



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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St. Cloud State's Borgen signs 3-year contract with Sabres

AP

March 25, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Defenseman Will Borgen is skipping his senior season at St. Cloud State after signing a three-year entry level contract with the Buffalo Sabres.

Borgen's contract with the Sabres won't kick in until next season. He will finish this year playing for Buffalo's minor-league affiliate in Rochester, New York, after agreeing to sign an amateur tryout contract.

The deal was reached Sunday, three days after Borgen's season ended when the top-ranked Huskies lost 4-1 to Air Force in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

Borgen was selected by Buffalo in the fourth round of the 2015 draft. The 21-year-old had two goals and 15 points in 36 games this season, and named the National College Hockey Conference's defensive defenseman of the year.

Overall, Borgen had five goals and 36 assists in 106 games.

From Moorhead, Minnesota, he was one of four collegians selected to the United States Olympic team roster, though he did not appear in a game at South Korean Winter Games last month. In January, Borgen won a bronze medal representing the U.S. at the World Junior hockey championship, which was held in Buffalo.

Vesey, Georgiev lead Rangers to 5-1 win over Sabres

AP

Allan Kreda

March 25, 2018

NEW YORK (AP) — With each passing game, it appears the New York Rangers may have found an apprentice goalie for next season.

Jimmy Vesey had two goals and an assist to support Alexandar Georgiev's season-high 43-save performance and the Rangers beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-1 Saturday night.

Chris Kreider, Mika Zibanejad and Neal Pionk each added a goal and an assist as the Rangers completed a sweep of the three-game season series and improved to 13-3-0 in the last 16 meetings with the Sabres.

"The main thing is that we won the game," said the 22-year-old Georgiev, who has been impressive since his recall from AHL Hartford last month after backup Ondrej Pavelec was injured. "We scored great goals in the first period, played really good defense. The guys were really battling to not let them have many good opportunities to score."

Sam Reinhart spoiled Georgiev's shutout bid with 4 1/2 minutes remaining for the Sabres, who have lost four straight. Robin Lehner gave up four goals on 12 shots before being replaced near the midpoint of the second period. Linus Ullmark came on and stopped 10 of the 11 shots he faced.

Kreider and Vesey each scored in the first before Pionk got his first NHL goal early in the second.

"It's hard to believe it at first. It's just such a great feeling when those guys come get you and they all give you a huge hug," Pionk said. "Something I will never forget."

Zibanejad made it 4-0 with his team-leading 27th at 8:45 of the second, giving the Rangers goals on four consecutive shots for the first time since Jan. 3, 2015, also against the Sabres, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Georgiev, starting for fifth time in six games, made 21 saves in the first period, nine in the second and 13 more in the third. He has four wins overall and could emerge as Henrik Lundqvist's backup next season.

"I'm just trying to play my game and help the guys in every way I can," he said.

The Sabres outshot the Rangers 21-10 in the first period but it was Kreider opening the scoring with 3:31 left with his 15th of the season with assists to linemates Zibanejad and Jesper Fast. The line has totaled 25 points in last five games.

Zibanejad has 12 points in his last seven games including eight goals. Kreider has a five-game points streak with three goals and seven assists. Fast has an eight-game point streak with three goals and seven assists over the span.

Vesey made it 2-0 with just under two minutes remaining. Mats Zuccarello had an assist for his team-leading 50th point.

Pionk scored his milestone goal at 3:59 of the middle period, extending his points streak to seven games. He has a goal and nine assists during the stretch. The 22-year-old defenseman was recalled from Hartford of the AHL last month and has 14 points overall.

Vesey's 17th made it 5-0 with 5:13 left in the second.

"We lost coverages, guys were beating us up the ice, and I think it goes back to have that respect in our own zone and for our goaltender," Sabres coach Phil Housley said "We have to keep the puck out of our net."

