



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 17, 2018

As contenders line up to face Sabres, it's not fun being out of playoffs

Buffalo News

By John Vogl

Feb. 16, 2018

The Los Angeles Kings arrived in Buffalo fresh off a big trade with more on the way as they aim for the NHL playoffs. Jordan Nolan is happy for his friends but disappointed in his last-place plight.

"It's not fun," the Buffalo Sabres forward said Friday. "It's not fun losing this many games and being out of it so early."

When the Sabres acquired Nolan from the Kings prior to the season, he was eager for a fresh start on a team with potential. Buffalo's 17-30-11 record heading into Saturday afternoon's game shows how that turned out.

"We still have a lot to work for," Nolan said in KeyBank Center. "Guys are battling for different things. You come in here and just work. It's really simple. You just come in here and work and put your best foot forward, try to win as many games as we can."

As the schedule heads toward the trade deadline and homestretch, excitement is building in many dressing rooms. The Sabres merely have a chance ruin those teams' day whenever they meet.

"It's always tough," coach Phil Housley said of being out of contention. "It's just the position we're in. We have to just face it. We want to start to continue to win here and build that environment down the stretch.

"It's a great challenge for our group. There's a lot of teams that we're playing that are in the playoffs or are in playoff contention. We understand who our opponent is, so we know we have to be ready because they're probably saying this is the game that could turn it around for us. We have to be ready to go."

The next couple of weeks won't be easy for the Sabres, although not many have been easy. After hosting the 30-22-5 Kings at 1 p.m. Saturday, they also have two games against Washington (33-17-7), one with Boston (35-12-8) and one against Tampa Bay (39-16-3), with a visit to Detroit (23-24-9) mixed in.

"It's a good challenge that we have so many games with playoff contenders," left wing Zemgus Girgensons said. "That's when you see who can step up and play against the big guys who put in work. The motivation is just to win that game.

"Everything is better when you're winning, no matter where you're at the in standings."

How do you sell Sabres tickets that no one wants? You don't.

The run against contenders could conceivably drop the Sabres to last overall in the standings. They have 45 points, worst in the Eastern Conference and three ahead of Arizona. The Coyotes have upcoming games with Edmonton (23-29-4) and Vancouver (22-30-6), so they'll be looking to leave the basement.

This is certainly not what Nolan thought his fate would be after the trade. He was accustomed to contending for Stanley Cups or playoff spots.

"That's where I started my career, and we were so successful from the start," said Nolan, who won the Cup as a rookie in 2012 and again in 2014. "When I was there we always just focused on keep playing the way you have to play to win hockey games. It could be a boring 1-0 game. You never know.

"For us to be successful, we just have to play our game, work hard, get pucks deep and just keep going."

Some Sabres will be going out of town before the Feb. 26 deadline. Maybe someone will acquire Nolan for his playoff experience. The Kings got the trade season rolling by acquiring defenseman Dion Phaneuf from Ottawa in a package that included Marian Gaborik going to the Senators.

The uncertain future should keep the Sabres motivated, although they looked rough during Thursday's 3-2 overtime loss in Ottawa.

"It's different for everyone," Nolan said of the no-playoff motivation. "Some guys are younger. Some guys are older and looking for contracts. Some guys are hoping Buffalo likes what they're doing and hope they re-sign them.

"There's lots of things to play for individually, but I think that doesn't happen or work if you're not playing together as a team and bringing the work every night."

Sabres Notebook: Cancer relapses for commercial star; penalty trouble; Wilson shines

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

February 16, 2018

During the Buffalo Sabres' home games this month, the team is playing a fundraising commercial starring Ryan O'Reilly, Martin Biron, Sabretooth and a 5-year-old girl named Isabella Phelan. With a bow in her hair, she smiles throughout the ad for cancer-fighting "Bald for Bucks."

The commercial is light-hearted, but it's taken on a sadder tone. Biron revealed Phelan has suffered a relapse of her cancer.

The news hit the young girl's co-stars hard.

"I've seen her a bunch of times, and she's soooo sweet," O'Reilly said Friday in KeyBank Center. "She's so nice. It's tough.

"Obviously, her story is really tough. She's been through so much. That's awful. I really hope she's doing well and things will be OK."

Biron, one of the Sabres' studio analysts, will have his head shaved live during the Feb. 25 game broadcast by studio host Brian Duff. Biron's Bald for Bucks fundraising page is now dedicated to Phelan.

"I am sending her and her family thoughts and prayers, and hope that you will do the same," Biron wrote.

Phelan's family provided Biron with an address for those who desire to send well-wishes:

Isabella Phelan
C/o Courage of Carly Fund
Roswell Park Alliance Foundation
Elm and Carlton Streets
Buffalo, NY 14263

There will be a Bald for Bucks stand set up in the arena during Saturday's home game against Los Angeles.

