



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 20, 2018

Baptiste ready to prove he's learned defensive responsibility

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

January 19, 2018

Nicholas Baptiste built himself into an NHL prospect by scoring goals. He was known for his offense in juniors and had potential to be a key contributor for the Buffalo Sabres rebuild when the team selected him in third round of the 2013 NHL Draft.

But the jump from scoring in the OHL to the NHL isn't always a seamless one.

"It's the National Hockey League though, right? You can't expect to come in here and just score a bunch of goals all of a sudden," Baptiste said in KeyBank Center Friday afternoon. "I've got to find a way to stay in the lineup, and get in the lineup, and do those things to eventually move myself a bit up the chart and be a guy who's here for the long term."

Baptiste may get a chance on Saturday afternoon when the Sabres host the Dallas Stars at 1 p.m. in KeyBank Center. He earned his second recall of the season, taking a spot in Friday's practice as Kyle Okposo was on a maintenance day.

With Jacob Josefson on injured reserve with a lower body injury, the Sabres had just 12 healthy forwards in New York on Thursday where they lost to the Rangers, 4-3.

If Josefson is not ready to go, Baptiste may stay with the team to give the Sabres an extra forward for their three-game western road trip next week with games in Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver.

"Well we've got some guys that are banged up, some guys taking maintenance days and he's earned his right to be up here," Sabres coach Phil Housley said about Baptiste. "He's done a really job down in Rochester and we need an extra body so he got the call.

"I just think he's doing the things that they're telling him to do. He's tenacious on the forecheck, he's really strong down low, he's getting to the net, he's creating things offensively so that's why he's up here."

Baptiste, a 22-year-old right winger, has seven goals and 17 points in 34 games with the Rochester Americans this season. Those numbers haven't set the world on fire, but he's taken to heart what he learned during his earlier recall this year, when he played four games with the Sabres from Nov. 7-14.

He didn't have point in those games and didn't get a ton of ice time, logging his most minutes (10:45) on Nov. 10 in a 4-1 loss to the Florida Panthers.

Back in Rochester, Baptiste said he worked on his game away from the puck, so that the Sabres coaching staff could see he was a responsible player in his own zone.

"I've definitely improved my game, I think, defensively and on the walls and penalty killing and all those things," Baptiste said. "I'm up here to show Coach Housley that he can trust me in the D-zone and I think that's part of the reason I'm up here.

"I don't think it's a change in my role. I think it's finding a way to play at this level and being able, if you're not scoring, being able to provide physical play, speed and helping in my D-zone. I think I've just developed my game."

That's exactly what Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill wanted Baptiste to learn when he returned to the Amerks. Botterill isn't concerned only with point production, citing Baptiste and Hudson Fasching in particular when talking about the Amerks last week. Botterill also wants to see Baptiste and his counterparts develop their overall game.

"They're rounding out their game," Botterill said specifically about Baptiste and Fasching. "There are things we've talked to them about when they've had their recalls to the National Hockey League and then been set down – wall play, get to the net, stronger on the forecheck. They're implementing that into their game in Rochester and I think that's going to make them better NHL players."

And better NHL players includes forwards playing solid defensively. That was the message not just to Baptiste but one preached at practice on Friday -- take care of your own end the offense will come.

"I've been up a couples times now so I know what to expect, but in order to stay up here I need to do those things that Coach Housley wants me to do and that's being responsible in my own end and being a guy that can go out there and kill penalties and play five on five," said Baptiste who played 14 games with the Sabres last season. "Do the little things. Play aggressive and use my strengths to my advantage.

"Coach talked today that if we take care of our D-zone, offense will come. That's a message through the whole team, not just myself."

Sabres Notebook: Defense starting to find the lanes

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

Jan. 19, 2018

For the first time this season, the Buffalo Sabres had two goals scored in a game by a defenseman.

Although, that could change.

In Thursday's 4-3 loss to the New York Rangers, the Sabres got goals from defenders Justin Falk and Rasmus Ristolainen. Only Ryan O'Reilly got his stick on the shot from Ristolainen, which was a power-play goal for Buffalo late in the third period.