The Rangers are 6-4-3 since dealing Rick Nash to Boston, and captain Ryan McDonagh and J.T. Miller to Tampa Bay as part of a promised purge of top players at the trade deadline. Though they will miss the playoffs for the first time since 2010, they have played with renewed energy since the deals were made.

“We had some grade-A chances that we were able to capitalize on and we got a lead,” Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. “For the most part, we had some good looks and our goaltender was able to make some big saves.”

NOTES: The Rangers also defeated Buffalo 3-2 in overtime in the Winter Classic at Citi Field — which was considered a home game for the Sabres — on New Year’s Day, and won 4-3 at Madison Square Garden on Jan. 18. ... The Rangers again scratched Lundqvist after he was shaken up in a collision last Tuesday against Columbus. ... The Rangers also scratched F David Desharnais. ... Buffalo scratched F Jacob Josefson, F Justin Bailey, D Justin Falk and D Nathan Beaulieu.

UP NEXT

Rangers: Host Washington on Monday.

Sabres: Visit Toronto on Monday.

Niemi stops 35 shots in Canadiens' 3-0 win over Sabres

AP

John Wawrow

March 24, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Upon handing the puck to Canadiens goalie Antti Niemi in honor of his 35-save performance, defenseman Karl Alzner had a hard time believing how long it has been since his teammate's last shutout.

It's been more than two years.

"It's hard to believe as good of a goalie as he is for that to be the case," Alzner said, Friday night, following a 3-0 win over the Buffalo Sabres in a game between two teams out of playoff contention. "It's nice to be part of it and nice to be there for him to get it."

Niemi's 36th career shutout was also significant given how the 34-year-old finally landed in Montreal — his fourth team in less than a calendar year. He went from being released by Dallas in June to signing with Pittsburgh in July and then being claimed off waivers twice in three weeks — first by Florida in October, and then by the Canadiens in November.

"What he's persevered through and also his work ethic is unbelievable," coach Claude Julien said. "There's no doubt he's been a real positive for our hockey club."

Niemi improved to 6-4-4 with Montreal, and the shutout was his first since a 20-save performance in Dallas' 4-0 win over Chicago on Dec. 22, 2015.

"I knew it's been a long time," said Niemi, who won a Stanley Cup with Chicago as a rookie in 2010. "I wouldn't have cared too much if they would've scored one in the end and we still won. I like the way I played."

Artturi Lehkonen scored the go-ahead goal by converting a puck that bounced off the end boards 4:56 into the second period. Former Sabres forward Paul Byron and Brendan Gallagher then scored empty-net goals 22 seconds apart in the final 1:15 to seal the win.

Montreal had lost its past four overall, and gone 0-5-2 on the road since a 6-3 win at the New York Islanders on March 2.

Nothing is going right for the NHL's last-place Sabres, who closed their six-game homestand at 1-4-1. The Sabres' league-worst home record dropped to 11-22-5, and they must win their final two home games to avoid setting a franchise low for fewest wins in an 82-game season (13-21-7, in 2012-13).

Buffalo's league-worst offense was blanked for the second time in three games — following a 4-0 shutout loss to Nashville on Monday — and seventh time this season. The Sabres also lost to a Canadiens opponent now tied with Arizona with the NHL's fewest road wins (10) and has scored a league-low 85 goals on the road.

The poster-boy for frustration was forward Ryan O'Reilly, who muffed Kyle Okposo's pass while facing an open net during a two-man advantage eight minutes into the third period.

"I've got to be better. It's my fault," O'Reilly said. "I should just get behind it and take my time. It was a stupid play by me."

O'Reilly also had Niemi beat on a rush up the right wing with 2:55 left in the second period. With room between the post and Niemi's pad, O'Reilly missed stuffing the puck in and instead had it slide through the crease.

"I've done that move in practice hundreds of times," he said. "When it matters, I don't do it. Just letting the guys down."