"She's a sweet girl that I loved being around, always had a smile on her face," O'Reilly said. "Her family, too, they were always so grateful to be around and it was so nice to have them around. It's very sad. She's a special person."

Sabres cut it close for cancer fundraiser

A couple of familiar faces are in town with the Kings. Rookie forward Alex Iafallo is an Eden native who has six goals and 19 points in 55 games. Assistant coach Pierre Turgeon played for Buffalo from 1987 to 1991 after being drafted first overall by the Sabres.

Turgeon and Housley were teammates in Buffalo for three seasons.

"Pierre was a terrific player," Housley said. "One of the things I remember is the smile on his face coming to the rink every day, just trying to get better and playing the game. He had a very high passion level, and he was a great teammate."

Finding a home on Kings' top line, Eden's Alex Iafallo is pumped to meet Sabres

The Sabres have had to kill 33 penalties in the last eight games. The short-handed unit has been pushed into action five times in each of the last three games.

Housley has had enough.

"We addressed the penalty situation," the coach said. "Certainly, we do not want to get in the box. It just takes away the flow of our bench. We're spending energy killing penalties.

"Guys did a terrific job, but there's no need for that, especially when we're 200 feet away from our net, and it's just the calls that are being made with high-sticking, hooking, holding. We've just got to use our feet, get in position and get on top of people. We didn't do that."

How do you sell Sabres tickets that no one wants? You don't.

The Sabres' line of Johan Larsson centering for left wing Scott Wilson and right wing Jason Pominville has been together for two games. It has two goals, both by Wilson.

The trio will skate out for a third time against the Kings.

"I really liked that line," Housley said. "They were pretty tenacious. They've been playing really well together. They have good chemistry."

Wilson, acquired from Detroit in December, has four goals and seven points in the last 11 games. He had one goal and one assist in his first 14 games with Buffalo.

"Wilson does a lot of the little things well – blocking shots, taking hits to make plays, drives the net, has a shot mentality – and that mix right there has been really good for us," Housley said.

How do you sell Sabres tickets that no one wants? You don't.

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

February 16, 2018

K.P. is a union roofer, a job that depends on decent weather. To keep his income rolling during Buffalo's winter months, he buys and sells Sabres tickets.

"This is the worst it's ever been in the 30 years I've worked hockey," he said a block from KeyBank Center before Tuesday's game. "They just don't want them."

The last-place Sabres lost their season months ago, and the effects are evident every time they take the ice. Empty seats litter section after section, the sea of blue chairs as vast as it's ever been.

The majority of those vacant seats are sold, however, mostly to season ticket-holders. For each seat that goes unused, someone is losing between \$30 and \$121 per game. The scalpers who patrol outside the arena hold multiple season tickets.

K.P.'s hand was full of unwanted tickets as he stood at the corner of Perry and Mississippi streets.

"I went home with more than half of the season," said K.P., who like the others quoted in this story declined to give his full or real name. "I get eight season tickets a year. I already ate them. That's \$7,000 down the tubes."

What was once the hottest ticket in town sometimes isn't worth the paper it's printed on. Tickets are available online for as little as \$6. On the streets, they're often worth less than that.

"It's more expensive for the popcorn than it is for the tickets," said Ned, who is said to have one of the largest inventories among the brokers. "I call up some of my friends to give it to them for free, and they don't want them because then they have to buy concessions. They've got to buy souvenirs for their kids. They've got to pay to park. They don't even want to come down."

As Ned strolled up Washington Street after a walk down Perry, his associate, Troy, said they typically have 40 tickets available per game. They've been going home with at least 20, if not more.

"Even the kids that used to come, they haven't even been out here this year, the stragglers," Troy said. "The people who are cheap, the \$10 to \$15 buyers, when they're not out here you know something's wrong."

Another trend for the scalpers is the ease of acquiring tickets. Whenever fans going to the game were stuck with extras, they could haggle with the brokers to get money back. Good seats used to fetch \$75.

"The fans are literally giving us the tickets now," K.P. said. "We don't even have to buy them anymore. They say they can't even give them to family members."

"After they give them to us, we still can't get rid of them for \$5 or \$10. People don't even want them."

pic.twitter.com/E4WhmbBNnO

— John Vogl (@BuffNewsVogl) February 14, 2018

The street sellers are experiencing a double whammy. In addition to a bad team, online sales have diminished the need to search out scalpers. Fans can go to StubHub.com or VividSeats.com and get the seats they want with guarantees that the tickets are real.

Those tickets are selling at a fraction of the price, if at all. For five of the last six home games, tickets were available on StubHub for \$6. The other game, a Saturday against St. Louis, featured a low price of \$11. Each 300 Level seat cost the season ticket-holder between \$30 and \$53.

