



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

November 15, 2016

Blues host Sabres in matchup of skidding teams

Associated Press

November 14, 2016

ST. LOUIS -- Coach Ken Hitchcock hopes the combination of a lopsided loss, a day off and a good practice on Monday will result in a better performance when the St. Louis Blues host the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

"There's building times and this is it," Hitchcock told NHL.com. "We've got a real opportunity right now." The Blues have lost three games in a row and five of their last seven, including a 3-1 defeat at Nashville and an embarrassing 8-4 loss at Columbus on Saturday night, a game in which they trailed 7-1 at one point.

Three of those recent losses came in games in which the Blues allowed five or more goals.

"There's spots in games where we're doing everything we want to do, then all of the sudden, things turn the other way and it's going negative," said defenseman Alex Pietrangelo. "It's got to come from within this room. Nobody's going to help us. Everything's getting magnified. We're not being as assertive as we usually are. You identify a check, you know that's your guy and you're going to play him hard. If someone makes a mistake, you're there to help your teammate out right away.

"We're getting spread out in our end, we're not communicating the way we need to communicate, and that's resulting in glaring opportunities, whereas in the past, if those were there, it didn't seem like they were obvious opportunities. I think when we get more assertive and play teams harder, be tougher to play against, it's going to work in a positive direction."

Jake Allen, who was pulled in the second period against the Blue Jackets after allowing four goals, will get the start in net against Buffalo.

As a team, the Sabres can relate to what the Blues are going through. They are winless in their last four games, including both a shootout and an overtime loss. They have scored a combined four goals in those games. Just like the Blues, the Sabres have had a problem staying out of the penalty box. They have been called for five or more penalties in four of their last five games. The Blues have been called for the most minor penalties in the league (76) while Buffalo ranks 11th with 58 minor penalties.

"We've got to stay out of the box," Sabres right winger Kyle Okposo told NHL.com. "That's something that needs to be addressed and needs to be executed. There are some penalties that you have to take and other ones that are just undisciplined penalties. We've got to stay away from the undisciplined ones."

Center Ryan O'Reilly, who has missed two of the last three games, could play against the Blues, according to coach Dan Bylsma. Buffalo still is expected to recall at least one forward and a defenseman from the minor leagues before Tuesday night's game.

The Sabres have fallen to last in the NHL with an average of 1.93 goals per game.

"Maybe the biggest surprise is we haven't got to the power play as much as we need to to get opportunities to score," Bylsma told the Buffalo News. "We should be playing the way where teams have to take penalties against us. Given the lineup we have, we need to manufacture goals in a hard and difficult way."

Carrier expected to keep top line slot for Sabres

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 14, 2016

Having William Carrier on their top forward line certainly wasn't in the Buffalo Sabres' sketch book when training camp started. But a lot of the team's plans have gone awry over the first 15 games of the season.

Carrier's first five games up from Rochester have shown a good deal of promise and coach Dan Bylsma rewarded him with a spot on a line with Sam Reinhart and Kyle Okposo for the second half of Saturday's game in New Jersey.

The 6-foot-2, 212-pound Carrier was certainly assertive in that role and it seems likely he will get to keep that spot Tuesday night when the Sabres play in St. Louis.

Carrier, 21, doesn't have a point yet in his first tour of duty in the NHL. But he's creating scoring chances, helping the Sabres get some odd-man rushes and is a bull on the puck, just as he showed over the summer and during the team's September prospects tournament. That's more than the club is getting from several players on its offensively-challenged roster.

"He works extremely hard, makes those good plays and plays the game the right way," Okposo said after practice Monday in HarborCenter. "As a young kid, that's what you need. He's got some confidence out there and is doing the right things. I think his play probably warrants that move up in the lineup."

Carrier got moved up to the top six Saturday as Evander Kane went pointless for the fourth straight game since his return from injury while pushing his penalty total to 10 minutes. Kane skated on the third line Monday with Derek Grant and Matt Moulson.

"Will has played extremely well, been really effective with his speed," Bylsma said. "He's been really physical and got in the mix on offensive chances...the speed and physicality is an effective thing for us. ... Whether he plays on a line with Sam and Kyle or he's playing on the fourth line or playing on the third line, which he did for two of the games, he needs to continue to play that way."