O'Reilly wasn't the only one off the mark. Scott Wilson hit the crossbar from the left circle in the first period. And Sam Reinhart was set up alone atop the crease only to be robbed by Niemi in the second period.

Sabres rookie Linus Ullmark allowed one goal on the 22 shots he faced.

Lehkonen scored when teammate Alex Galchenyuk's shot from the left circle was blocked in front. The puck dribbled to Jacob de la Rose, who snapped a shot just wide of the net from the slot. The puck struck the boards and to Lehkonen, who flipped it in above Ullmark's out-stretched right leg.

NOTES: Sabres C Zemgus Girgensons returned after missing two games with an undisclosed injury. ... After opening the season with a 3-2 shootout win at Buffalo, the Canadiens proceeded to go 0-6-1 in their next seven. ... Before the game, the Sabres honored Luke McDermott and Adam Page, two local members the United States gold-medal-winning Paralympic hockey team.

UP NEXT

Canadiens: Host Washington Capitals on Saturday.

Sabres: At New York Rangers on Saturday.

With Toronto seeking club records, this is the worst time for Sabres to face Leafs

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

March 25, 2018

ETOBICOKE, Ont. – Probably the last place the Buffalo Sabres need to be Monday night is the Air Canada Centre.

At one of the lowest points in their season, when they once again can't put the puck in the ocean if they were given a free shot from the beach, the Sabres will meet the Toronto Maple Leafs in a game where plenty of history can be made for the NHL's resurgent Original Six franchise.

The Leafs are currently on a franchise-record run of 13 straight wins at home. For a little bit of perspective there, you'll recall that the Sabres have won just 11 home games all year. All Toronto needs is a win over the Sabres and it will set franchise records for home wins (27) and overall wins (46) in a season.

The Leafs are 26-8-2 at home this year and haven't lost in the ACC since a 4-2 defeat to Colorado on Jan. 22. Coach Mike Babcock had some sobering words for the Sabres – or any visitor, for that matter – after practice Sunday in the suburban Mastercard Centre.

"It's important for teams to know when they're out for dinner in your town the night before that they're not getting any points tomorrow or that it's a real hard place," Babcock said. "When you're home and you don't win, it's hard for you. The crowd is tense, the whole thing. When you win, they're the wind in your sails. They help you out. It's important to get that feeling at home."

"We feel really good at home, especially toward this tail end of the year," said Leafs star Auston Matthews. "The crowd is into it. We're playing these big games and it feels like the playoff games every night. It's intense and I think everybody relishes it."

The Sabres took a CBA-mandated day off Sunday, so that's another day when they didn't score. They were drubbed by a combined 16-2 count in dropping all four of their games last week. And that's even though they outshot their opponents, 144-108, and outattempted them, 261-202. Buffalo remains last overall with just 58 points and its NHL-worst goal differential has now fallen to minus-74.

Monday's game is the Sabres' first visit of the season to the ACC and a major subplot will be that it marks the first head-to-head matchup of the season between respective stars and close friends Matthews and Jack Eichel.

The teams split their two meetings in KeyBank Center earlier this month, as both young studs sat out. Toronto is 6-1 since its 5-3 loss to the Sabres on March 5.

Matthews has a goal and an assist in two games since returning Thursday from a shoulder injury that kept him out of the lineup for a month. Meanwhile, Eichel has just one assist and a minus-8 rating in his five games back from a high ankle sprain that cost him 15 games.

"It's always fun to go against friends. Obviously he's a really talented player so it makes for a pretty tough matchup," Matthews said. "I know him. We're both very competitive and don't want to lose to one another so it should be a good battle. I talked to him a little bit when we were in Buffalo just catching up. I've known him for a while now. You want to see players like him healthy and it's good to see him back."

"Especially for American hockey, it's cool to see those two guys and how talented they are," said Leafs winger James van Riemsdyk. "Those guys have a good relationship off the ice, growing up with the USA Hockey stuff. It makes it fun for the fans to watch something like that but at the end of the day it's Toronto-Buffalo and you have to play team on team."