As the clock neared the 5 p.m. cutoff time for StubHub's game-day sales, it was clear most transactions wouldn't happen. For the Feb. 1 game against Florida, there were still 537 tickets available for \$10 or less. For Tuesday's game against Tampa Bay – the top team in the NHL – there were still 426 tickets available for only \$6.

There were hundreds more at higher prices in the 100 and 200 levels.

"If you're counting on selling some of them, you're getting dimes on the dollar," said Stan, the owner of six season tickets who has been reselling them for 15 years. "There's some nights when I've stood out there from 5 o'clock to 7:30 and not sold a single ticket. Not even not been able to come to an agreement, I mean not talked to a person who's buying a ticket."

Stan's season-ticket bill this season was \$14,058. In years past, he had resale profits of up to \$5,000. This year, he's down \$589 so far on his season tickets. It would be much worse if he sold only on the street. He's built a regular base of customers through the years, and many paid a premium for the marquee games before the season.

For games without presales, he takes a bath. New Jersey and Florida visited in a three-day span two weeks ago, and Stan lost \$444.

Stan also has friends and clients who visit him near the corner of Scott and Washington streets when they're not using their tickets. He buys low and attempts to sell higher. Thanks to those sales, he's totaled \$89 profit – for five months of work.

However, those buy-low, sell-high transactions are diminishing.

"They just don't bother coming down here because, quite frankly, it's just not worth the trip," Stan said. "They know how much they're losing, and they're not going to complicate it by driving into traffic just to sell the tickets."

Inside the Sabres: Deadline history as Botterill readies for trades

People selling tickets hope a few upcoming games brighten their season. Toronto and its rabid fans come to town twice. Chicago and Buffalo-born Patrick Kane still have to visit. There are a few afternoon games, which tend to sell better.

But from Dec. 23 through the home finale April 4, Buffalo will have hosted only one Friday night game. The sellers say that's a killer.

"Whoever made the schedule never should have made them for Tuesdays and Thursdays," Troy said.

The Sabres used to book Friday home games, but many other teams insist on Saturday home games. That meant an inordinate number of back-to-back games with travel for Buffalo, so the organization shifted home outings to other nights to help the players.

It hasn't mattered on the ice. The Sabres have lackadaisical efforts regardless of rest, and more and more fans have lost interest. NHL teams don't announce actual attendance, but the Sabres are selling their arena to only 93.2 percent capacity, which ranks 23rd in the NHL.

The big question is will fans regain their interest by the time season-ticket invoices arrive this spring for the 2018-19 season?

"My supplier network is going to dry up because most of my suppliers have told me, 'This is my last year doing it. I want to give you a head's up,'" Stan said. "Maybe they change their mind when the time comes to pay for them, but I would think there's going to be a big amount of people giving their tickets up."

After years of boasting about renewal rates and season-ticket sales of 16,000, the Sabres declined to provide the information this season. It signaled a drop, which likely will happen again.

"The whole fear that they used to rule over you, 'Give them up and you'll never get them back,' I don't think that's true anymore," Stan said.

Inside the Sabres: Three franchise legends recall death-defying moments

When the Sabres were at their peak in the arena, they established the "Blue & Gold Club," which is a waiting list for season tickets. Fans pay a nonrefundable deposit of \$100 per seat to get on the list, and they are offered tickets when others fail to renew.

The early years featured only a trickle of openings as the list swelled to more than 3,000. The number is said to still be in the thousands, but since the deposit is nonrefundable, the list includes people who have moved or are no longer interested, according to a source inside the organization with knowledge of the situation.

Everyone who was on the list last summer had the opportunity to buy tickets, the source said, and the Sabres again expect everyone on the list who wants tickets will have a chance to purchase them.

K.P. said he will drop from eight season tickets to six. Ned plans to get rid of the four 200 Level club seats he owns, which total \$19,728. Stan says he'll likely keep his six, though since they're split up he may consolidate them to one section.

"I imagine this will be the offseason to move around," he said, referencing the anticipated drop in season-ticket sales.

The guys on the street know all about a drop in sales. The empty seats in the Sabres' arena mean empty pockets for them.

"All you can do," K.P. said, "is thank God and hope for next year."

The Sabres need to get back to what made them successful against Tampa Bay

The team knows Thursday's effort in Ottawa was not good enough to get a win

WGR550

BRAYTON WILSON

FEBRUARY 16, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres had been on a roll as of late, winners of three in four games heading into Ottawa to play the Senators on Thursday night. The Sabres had also been red-hot on the road, winners of their last four games away from KeyBank Center.

Buffalo managed to grab a 2-1 lead in the game with about five minutes to play, but Ottawa came back with a goal in the final minute to tie the game and force overtime. In the extra time, Senators forward Mike Hoffman ended things with a one-time shot that beat Lehner to his left as the Sabres executed a poor line change.