Carrier played 11:53 in Saturday's game, the first time he's cracked the 10-minute mark. He had three shots on goal, set up Zemgus Girgensons for a good chance in the slot and drew the penalty that produced the only power play the Sabres had on the night.

Carrier was a second-round draft pick of the Blues in 2013 but never played in their organization. While still in junior, he was traded to the Sabres on Feb. 28, 2014 as part of the seven-player deal that sent goaltender Ryan Miller and captain Steve Ott to St. Louis.

"I'm just trying to play my game, play physical," Carrier said. "It's fun to play with 'Okie' and Reinhart. It's great. Just trying to get my opportunity and run with it. ... They're really good at what they do. Okie has a helluva shot. As long as I can read the play and make plays, it's really nice."

The Sabres skated Monday with just 10 forwards and five defensemen at practice Monday. They returned Nick Baptiste, Cole Schneider and Justin Falk to Rochester after Saturday's loss and that trio played for the Amerks Sunday in Springfield. In deference to salary cap concerns, the Sabres are watching how much they use the AHL players in practice.

Falk and at least one of the forwards are likely to be called up to play in Tuesday's game. The team made no transactions Monday.

Injured defenseman Dmitry Kulikov didn't practice Monday and did not make the trip to St. Louis so he will miss his fourth straight game. Neither did center Ryan O'Reilly, who will sit out his second straight with an abdominal injury.

Sabres notebook: Trip to meet Blues starts rugged week

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

November 14, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres are winless in their last four games and have won just once in their last six. Their injury plagued lineup has dropped to last in the NHL in scoring. Probably the last thing they need is a schedule like this week.

The Sabres play three straight games against returning conference finalists, starting Tuesday night in St. Louis against the Blues. They return home to host Tampa Bay on Thursday night and defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh on Saturday night.

"It's a challenge, that's for sure," coach Dan Bylsma said after practice Monday in HarborCenter. "We're looking at three very good teams if you go back to last year. It's going to be a big challenge. You never like to look past on your schedule to game two and game three this week but we've got three really good teams."

St. Louis lost to San Jose in Game Six of the Western Conference finals last season, falling two wins shy of its first trip to the Stanley Cup final since 1970. The Blues are coming off an ugly 8-4 loss Saturday in Columbus, so you would think they'd be ornery come Tuesday.

The Blues have beaten the Sabres eight straight times dating to 2009 and there's another sobering note to add to the Sabres' watch list: Coach Ken Hitchcock said Monday's practice was the best one his team has had in a long time.

"It was really good," Hitchcock told St. Louis reporters after his team's workout in suburban Hazelwood, Mo. "I knew it was going to be good when we were getting on the plane in Columbus. I knew we were going to make some headway. There's building times and this is it. We've got a real opportunity. We're in the quagmire with everybody else, and it is an opportunity that starting today the players really took advantage of."

"I told the coaches that it's the best one I've had here in almost two years. The focus, the energy, the communication, disposition, compete level ... it was really good."

Like the Sabres, the Blues have had a hectic schedule of late and are 2-2-1 in a span of eight days through Saturday. They are 7-6-3 overall and currently holding the first wild card position in the Western Conference. But they are dramatically better at home (5-1-2) than on the road (2-5-1) and Tuesday's game starts a stretch where eight of their next 10 games will be in Scottrade Center.

Defense and goaltending has been a problem in November for St. Louis, which is 2-4-1 in the month and has been outscored, 26-15, in the seven games. Three of the four regulation losses have been by at least four goals.

Dynamic winger Vladimir Tarasenko leads the Blues in goals (6), assists (11) and points (17). He is tied for fifth in the league in scoring. Hitchcock said starter Jake Allen (5-3-3, 2.62, .896) will be in goal Tuesday.

With Vancouver's five-goal output Sunday night in an overtime win over Dallas, the Canucks passed the Sabres in the NHL's goal scoring total and left Buffalo and Colorado tied for the bottom spot at 1.93 goals per game. The Sabres have just 29 goals in 15 games, with Matt Moulson holding the team lead at six.