The Leafs have an incredibly balanced lineup with nine players over 40 points. Mitch Marner is the leader in points (64) and assists (44) while van Riemsdyk leads in goals with 34. Matthews and Nazem Kadri have 29 goals apiece while Matthews has 52 points in his 55 games. William Nylander is second on the team with 54 points.

Frederik Andersen has been a workhorse in goal, making 61 starts and collecting 35 wins while Curtis McElhinney has been perhaps the league's best backup, with 10 wins, a 2.09 goals-against average and .935 save percentage.

It's all added up to a 45-23-7 overall record for 97 points. With seven games left, the Leafs' franchise record of 103 points is certainly within reach and it's interesting to note that a longtime stalwart of the league has never won more than 45 games in a season. By comparison, the Sabres have exceeded 45 wins eight times in their history, which only began in 1970.

"You look at the history of the franchise that would be something that would be really cool," van Riemsdyk said. "Certainly something that you don't get a chance to do every single year."

"It would be a great accomplishment," added center Tyler Bozak. "For me personally being here for some tough times and being able to turn it around and be a part of this now, it's pretty cool."

Babcock walks by pictures of former great Leafs coaches Pat Burns and Pat Quinn every day outside his office so he knows what those records would mean. And he certainly knows what a deep Stanley Cup run – something that hasn't happened here since 1967 – would also mean. But the veteran coach is grounded too. Just keep winning and keep the eyes on the next day.

"One time I won something, won a Cup or a gold medal and I'm sitting by the fire at my lake place having a rum and my dad was having a scotch," Babcock said. "So I said, 'Things are going pretty good', kinda tooting my own horn and he said, 'When was that again?' In other words: What's coming? That's the same as our group. It's nice and it says they're getting confidence and expect to win. In reality, what we're trying to do is keep getting better."

Story topics: Auston Matthews/ Buffalo Sabres/ Jack Eichel/ Toronto Maple Leafs

St. Cloud's Borgen signs entry-level deal with Sabres, will report to Amerks

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

March 25, 2018

TORONTO – St. Cloud State defenseman Will Borgen, whose top-seeded team was upset in the first round of the NCAA Tournament on Friday, has signed his three-year entry-level contract with the Buffalo Sabres and will immediately report to the Rochester Amerks.

Borgen, 21, will head to the AHL on an amateur tryout offer and his ELC will kick in for the 2018-19 season. It will pay \$742,500 in the first season and the maximum \$925,000 for years two and three.

Buffalo's fourth-round pick in the 2015 draft, Borgen completed his junior year at St. Cloud and was named the National College Hockey Conference's Defensive Defenseman of the Year. The 6-foot-2, 188-pounder had two goals and 13 assists in 36 games this season for the Minnesota school. He was also one of four collegiate players named to the U.S. Olympic team but did not appear in a game in Pyeongchang.

The Sabres were certainly interested in bringing Borgen into their organization but the Huskies were the nation's top-ranked team and had designs on making the Frozen Four in St. Paul, Minn., which doesn't begin until April 5.

The plans quickly changed, however, when St. Cloud suffered a 4-1 loss to Atlantic Hockey champion Air Force in a first-round regional at Sioux Falls, S.D. Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill attended that game and quickly moved to get Borgen officially signed. He could be in the Rochester lineup as soon as Wednesday night's game against Utica.

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The Sabres are also working to get 2017 top draft pick Casey Mittelstadt signed after his freshman season at the University of Minnesota ended last week as the Gophers did not make the NCAA Tournament. The team may be willing to burn a year of Mittelstadt's entry-level deal by having him play a few games in the NHL before heading to Rochester, but Mittelstadt is believed to be weighing a return to school for his sophomore season and the Gophers' decision on a replacement for outgoing coach Don Lucia is a key factor in that decision.