The game before on Tuesday night against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Sabres had put together one of their best performances of the season in a 5-3 win over the NHL's best team. Sabres forward Ryan O'Reilly knows that Tuesday's effort got away from them in Ottawa on Thursday.

"It wasn't a great game by us," O'Reilly said after practice on Friday at KeyBank Center. "Coming off the win before, we got away from some things and it's unfortunate because [Robin Lehner] played a phenomenal game. He played outstanding, gave us a chance to win and we let him down. There are some things we have to get back to. We have to stay out of the box. We can't be giving them the momentum like that, and we have to get back to little battles, getting the puck in deep, possessing it low and wearing them down a bit more. It wasn't a game we wanted, and it was even more disappointing that [Lehner] had that performance and we didn't help him out to get that [win]."

"I think everyone knows it wasn't our best effort," Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues echoed in the Sabres locker room after practice. "It's a long season, you don't want to have those games but sometimes they happen. We were still able to get a point out of it, but obviously we would've liked to have gotten the win. Those are games that you have to put behind you and move on. I think that's what we've all done. We had a good practice today, it was very upbeat after a game like yesterday. Hopefully we can bring that same attitude tomorrow."

The Sabres will continue their stretch of games against teams looking to make the playoffs on Saturday as they get set to host the Los Angeles Kings. The Kings are coming off a 3-1 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday, and will play Saturday's game as losers of three straight.

Sabres head coach Phil Housley was not pleased with his team's effort on Thursday night, and made it clear at practice that they have to get back to where they were Tuesday in their win over Tampa Bay.

"We addressed some situations this morning, but it was just a bit uncharacteristic of the way we have been playing. I didn't like our compete and our attitude in the battles. I think over the whole game, those things come back to haunt you. Then the hockey gods came through where we should have closed out that game. But in saying that, even though we played poorly, we held a one-goal lead with one minute to go. We put ourselves in a position to win, but I don't we want to approach tomorrow's game that way. I thought we played the last four-to-five games reasonably well and beat some good teams. I just think we got away from that.

"I think it's more disappointing because we're making strides and we were playing the right way. For us, all 20 guys have to be focused and prepared to battle and win those 1-on-1 battles. I thought we had a lot of one-armed reach ins with sticks and not getting engaged. Eventually, that's going to come back and bite you."

Rodrigues has been playing very well for the Sabres lately after a cold slump through much of the last couple of months. In his last five games, Rodrigues has two goals and five points, including another goal on Thursday in Ottawa.

The 24-year old forward is just trying to do his part to contribute to the team's success with Jack Eichel sidelined with a high-ankle sprain.

"I'm just doing me," Rodrigues said. "Everyone has kind of picked up their game since Jack went down, and I'm just trying to do the same thing. Obviously he's a big loss, he's a franchise player, but every team goes through it. When teams do, everyone else has to pick up their game and fill the hole.

"I've just been focusing in on those 1-on-1 battles, trying to be hard in the corners, and I think things are starting to come together. I've had some great plays by some teammates, and I'm just trying to pick my spots and get to the dirty areas."

Rodrigues was back centering the second line on Friday with Benoit Pouliot off to his left and Kyle Okposo to his right.

As for Jordan Nolan, Saturday will be the second time this season he faces his former team. The last matchup between the Sabres and Kings resulted in a 4-2 win for the Kings at Staples Center.

As the Kings have struggled with their recent three-game losing streak, they have fallen out of the playoff picture for the time being. However, they remain just three points back of a playoff spot in the Western Conference Wild Card picture and the Pacific Division standings.

The Sabres are well out of the playoff picture, and it would take an absolute miracle run for the team to get into the playoffs. Nolan admitted on Friday that it is not easy being out of the playoff race while his former team is just on the outside looking in.

"It's not fun," Nolan said. "Not fun losing this many games and being out of it so early. But we still have a lot to work for. Guys are battling for different things, and we're just coming in here and just working, trying to put our best foot forward and win some games."

Here's how the lines and defensive pairings looked on Friday:

Forwards:

Kane - O'Reilly - Reinhart

Pouliot - Rodrigues - Okposo

Wilson - Larsson - Pominville

Girgensons - Josefson - Nolan

Scandella - Nelson

Beaulieu - Ristolainen

Falk - Antipin

Gorges - Baptiste

Be sure to tune in at 12 p.m. for the Paul William Beltz Pre-Game Show on Saturday with Pat Malacaro as he will be joined by Paul Hamilton in the broadcast booth at KeyBank Center. Also get the chance to hear from Rodrigues, Nolan, and Housley from the locker room.

Faceoff against the Kings is set for 1 p.m.

Dreger: "I believe Josh Gorges will be traded"

Gorges has been a Sabre for almost 4 years

WGR550

FEBRUARY 16, 2018

Joe DiBiase

The NHL trade deadline is 10 days away on February 26th. Rumors have surrounded Evander Kane, Robin Lehner, and now Josh Gorges. Gorges is an unrestricted free agent at the end of the year, and if the Sabres could get something for him, it makes sense they'd do it.