Moulson finished last season with just eight goals in 81 games but the team's struggles leave no cause for celebration.

Said Moulson: "It's tough to win games no matter how well your goalies are playing if you're scoring one goal a game, two goals a game."

"Through 15 games, the number is low for sure," Bylsma said of the goal total for his 5-6-4 team. "Maybe the biggest surprise is we haven't got to the power play as much as we need to to get opportunities to score there. We should be playing the way where teams have to take penalties against us."

In the last five games, the problem has become acute as Buffalo has yielded 26 power-play chances while getting only nine of its own. The Sabres are 11th in the league in power play percentage at 20.4 but they're just tied for 23rd in chances with 44.

On the penalty kill, the Sabres are 10th at 84.2 percent and 22nd in times short (57). The Sabres and Nashville are the only two teams to not allow a power play goal at home, with Buffalo 17 for 17. On the road, the Sabres are 22nd at 77.5 percent.

Former No. 1 overall draft pick Nail Yakupov is having about as much success in St. Louis as he did in Edmonton. Yakupov, who went bust after being the top choice in the 2012 draft, played just 7:27 in Columbus and did not see the ice in the third period. The Blues acquired him from the Oilers last month for a prospect and conditional draft pick. He has two goals and two assists in 13 games.

"Yak' got out of sorts positionally, and we needed to grab it back," Hitchcock said. "That's the best way to describe it."

A healthy scratch recently for three straight games, Hitchcock said he had not made a decision if the winger will play against the Sabres.

Sabres practice without O'Reilly

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 14, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres were short at practice on Monday because of injuries to Ryan O'Reilly and Dmitry Kulikov. Buffalo also couldn't recall the three players that were sent to Rochester due to Salary Cap reasons.

Dan Bylsma said one defenseman and likely two forwards will be recalled from the Amerks. As far as Kulikov and O'Reilly go the head coach said, "Kulikov is not coming on the trip with us and is day to day and we're seeing on O'Reilly, but he's still day to day at this time."

After a grueling schedule the Sabres had Sunday away from the rink. Bylsma said it was needed, "We've been on the road through 15 games a fair amount, so with travel and playing three in four, even had we won that game, we still would've needed that day off just to regroup mentally and physically."

The Sabres are tied with Colorado for last in the NHL in goal scoring with 1.93 goals per game. Buffalo has had 44 power plays this season and has had to kill 57 penalties. Bylsma said that does have something to do with what has been happening, "We've had our bigger scorers out of the lineup, but we haven't gotten to the power play as much as we need to to get opportunities to score there."

So that begs the question how do you get more power plays? Bylsma said, "We should be playing that teams have to take penalties against us so that we do get to the power play to get that opportunity to score and given the lineup that we have, we need to manufacture goals in a hard and difficult way."

In the past five games the Sabres are 1-2-2. Buffalo has had nine power plays while the opposition has had 26 power plays. The Sabres had three consecutive games where they had to kill a long 5-on-3.

The Sabres had a late morning practice and then straight to the airport to leave for St. Louis.

Sabres' offense struggling to score again

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 15, 2016

BUFFALO – With a slew of established, high-priced forwards and two talented youngsters poised to break out following terrific rookie seasons, the days of the Sabres owning one of the NHL's worst offenses appeared to be over.

But 15 games into another tough season, the Sabres have scored only 29 goals, a paltry 1.93 a contest, the league's worst figure entering tonight's road tilt against the St. Louis Blues.

The Sabres have scored two or fewer goals in *seven consecutive games*. No wonder they have a four-game losing streak (0-2-2) and losses in five of the last six contests (1-3-2). They have only cracked the three-goal mark five times this season.

Right now, the Sabres are on pace for 159 goals over 82 games, just nine more than they had in 2013-14, when they scored the fewest goals in a full season *ever*.

The Sabres won 6-2 Oct. 16 in Edmonton, meaning 21 percent of their goals came in *one game*. That was the only time they scored more than three goals. They have a league-worst team shooting percentage of 6.73 percent and have scored only 20 even-strength goals, the second-worst total.

Want more? Incredibly, the Sabres don't have a single goal from a defenseman, not even Rasmus Ristolainen, who scored a hat trick in one period last season.