"I thought I tipped it," O'Reilly said of the goal. "I think they're looking at it."

Which is all fine with Ristolainen.

"I mean personally I don't really care who scores. I would like to win," Ristolainen said. "That's why we play hockey. I want to win. I want to be a winner."

Whether Ristolainen keeps credit for the goal or ends with the primary assist, the Sabre defense collectively had a solid night of contributing on the offensive side of the game.

Falk scored his first goal in 101 games and just his third in 245 games. Even Josh Gorges got into the action, having two of his shots go off the post.

"We had a couple guys with shots through from the point and that always leads to good things and more continued offense that you play off the shot," Falk said. "The forwards did a good job of working hard to get the puck back to the point and ultimately getting to the net and fighting to get there for screens. We keep working hard like that, good things will come."

"I think in today's game you need to have D active but you're just trying to get shots to the net," Gorges said. "On Falk's goal, on Risto's goal, it's a great job by the forwards getting in the goalie's eyes and creating havoc and that makes it tough for them. We're going to do our part to try and get shots through as best we can. It comes down to when the forwards are down there, it make a world of difference."

That world of difference, known as "net-front presence" in hockey speak, has been lacking in the Sabres game. It showed signs of life in Thursday's loss. While the defensemen were moving the puck with speed and finding shot lanes, the forwards were going to the front of the net to screen Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist.

"I think it's coming – the offensive zone scheme and what we want to do as a five-man attack," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We're getting those opportunities to get the puck low to high. The D are finding the lanes now as you saw Gorges hit two posts and Falk cashed in on a nice, quick shot. We continue to work on that, but I think also it has to do with our net-front presence. We did a really good job in front of Lundqvist and we've got to continue to do that. But our D are trying to find lanes now. They're doing it quicker which doesn't allow the other team to get in the shot lane. I liked that part of our game last night."

Kyle Okposo missed practiced on Friday but Housley said it was a maintenance day for the forward.

Housley said that Victor Antipin, who has missed 11 straight games in part due to the flu, "will be re-evaluated" on Saturday.

Nathan Beaulieu (illness) and Jacob Josefson (lower body) also missed practice on Friday but Housley said "they're getting closer. They skated on their own today so that was a good sign. Moving forward, hopefully they'll get in some practices."

Dallas comes to Buffalo off a 2-1 shootout loss to the Blue Jackets in Columbus on Thursday. The Stars have been hot of late, going 10-4-3 since Dec. 11 to play themselves into the top spot in the Western Conference wild card race and just four points out of the Central Division lead.

Defense has been a key point for Dallas. In those 17 games, the Stars have surrendered two or fewer goals 11 times – quite a change from last season when they ranked second to last in the league in goals-against average. This season, they rank ninth in goals-against allowing just 2.68 per game. A key that has been the acquisition of goaltender Ben Bishop, who has a 2.46 goals-against average and a .917 save percentage in 37 appearances this season.

Sabres' Okposo misses practice, but will play Saturday

Nick Baptiste called up.

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

JANUARY 19, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The first time Nick Baptiste was called up it didn't go well in the four games he played. With Jacob Josefson injured and Kyle Okposo missing practice for a maintenance day, Baptiste got the call for Friday's practice.

Phil Housley said Okposo will play on Saturday while Baptiste is a possibility.

Housley may want to take Baptiste to Calgary on Sunday if Josefson isn't ready. He said, "I just think he's doing the things that they're telling him to do, he's heavy and tenacious on the forecheck, he's really strong down low, he's getting to the net more and he's creating things offensively, so that's why he's up here."

This season in Rochester the winger has played 34 games scoring just seven goals and 17 points. He said the reason is because his game has changed, "They haven't changed my role, I think it's finding a way to play at this level and if you're not scoring, you provide physical play, speed and helping in my D zone, so I think not changed my game, but developed my game."

Baptiste is anxious to show Phil Housley and Jason Botterill that he can play in this league. He said, "I just have to use my speed, be physical, do the things that I did down there that got me up here. I need to play the way that they've been preaching to me to play which is being two-way and being hard on pucks."