The Sabres acquired Gorges in exchange for a 2nd round pick in the 2016 NHL Draft. Montreal would send that pick to Chicago in the Andrew Shaw trade. The Blackhawks used the pick on defenseman Chad Krys, who has not played a game in the NHL yet. In 4 seasons with the Sabres, Gorges has played over 200 games, scored 3 goals, and added 23 assists.

One road block to a trade could be Gorges' cap hit at \$3.9 million. TSN's Darren Dreger joined the Instigators on his usual Friday visit, and addressed that issue among others.

On the idea of Gorges being traded

"I do believe he will be traded. I believe that Jason Botterill is going to do everything in the power of the Buffalo Sabres to give this guy a playoff opportunity. He's been a terrific pro, and an excellent leader within this organization. He deserves it."

On Gorges expensive contract

"Final year of his contract, but the cap hit is a problem at \$3.9 million. The Buffalo Sabres have let it be known they're willing to eat 50% of his cap hit."

Potential suitors for Gorges

"I know there's been interest. Look at a team like St. Louis for example. They might be looking for a depth defenseman, someone that can give them honest minutes. St. Louis is a cap team, so maybe even half the cap hit is a problem, but maybe there's another piece that can be thrown in to soften it. Winnipeg is another team that's kicked tires, and there could be others."

On why Gorges is appealing to teams

"Just based on his reputation and the will to compete, I think Josh Gorges will get traded."

If you're wondering what Gorges could fetch the Sabres in a trade, one example to look back at was Mike Weber being traded to the Washington Capitals before the 2016 deadline. The Sabres received a 3rd round pick for Weber. Like Gorges, Weber was a veteran depth defenseman that provided little to no offense. The Sabres used that pick in this past draft on Finnish defenseman Oskari Laaksonen.

Sabres' Kyle Okposo piling up points

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Feb. 17, 2018

BUFFALO – Late in Thursday's 3-2 overtime loss, Sabres defenseman Casey Nelson stymied a rush and quickly dished the puck up to winger Kyle Okposo.

Okposo then zoomed through the neutral zone and into the high slot when he noticed center Evan Rodrigues streaking down the right wing.

"I saw that their D was kind of shading over toward (Evander Kane), so I just tried to take the middle," Okposo explained Friday. "I was going to shoot it, they were kind of letting me walk down, the D kind of slid and kind of got caught flatfooted, so I noticed Roddy had basically a breakaway."

So Okposo pump-faked and fed Rodrigues in the right circle. A split-second later, Rodrigues' wicked shot beat Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson under the crossbar, putting the Sabres up 2-1 with 4:30 left in the third period.

Rodrigues said Okposo's subtle move created an extra second for him to corral the puck and pick his spot.

While the Senators scored late and again in overtime, at a critical time, Okposo's skills and savvy nearly pushed the Sabres to their fifth straight road win.

Okposo, 29, has been making a lot more notable plays recently. After a slow start, the 10-year veteran has been enjoying a hot streak, compiling 16 points in the last 16 games entering this afternoon's tilt against the Los Angeles Kings inside KeyBank Center.

With top center Jack Eichel sidelined indefinitely with a high right ankle sprain, Okposo's contributions have become even more critical.

By now, Okposo's story has been told over and over. A harrowing concussion he suffered late last season left him hospitalized in intensive care. Although he recovered long before the season started, he looked nothing like his old self early on, mustering only two assists in his first 10 outings.

He recently acknowledged coming back was tougher than he had anticipated.

Okposo started finding his groove around Christmas and hasn't let up much since then. Through 56 appearances, the American has compiled nine goals and 36 points.

Still, Okposo, who has a nine-game goal drought, and Sabres coach Phil Housley know the former NHL All-Star can be better.

"Still riding the roller coaster a little bit, but it's been a lot better, I think I've been on a better trajectory in the last few months," Okposo said.

Okposo said he liked his performance in Thursday's loss. The three games prior to that, however, were weak.

"I was ... tightening up and thinking too much," said Okposo, who's in the second season of a seven-year, \$42 million contract. "Last game, I just tried to go out there and play a power game and just tried to move the puck north and play my game. I thought I did a pretty good job of that."

Housley, though, wasn't impressed with Okposo's outing in Ottawa.

"Kyle's been more consistent the last month," Housley said. "Like a lot of our guys (Thursday), just didn't have that extra jump. ... His body work (Thursday) isn't where it needs to be. I think he needs to be tenacious on the forecheck and being tough to play against down low, driving out of coverage in the offensive zone and creating things.

"He's pretty hard on himself in that respect, he evaluates himself pretty well, but I expect him to rebound (today)."