Sure, some of the anemic output can be blamed on injuries.

A high left ankle sprain has sidelined Jack Eichel all season. The dynamic young center scored 24 goals and 56 points as a rookie. A healthy Eichel likely would've contributed at least seven goals by now.

Evander Kane, a 20-goal scorer last season, cracked four ribs opening night, shelving him 11 games. The \$6 million winger has performed terribly since he returned, taking some costly, ill-advised penalties. He hasn't scored yet, either.

"We've had our bigger scorers out of the lineup," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Monday following practice inside HarborCenter. "But through 15, the number is low, for sure."

The Sabres' inability to earn power plays recently – believe it or not, they rank 11^h overall in man-advantage scoring, operating at 20.5 percent – has hurt them. They have enjoyed only 13 power-play opportunities in the last eight games.

"We should be playing so that teams have to get penalties against us," Bylsma said. " ... Given the lineup we have, we have to manufacture goals in a hard and difficult way."

The Sabres, meanwhile, have taken a whopping 26 penalties in the last five games.

"We got to stay out of the box," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "That's something that needs to be addressed and needs to be executed."

Sabres winger Matt Moulson said: "It's tough to get a rhythm for anyone going."

Only a few Sabres have found a scoring rhythm. Moulson has scored a team-high six goals. Top center Ryan O'Reilly, who could miss his second straight game tonight, has four goals and nine points. Okposo has five goals and nine points.

Those three have combined for 52 percent of the team's goals.

Despite his strong start, Okposo, who signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract July 1, isn't happy.

"I've only got one shot in the last two games," he said. "I got to find a way to create more opportunities for myself and my linemates and teammates. I got to put that pressure on myself. ... I definitely expect more out of myself."

Okposo is one of the few players living up to expectations. Sam Reinhart, Eichel's main winger most of his 23-goal, 42-point rookie season in 2015-16, has struggled without his close friend, scoring just twice.

Of course, at least Reinhart is producing a little bit. Fifteen players haven't scored a goal yet. Marcus Foligno and captain Brian Gionta are the only other players who have hit the three-goal mark.

Given the injuries and team's low shooting percentage, things could eventually flip. The Sabres have played several games in which they generated enough offense to score four or five goals.

Many nights, however, they can't score more than one.

"We have the opportunity to get the second goal," Bylsma said. "It'd be a big boost for our team, get the second goal in the Ottawa game (Wednesday, a 2-1 loss). I think it's what our team is looking for. It's what our team needs and not just to get into 0-0 game or get into a 1-1 game. We have to fight to get that second goal. We have the opportunities to do so. We just need to cash in on them."

The Sabres have wasted some terrific goaltending from Robin Lehner and Anders Nilsson, whose 2.33 combined goals-against average is tied for fifth in the league.

Sabres' Dmitry Kulikov out against Blues

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 14, 2016

BUFFALO – Some quick updates from HarborCenter, where the Sabres practiced about an hour this morning before flying to St. Louis:

– The Sabres plan to recall some players before Tuesday's road tilt against the Blues. Only 17 players – 10 forwards, five defensemen and two goalies – practiced today.

They need a defenseman and at least one forward. Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov(undisclosed injury) missed today's practice and will miss his third straight game Tuesday, coach Dan Bylsma said. Meanwhile, top center Ryan O'Reilly (upper body) also missed the session but hasn't been ruled out.

The Sabres returned wingers Nick Baptiste and Cole Schneider and defenseman Justin Falk to the Rochester Americans after Saturday's 4-2 loss in New Jersey, a game O'Reilly sat out.

"We do have salary cap issues," Bylsma said of the recalls.

Don't be surprised if the reinforcements officially join the Sabres on Tuesday.

– The Sabres made one notable line change today, bumping rookie winger William Carrier up to the top line with center Sam Reinhart and Kyle Okposo.

"Will has played extremely well, played (with) ... speed, he's been really physical and he has gotten in the mix on offensive chances," Bylsma said.

Carrier is pointless in his first five NHL games.