Baptiste has scored three goals in 18 NHL games. He believes if he does the things he just mentioned, offense will come his way, "One hundred percent, yes, just take care of my end first and I think with that comes offense.

"It's the National Hockey League, right? You can't expect to come in here and just score a bunch of goals all of a sudden, I've got to find a way to stay in the lineup and do those things to eventually move myself up the depth chart and be a guy who is here for the long term."

Baptiste skated in Okposo's spot on the wing with Jack Eichel and Benoit Pouliot.

Housley said Josefson and Nate Beaulieu both skated on their own and are close to getting back to practice.

The Sabres host Dallas on Saturday. Join Brian Koziol for the pregame at noon when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Jason Pominville, Ryan O'Reilly and Nick Baptiste.

Slow starts often dooming Sabres

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Jan. 19, 2018

BUFFALO – Barely one minute into Thursday's 4-3 road loss to the New York Rangers, Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe whiffed on a loose puck in the neutral zone and started chasing speedy winger Rick Nash.

When Nash hit the blue line, McCabe knew he couldn't catch the 400-goal scorer. Nash roared in alone and beat goalie Robin Lehner just 1:24 into the tilt.

For the 26th time in 45 games this season, the Sabres let an opponent score first.

A lot of ugliness has contributed to the Sabres' awful campaign. Their wretched starts should be at the top of the list.

Incredibly, the Sabres have finished the first period holding a lead only eight times entering this afternoon's tilt against the Dallas Stars inside KeyBank Center.

They constantly fall behind early and chase games. They've scored an NHL-low 19 first-period goals this season and allowed 41. No other team has scored fewer than 27. They're 2-15-2 when trailing after 20 minutes.

Why do the Sabres keep falling behind early?

"There's no real good explanation for it because there's no excuse for it," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said Friday. "I think at times we're coming into games waiting to see what the game's going to be like and what are we up against, what's coming at us, and you just can't play that way."

Gorges said the Sabres must possess a mindset they're going to dictate the game.

"Play our game, play the way we want to play," he said. "Let's push the pace and let's do what we want to do, force the other team to try to adjust to us. It's not always going to happen that way, the other team's going to think the exact same thing we are."

The Sabres might get a mulligan for allowing an early goal Thursday. They hadn't played in a week following their bye. To their credit, they tied the game later in the opening period, one of three times they erased a deficit against the Rangers.

"Maybe five days being away from the game your mind is not working the way it should," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I know just at the start of the game our battle level was just a little low. But as we got our feet underneath us I thought we played really well. ..."

"In the past we've had good starts. We just have to warrant against getting scored on early because it sort of puts us back on our heels."

Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly said: "There's going to be games where we don't have our legs right away, and whether it's simplifying or making better decisions, coming off the bye week, that first 10 minutes was rough. You could see it in us, the jump wasn't there. But we held our own, we responded well after that."

After a rough or quiet start, the Sabres often settle in and get back in the contest. While opponents have outscored them a whopping 154-102 this season, they're only being outscored 48-44 in the third period.

Still, playing from behind in today's ultra-tight NHL is a recipe for disaster.

"You can't play that way, you just can't," Gorges said. "Once in a while you're going to have a comeback and you're going to get a push, but when you're playing from behind, it's a tough way to play."

So what gets the Sabres back in games late? Well, teams sometimes take their foot off the pedal when they're up big. But the Sabres often start playing more aggressively late, a style Gorges said they need to start showcasing earlier.

“If it comes into the third period and we’re down a goal, you kind of come in with that mindset of, ‘What have we got to lose here?’” he said. “We don’t have a choice, we got to make a push. Then we start doing things where we’re skating a little harder, we’re putting pucks in behind them, we’re getting in the forecheck.

“We’re doing all those simple details for the game that make us successful, and that’s usually the reason we’re behind early, is we step away from that, we try to be too cute, make plays when plays aren’t available, commit turnovers, and we’re chasing – not even the score – you’re chasing the game in general.”

'Developed' game helps Sabres' Nick Baptiste earn recall

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Jan. 19, 2018

BUFFALO – On a loaded Rochester Americans team enjoying its best season in more than a decade, winger Nick Baptiste has gotten a little lost in the mix.

Through 34 AHL appearances, Baptiste has compiled eight goals and 17 points, numbers that rank eighth and 10th on the Amerks, respectively. The former third-round pick scored 25 times in 59 contests last season.

So if Baptiste, 22, isn't scoring at his regular pace – he has one goal in the last 11 games – why did the Sabres recall him this morning?

"He's doing the things that they're telling him to do," Sabres coach Phil Housley said following practice inside KeyBank Center. "He's tenacious on the forecheck, really strong down low, he's getting to the net more. He's creating things offensively, so that's why he's up here."

The 6-foot-1, 205-pound Baptiste, who went pointless during a four-game recall in November, said he's "developed" his game this season, his third as a pro.

"I don't think it's changing my role," he said. "I think it's finding a way to play at this level, and if you're not scoring, being able to provide physical play, speed and helping in my D-zone. So I think I (didn't) change my game."

He added: "Take care of my end first ... with that comes offense."

With Baptiste, the Sabres have 13 forwards. They start a three-game road trip Monday, so they need an extra forward. Housley wouldn't say if Baptiste would play Saturday afternoon against Dallas.

Baptiste has played 18 career NHL contests, compiling three goals and four points. At times, he has looked good. Still, he has never done enough to stick around.

Perhaps his recent improvements will help him carve out a regular spot.

"You can't come up to come up here and just score a bunch of goals all of a sudden," Baptiste said. "I got to find a way to stay in the lineup and do those things to move myself up the depth chart and eventually be a guy who's here for the long term."

In other news, Housley said winger Kyle Okposo had a maintenance day today. Meanwhile, defenseman Nathan Beaulieu (flu) and center Jacob Josefson (lower body) skated on their own.

Baptiste hopes two-way game can translate to NHL

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 19th, 2018

Look at the numbers alone, and one might think Nicholas Baptiste has taken a step back in his second pro season. The 22-year-old forward has scored seven goals and 10 assists in 34 games for Rochester, not quite on pace to match his 59-game total of 41 points (25+16) he set as a rookie last season.

In the big picture though, Baptiste believes he's taken a step forward. He's maintained his status as a top-line presence in Rochester, but has developed in other areas - chiefly on the penalty kill and in the defensive zone - to show he can be trusted at the NHL level.

It appears that the organization agrees. With the team in need of an extra body up front, Baptiste was recalled on Friday morning.

"I don't think it's changing my role," he said. "I think it's finding a way to play at this level, and if you're not scoring, being able to provide physical play, speed and helping in my D-zone. So, I think I [didn't] change my game, but developed my game."

Sabres Now (1/19/18)

01:41 • January 19th, 2018

Baptiste has been recalled to Buffalo once prior this season, a short stint in November that saw him held scoreless in four games. Last season, he scored three goals and an assist in 14 games with the Sabres. Upon returning to Rochester, he was instructed to focus less on scoring and more on details.

Employing that mindset can be tough for a young player, but Phil Housley said that Baptiste instead embraced the challenge of learning what it will take to become an everyday NHL player.

"I just think he's doing the things that they're telling him to do," Housley said. "He's tenacious on the forecheck. He's really strong down low. He's getting to the net more. He's creating things offensively. That's why he's up here."

Phil Housley (1/19/18)

04:38 • January 19th, 2018

With Kyle Okposo absent from practice on Friday for a maintenance day, Baptiste took his place on a line with Benoit Pouliot and Jack Eichel. Housley said there has not yet been a decision as to whether he'll play against Dallas on Saturday or on the team's upcoming road trip in Western Canada.

Regardless of where and when he plays, Baptiste said his approach will remain the same: play simple, be hard on pucks and focus on his two-way game. The rest will take care of itself.

"It's the National Hockey League, though, right? You can't come up to come up here and just score a bunch of goals all of a sudden," Baptiste said. "I've got to find a way to stay in the lineup and do those things to move myself up the depth chart and eventually be a guy who's here for the long term."

At the net front

One area that Housley said Baptiste has improved is his presence in front of the net. As a team, the Sabres put forth one of their best efforts of the season in that regard against the New York Rangers on Thursday.

The Sabres received two goals from defensemen - scored by Justin Falk and Rasmus Ristolainen - as a product of net-front traffic. Josh Gorges also rung the post twice with Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist screened and Sam Reinhart nearly scored on a rebound late in the third period.

Falk's first goal of the season
00:57 • January 18th, 2018

"We did a really good job in front of Lundqvist," Housley said. "We've got to continue to do that. But our D are trying to find lanes now, and they're doing it quicker which doesn't allow the other team to get in the shot lane. I really liked that part of our game last night."

Friday's practice

Nathan Beaulieu (illness) and Jacob Josefson (lower body) remained absent from practice, but Housley said that both players skated on their own and are making progress. Here's how the lineup looked in their absence:

67 Benoit Pouliot - 15 Jack Eichel - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 23 Sam Reinhart
20 Scott Wilson - 22 Johan Larsson - 17 Jordan Nolan

Defense: 4 Josh Gorges, 6 Marco Scandella, 8 Casey Nelson, 19 Jake McCabe, 41 Justin Falk, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 93 Victor Antipin

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: January 19, 2018

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 19th, 2018

They came back on three occasions, but a late goal from New York Rangers forward Pavel Buchnevich proved to be the difference in a 4-3 loss for the Sabres at Madison Square Garden on Thursday night.

Kyle Okposo, Justin Falk and Rasmus Ristolainen scored goals for the Sabres to erase deficits of 1-0, 2-1 and 3-2, respectively. Ristolainen's goal - a shot through traffic on the power play - tied the game at 3-3 with 5:01 remaining, only for Buchnevich to answer with the game-winning goal barely a minute later.

Robin Lehner made 29 saves for Buffalo.

The game was Buffalo's first coming off the five-day bye week and, all things considered, the Sabres were pleased with how they handled parts of their game. They scored twice on the power play and got two goals from defensemen, both areas that have been lacking at times this season.

From the Lexus Postgame Report:

For the Sabres, they saw their net-front presence as a positive as it led to both goals from the defensemen.

"A lot of offense ended up leading off of that. We can do good things when we're getting pucks to the net," Falk said. "The forwards work so hard to get it back to us and it's up to us to either get it back to them in a good spot or get shots on net where we can get offense off of that."

However, lapses coming off of productive shifts have haunted the Sabres all season and that was especially true in the moments leading up to Buchnevich's winner.

"A shift after a goal is huge and we were a little sloppy there. That cost us the game," Ristolainen said. "We've got to be mentally more sharp. ... The effort was there. The battle was there. But we're here for winning and we've got to learn."

Inside the dressing room

Phil Housley Postgame (1/18/18)

03:22 • January 19th, 2018

Justin Falk Postgame (1/18/18)

02:40 • January 19th, 2018

Sam Reinhart Postgame (1/18/18)

02:50 • January 19th, 2018

Ristolainen Postgame (1/18/18)

01:57 • January 19th, 2018

Okposo stays hot

Okposo's power-play goal

00:48 • January 18th, 2018

It looks like five days off weren't enough to cool Okposo, who has now produced multi-point efforts in three straight games. He scored the primary assist on Ristolainen's tally in addition to his own goal, giving him three goals and nine assists in his last 11 games.

Jack Eichel also extended his point streak to four games with a pair of secondary assists. He's scored 19 points (10+9) in 13 games dating back to his hat trick on Dec. 15.

Kids Day is Saturday

The Sabres return home to host the Dallas Stars on Saturday afternoon, which will double as a Kids Day at KeyBank Center. Buy one full-price Buffalo Creek 300 Level II Ticket and you will be able to purchase up to four additional kids tickets (up to age 15) for \$15 each.

The first 5,000 kids in attendance will also receive a Sabres drawstring backpack presented by BlueCross BlueShield.