By his standards, Okposo has compiled an odd stat line. He has already accumulated 26 assists, equaling last season's total in nine fewer appearances. His goals, meanwhile, are down.

In the last five non-lockout campaigns, he has averaged 22 goals and 33 assists.

"Last year was kind of a down year for that for me (assists-wise)," Okposo said. "If you look at my career, I've always been a guy who's going to get more assists than goals. ... I try to make the plays when it's appropriate. My whole life, every coach I've had tells me to shoot more. I probably should ... I'll be 30 here soon."

Sabres' Jordan Nolan excited to face Kings again

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Feb. 16, 2018

BUFFALO – Jordan Nolan won two Stanley Cups in Los Angeles, so while the Sabres winger already played against the Kings in October, facing his old team for the second time will still be special.

“I have a lot of friends on that team, that’s where I started my career and we were successful from the start, so you always have that kind of bond no matter where you go,” Nolan, who was claimed on waivers Sept. 27, said this afternoon.

Based on lines during today’s practice inside KeyBank Center, Nolan will return Saturday afternoon after sitting out the last two games as a healthy scratch.

Fourth-line winger Nick Baptiste, a recent recall, will likely be the odd man out.

The Sabres, fresh off Thursday’s 3-2 overtime loss in Ottawa, will also likely scratch defenseman Josh Gorges for Justin Falk.

Sharks, Predators, Kings among teams who should pursue Sabres winger Evander Kane

Evander Kane has 18 goals and 20 assists for 38 points through 58 games this season.

What's the best trade destination for Evander Kane?

ESPN

Greg Wyshynski,

Yet I can't apply the same lack of logic to this exercise. My heart says to put Evander Kane on the St. Louis Blues and watch grown men weep at the beauty that would be a Kane-Paul Stastny-Vladimir Tarasenko line. But I can't, in good faith, make that my answer when St. Louis has neither the first-rounder it might take to get Kane nor the cap space to make this work.

ESPN On Ice

Greg Wyshynski and Emily Kaplan give matchmaking a try for free-agents-to-be in the spirit of Valentine's Day and wonder why no coaches have been fired yet. Plus, they are joined by "Miracle on Ice" captain Mike Eruzione to talk Winter Olympics and Mark Lazerus of the Chicago Sun-Times to cover the Blackhawks' tough season. Listen »

There is, however, a team in the Western Conference with a first-round pick, enough prorated cap space and a need for an elite scoring winger: the San Jose Sharks.

Kane could play with Joe Pavelski, which would allow the Sharks to push Tomas Hertl down to play with Logan Couture, which would push Joonas Donskoi down to play with Chris Tierney. These are all good things. If Joe Thornton somehow makes it back from injury before the playoffs, the idea of Jumbo feathering passes to Kane is rather tantalizing too.

Kane has 18 goals and 20 assists in 57 games, with only eight of those 38 points coming on the power play. (He has three short-handed goals.) In a Western Conference that looks as if it could be an arms race for scoring talent, adding Kane would go a long way toward keeping the Sharks in a playoff spot -- and given their cap situation next season, there's always the potential for keeping him long term as well.

So that's the case for Kane with the Sharks. Now, watch the Blues land him. It's the trade deadline. Logic has no home here.

EDITOR'S PICKS

Power Rankings: Red-hot Bruins keep climbing

Vegas remains No. 1 -- while Tampa Bay and Nashville round out the top three -- but Boston's recent run has shaved the Lightning's lead in the Atlantic Division to just one point.

Atlantic Division deadline preview: Four buyers, four sellers

While other divisions around the NHL seem full of buyers and bereft of sellers, the Atlantic is split down the middle with four in each category. Here are the assets, cap space, deadline game plans and more for all eight teams.

One big trade deadline question for every NHL team

What can you expect from every team at the deadline? Matthew Collier reviews each team's salary-cap space and player movement clauses and answers their biggest question for the Feb. 26 deadline.

Emily Kaplan, national NHL reporter: We know the Nashville Predators are poised to make a splash at the deadline. We know all the other teams are hoping that luring Mike Fisher out of retirement was David Poile's big move, but the Predators GM probably wants to add even more top-six scoring, especially on the wing. We know this is a team that's not risk-averse. We know Nashville is in on the Rick Nash sweepstakes.

I know if they don't get Nash, Evander Kane would be one heck of a consolation prize.

For two months, we've been told that the Sabres' asking price for Kane was enormous: reportedly a first-round pick, a prospect, a roster player and a conditional pick. That should sound high for anyone -- hey, lean in Buffalo! -- but especially to Nashville, which has already given up significant assets in the megadeal that landed Kyle Turris. The Predators' top prospect, Dante Fabbro, is probably off the table, once again, especially if we're only talking about a rental. But Nashville still has all of its 2018 draft picks, minus the second-rounder, and all of its 2019 picks. If Poile can work out a fair price -- remember, he

has an embarrassment of depth at the center position, an overinflated asset in this center-barren market -- Kane's presence in the lineup could move the Predators from contenders to a downright scary team to face in the playoffs.

The Predators are (rightfully so) going all-in this season and, as Greg notes, the West could turn into an arms race for scoring. Nashville has been fantastic in so many areas of its game but could use help in 5-on-5 scoring (18th in the league). Kane would certainly thrive in the Western Conference, where more of a premium is placed on physicality. He'd provide insurance for injury, which the Predators have certainly had their share of, plus he would be a matchup nightmare on the third line (in terms of talent, he's certainly top six).

I have no idea where Kane will actually end up, but I know if I'm another team in the West, I'm hoping it's not Nashville.

Evander Kane, who has never played in the postseason during his nine-year career, probably would head to a contender as a rental player. AP Photo/Jae C. Hong

Sean Allen, NHL Fantasy writer: Speaking strictly from a fantasy perspective, as I am wont to do, the formula for a preferred destination for Kane is quite simple: role on the top line (with an established duo) and a spot on the first power-play unit.

Those two criteria would basically make Kane a lock for top-50 fantasy value for the remainder of the season. He flashed those chops early in this campaign before he slowly fizzled down the depth chart with the Sabres.

The top destination for fantasy purposes would be the Los Angeles Kings. The most frequently used duo on the Kings' top line this season has been Anze Kopitar and Dustin Brown. The majority of the time, Alex Iafallo has been given the third spot on the line, but Tanner Pearson and Tyler Toffoli have also had their chances. None have settled in and created a must-have trio for the Kings going forward. In a perfect world, Kane could step in and play off the space and chances created by Kopitar and Brown -- and Jeff Carter would return and reestablish his chemistry with Pearson and Toffoli on the second line.

The Kings are really the only destination, from a fantasy perspective, that would be a turnkey situation for Kane. Other possibilities that come close to meeting the criteria would require an undeserved demotion for another winger. That's not to say the Calgary Flames wouldn't slide Micheal Ferland down the depth chart, or the Washington Capitals wouldn't bump T.J. Oshie off the power play, but in the fantasy realm, we prefer these moves to lift all boats. If Kane landed with the Kings, no current fantasy asset would be negatively impacted. Other destinations that come close to meeting the needs would be the Blues or New York Islanders, but again, some tough lineup choices would need to be made regarding Alexander Steen or Anthony Beauvillier.

The upside for Kane still exists if there isn't a top power-play unit role awaiting him at his next destination, but it wouldn't be as high. If he lands with, say, the Pittsburgh Penguins or Boston Bruins, he could pile on a ton of goals at even strength between now and April. But in both of those scenarios, he probably wouldn't be a part of the top power-play unit.

Sabres have relied on scoring depth in Eichel's absence

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 16th, 2018

Jack Eichel was on an offensive tear before he sustained a high-ankle sprain during the first period of Buffalo's game against the Bruins on Feb. 9. With the team's leading scorer out of the lineup indefinitely, it was easy to wonder where the goals and assists would come from. As it turns out, the production has come from just about everywhere.

Including that game against Boston, Buffalo has scored 15 goals in four games without Eichel, and it's not just the big names who have been contributing. Ten of 13 forwards have recorded a point, as well as five of seven defensemen who have dressed.

Sabres Now (2/16/18)

01:38 • February 16th, 2018

Ryan O'Reilly, nicknamed Factor by his teammates, has received a lot of the attention with a pair of three-point efforts in those four games, as well as for his success in the faceoff circle. And Sam Reinhart (2+1) and Kyle Okposo (0+3) have also been productive.

"I think the guys have done a terrific job rallying around it," coach Phil Housley said after Friday's practice at KeyBank Center. "Obviously when you miss your best player, it's tough to fill that void. But our guys have done a really good job. It's been leadership by committee. It's been production by committee. And we need more of it. But it does give you a good chance to evaluate your players."

It's the depth of the Sabres forward group that has really helped them to a 2-1-1 record since losing their leading scorer. Seven forwards have recorded at least two points over that stretch.

Phil Housley (2/16/18)

06:20 • February 16th, 2018

"It's huge. Ever since Jack went out, we've been getting some scoring from pretty much everybody," Okposo said. "Factor's really elevated his game. And Sam's been really good, too. But we've been getting contributions from everybody which is really nice to see."

Scott Wilson (3+1) and Evan Rodrigues (1+2) have been among those players that have stepped up in those four games. Both scored in last night's overtime loss to Ottawa.

Wilson's slick short-side wrister

00:55 • February 15th, 2018

Wilson, who was acquired by the team in December in a trade with Detroit, said he's settling in with his new club. Last season with the Penguins, the 25-year-old forward recorded a career-high 26 points in 78 games and posted six points in 20 playoffs games en route to a Stanley Cup championship.

"Playing in Pittsburgh for a few years, I learned that you have to play the right way to win," he said. "Show by example. I'm not really a big talker or anything so just playing the game the right way, doing the right things, little things like blocking shots, getting pucks out of the D-zone when you can. I've just taken pride in that."

He's been skating on a line with center Johan Larsson and Jason Pominville. Housley lauded the line's consistency as of late.

"They were pretty tenacious. They've been playing really well together. They have good chemistry," he said. "Wilson does a lot of the little things well. Blocking shots, taking hits to making plays, drives to the net, has a shot mentality. That mix right there has been really good for us."

Rodrigues' laser from the circle
00:52 • February 15th, 2018

Rodrigues, who was the benefactor of a great play by Okposo to set up the go-ahead goal late in last night's game, has five points in his last five games. He's also seen some time on the first power-play unit with Okposo, O'Reilly, Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen in Eichel's absence.

The Sabres have tallied at least one power-play goal in 12 of their last 17 games dating back to Jan. 7 at Philadelphia (and went 0-for-0 on Jan. 11 vs. Columbus), scoring 16 power-play goals over that stretch.

"The power play's been clicking for about a month and a half. Guys like Okposo and Reinhart and Factor - when they power play's going well, it gives them confidence in all areas of their game," Rodrigues said. "I think it's really upped our team and hopefully we can keep it going."

Buffalo hosts the Los Angeles Kings tomorrow afternoon at KeyBank Center for a 1 p.m. faceoff. It's a Kids Day Game with a special ticket offer available [here](#).

Friday's line combos and D pairings

9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 23 Sam Reinhart
67 Benoit Pouliot - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 21 Kyle Okposo
20 Scott Wilson - 22 Johan Larsson - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 10 Jacob Josefson - 17 Jordan Nolan
13 Nicholas Baptiste

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Marco Scandella - 8 Casey Nelson
41 Justin Falk - 93 Victor Antipin
4 Josh Gorges

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

Sharpen Up: February 16, 2018

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

The Sabres managed to earn a point last night, but they gave up a late lead in the third period in a 3-2 overtime loss to Ottawa. The loss snapped a four-game road winning streak, but Buffalo does have points in five straight on the road since they went 4-0-1 in March 2012.

Here's what you need to know.

About last night

Video: BUF Recap: Sabres falter late, lose to Sens in OT

Evan Rodrigues put the Sabres ahead 2-1 with 4:29 remaining in regulation, but with goaltender Craig Anderson on the bench and the extra attacker on, Ottawa capitalized to tie the game with under a minute to go. Then Mike Hoffman scored in overtime to give the Senators two points.

Video: HOUSLEY Postgame Interview

On the brighter side, the Sabres do have points in 10 straight meetings with the Senators (7-0-3) for the first time in the all-time series, including the team's first four-game winning streak against Ottawa since they won in six straight meetings from Dec. 4, 2010 to Nov. 11, 2011.

Buffalo and Ottawa have now had 19 of their last 25 games decided by a single goal. Eight of those games have been decided in overtime or a shootout. They'll play the Senators two more times before the end of the regular season.

So there's that.

Video: RODRIGUES: Postgame Interview

Let's look at the Lexus Postgame Report...

It was the kind of game that a team likes to win for its goaltender. The Buffalo Sabres were far from at their best against the Ottawa Senators on Thursday, but still looked primed to steal a win late in the game thanks to a stellar night in net from Robin Lehner.

Video: LEHNER: Postgame Interview

Instead, they had to settle for a point. Derick Brassard scored for Ottawa to tie the game with 30.9 seconds remaining in regulation and Mike Hoffman beat Lehner with a one-time shot from deep in the right faceoff circle in overtime, clinching a 3-2 win for the Senators at Canadian Tire Centre.

Lehner began the night with 5-0-2 record against his former club, and he made several key saves to keep the Sabres in a game in which they were outshot 36-25.

"He played terrific," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said. "He always seems to bring his best against Ottawa and he brought it tonight. It's unfortunate we couldn't get the win for him."

Video: OKPOSO: Postgame Interview

"We got exactly what we deserved," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "The compete and the battles, they won the majority of them. Even though we found a way to get a 2-1 lead, to me, we've played much better than that the last three, four games and we got away from what made us successful."

Coming up

We'll have full coverage of today's practice from KeyBank Center for you here at Sabres.com.

Coming up this weekend

Buffalo has a pair of home games this long weekend. And they're both Kids Day Games. ([Click here for a special offer](#)). The Kings and Sabres will play at 1 p.m. on Saturday and then Buffalo takes on Washington at 3 p.m. on President's Day.

Oh and if you're coming to the sold-out Mega Raffle tonight, doors open at 6 with the first spin taking place at 7.