Carrier's strong play earns him promotion to top line

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

November 14, 2016

In the second period of Buffalo's game in New Jersey on Saturday night, William Carrier made a play that exemplified the combination of speed and physicality that has shown in his brief time in the NHL.

Carrier dumped the puck into the offensive zone and blew by defenseman Ben Lovejoy to retrieve it on the forecheck. He then wrapped around the net and passed to Zemgus Girgensons to create a scoring chance from the slot.

Clearly, his coaches took notice. On his very next shift, Carrier skated on the top line alongside Sam Reinhart and Kyle Okposo, where he spent the majority of the remainder of the game. He skated there again at practice on Monday at HarborCenter.

"I just think he works extremely hard and makes those good plays, plays the game the right way," Okposo said. "He's a young kid, that's what you need. He's got some confidence out there and he's doing the right things. I think his play probably warrants a move up in the lineup."

It wasn't Carrier's first play of that nature in the game. He'd already shown a propensity to be strong on the puck, using his body to maintain possession on multiple entries while beating defenders along the boards. One such play led to the high-sticking call against Jacob Josefson that earned the Sabres their only power play of the game. Having the confidence to make such plays with the puck, he said, is a key to his game.

Whether Carrier sticks on the top line remains to be seen, and might even depend on the availability of Ryan O'Reilly, whose eventual return from injury could result in a return to the wing for Reinhart. But the fact that Carrier remained in Buffalo when three other players were reassigned to play for Rochester on Sunday is a sign of where he stands with the team after four games.

"Will has played extremely, extremely well, been really effective," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Speed, he's been really physical, and he has gotten in the mix on offensive chances ... Whether he plays on a line with Sam and Kyle or he's playing on the fourth line or playing on the third line, which he did for two of the games, he needs to continue to play that way."

The only thing Carrier hasn't done to this point is score, but that's not for a lack of chances. He missed a good chance in the crease at home against New Jersey on Friday but has shown a willingness and an ability to make his presence felt at the net-front. On Saturday, his support on the breakout led to a 2-on-1 opportunity between him and Zemgus Girgensons.

"Just keep playing the way I'm playing," Carrier said when asked about what he'd like to bring going forward. "Bring some speed, go outside D's, bring the puck to the net, stuff like that. Hopefully get my first goal sometime soon."

Carrier and the Sabres return to action on the road against the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday night. Coverage begins with the TOPS Pregame Show on MSG-B, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 8 p.m.

Penalty trouble

The penalty problems that have hampered the Sabres have proven to be two-fold in recent games. On one hand, they've taken five or more penalties in three of their last four games, several of which have been stick penalties. Not only does that burn out their penalty killers, but it takes away from their offensive zone time.

"We've got to stay out of the box," Okposo said. "That's something that needs to be addressed and needs to be executed. There are some penalties that you have to take and other ones that are just undisciplined penalties. We've got to stay away from the undisciplined ones."

On the other hand, the Sabres have also struggled to draw penalties as of late. They only had one power play in New Jersey on Saturday, which was cut short by a high-sticking call against Evander Kane, and only had four opportunities in the two games prior.

Generating chances with an extra man is particularly important for a team currently playing with its top two centers in O'Reilly and Jack Eichel, the latter of whom has yet to see the ice this season due to a high-ankle sprain.

"Maybe the biggest surprise is we haven't gotten to the power play as much as we need to get opportunities to score there," Bylsma said. "We should be playing a way that teams have to take penalties against us so that we do get to the power play to get penalties to score. Given the lineup that we have, we need to manufacture goals in a hard and difficult way."

Injury Report

Neither O'Reilly nor Dmitry Kulikov participated in practice. O'Reilly has missed two of the last three games due to injury; Kulikov has missed three in a row. Both players are day-to-day. Bylsma said that O'Reilly remains a possibility to travel with the team to St. Louis, but Kulikov will not.

With Nicholas Baptiste, Cole Schneider and Justin Falk having been reassigned to Rochester on Sunday morning, Bylsma said that the Sabres will likely recall two forwards and a defenseman prior to their game on Tuesday.

Lines at practice

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

Defensemen: 4 Josh Gorges, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 29 Jake McCabe, 6 Cody Franson, 34 Casey Nelson

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson