth. It was evident when their best parts were removed.

Murray needs to address the Sabres' shortcomings, but first he must identify them. He could start with the obvious. The Sabres were the lowest-scoring team in the league through 17 games. They had nine goals in their previous eight games going into the matchup Saturday against Pittsburgh.

People would be screaming about the blue line, but they're too busy complaining about the offense or crying over injuries. The Sabres' lack of offensive production often starts with sloppy defense and an inability to consistently execute simple passes while exiting their own zone.

Murray was scrambling for a left-handed shot along the blue line when he acquired Dmitry Kulikov and a draft pick for Mark Pysyk and two draft picks in a swap with the Panthers. It made for a nice splash during the NHL draft and injected hope into a desperate fan base, but it didn't solve anything.

Kulikov missed five games with injuries and hasn't been effective when healthy. He's hardly been an upgrade over Pysyk while making \$4.33 million, nearly four times what Pysyk is pocketing from Florida. Making matter worse is that Kulikov will become an unrestricted free agent while Pysyk will be restricted.

Murray would have been less desperate for help along the blue line if he wasn't so infatuated two years ago with Evander Kane. He sent Myers, Drew Stafford, prospects Joel Armia and Brendan Lemieux and a first-round pick to Winnipeg for Kane, Zach Bogosian and goalie Jason Kasdorf.

Murray pacified Myers' critics, but Kane and Bogosian haven't had the desired impact. Kane had a reputation as a problem child, and trouble followed him to Buffalo. Bogosian has been mediocre when healthy. Myers is a long and mobile defenseman, a former rookie of the year, who has played well in Winnipeg.

The Sabres paid Myers more than \$20 million in the first two-plus years of his seven-year, \$38.5 million contract before shipping him to the Jets. He's making \$4 million this year, \$3.5 million next season and \$3 million in 2018-19. Who knows what would have become of Myers under the current coaching staff?

Kane is making \$6 million this year and next. He has 20 goals and 36 points in 71 games with Buffalo. Bogosian is making \$5.25 million this season and has another three years and \$17.5 million remaining on his contract. He has missed at least 17 games with injuries for each of the past five years.

Murray has a better team than the one he inherited, but that should be expected given his job description and their sorry state when he arrived. Any general manager could have made the same moves. We could dissect every transaction and agree that some were better than others. Regardless, his work isn't overly impressive.

This is what happens when an organization believes the only way to build a winner is by losing. In truth, losing prolongs the agony, creates less room for error during the rebuilding process and leads to more frustration. Murray has made mistakes. They were inevitable for almost anyone.

If the Sabres reach the playoffs someday, it's not going to be because they hit on Reinhart and Eichel. It will be because Murray made the right decisions with 20-plus other players on his roster, including Reinhart and Eichel, added more talent and created more competition and depth within the organization.

Reinhart is far from their only problem. Neither is Eichel's ankle. It's everyone and everything. And it will be that way when they win.