The Amerks clinched their first Calder Cup playoff berth since 2014 with Saturday's 4-2 win over Springfield in Blue Cross Arena. They still have nine games left in their regular season, which concludes April 14 at Syracuse. Rochester's playoff opponent will then be either Syracuse or Toronto, and the Amerks will be fortified by several players from the Sabres because Buffalo's season ends on April 7.

In addition to adding Borgen to the roster, the Sabres will be returning defensemen Brendan Guhle and Casey Nelson, forwards Justin Bailey and Nick Baptiste and goaltender Linus Ullmark to Rochester for the postseason in hopes of helping the Amerks win a first-round series for the first time since 2005.

Also Sunday, the Amerks announced they have signed forward Judd Peterson, Borgen's college teammate, to an amateur tryout deal. Peterson, 24, was originally drafted by the Sabres in the seventh round in 2012. He had six goals and a career-high 12 assists in 40 games this season and finished a 151-game college career with 37 goals and 28 assists.

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Rochester Amerks/ Will Borgen

Sabres' accountability problems return to spotlight

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK – As a seventh lost season nears its merciful end and a roster overhaul beckons, the search for the holy grail continues.

Accountability is harder to find than a playoff spot.

The Buffalo Sabres continue to look for locker-room leaders, the guys who refuse to lose and insist others adopt the same attitude. It's a mindset needed not only from game to game, but shift to shift.

"We've had new management, new coaches in here this year, and we've got to really look at ourselves and try and change things," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said Saturday before a 5-1 loss to the New York Rangers.

General Manager Jason Botterill and coach Phil Housley have brought winning pedigrees, but the Sabres still have guys who struggle to compete nightly. Housley called out his leadership group after Friday's loss to Montreal, and the team talked about his comments Saturday.

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There weren't any hurt feelings, but the incident did reignite chatter about flaws inside the Sabres' dressing room. Accountability remains one.

"It's something that you have to have on a team," Okposo said in Madison Square Garden. "Phil's doing a pretty good job of that, holding guys accountable in the meetings and in video. But I think we have to do a better job with each other and holding each other accountable to a standard that we really want to meet.

"It's something that we've got to fix."

As the numbers show – Buffalo is last in the NHL in most meaningful categories – the organization desperately needs an influx of talent at every position. But it's the no-show nights that have driven away the fans. A consistent effort shouldn't be too much to ask, but apparently it is.

"It's the other areas of the game – it's checking detail, it's the battle – those are the things we're looking at," Housley said. "It's that one-on-one puck battle that we need to win more of at this time of the year because of the position we're in, and that's sort of the message we're trying to put forth moving forward here."

While professional athletes should always be ready, there's no denying Buffalo's last-place standing has beaten the drive out of some guys. Though never acceptable, lackluster efforts would at least be understandable late in the year. But it has been a seasonlong problem, one that goes back much further than October.

Guys think they're working hard, but there's no real measuring stick in the room. Ryan O'Reilly has appeared in two playoff series in nine seasons, never advancing past the first round. Okposo missed the postseason in six of nine seasons with the New York Islanders. Rasmus Ristolainen has experienced loss after loss after loss during his five years in the NHL.

The guys who've enjoyed success, including Stanley Cup-winning forwards Jordan Nolan and Scott Wilson, are role players who can't put a team on their back.

It adds up to no-show nights or, at the very least, no-show shifts.

"We all can be better," Okposo said. "The team is moving in a direction that we all don't want it to. It's maybe going sideways a little bit. We play a couple good games, play a couple bad games. That's not something that we want to be doing, and it seems like it's gone on for a long time.

"It's up to us to try and fix that."

The Sabres want to change the culture of their room, but instead they're showing young guys such as Brendan Guhle, Casey Nelson, Justin Bailey and Nick Baptiste how to slack off. Is that a worry?

"Yup, absolutely," Okposo said. "We've got to go to work every day."

Though not named directly by Housley on Friday, center Jack Eichel knows he was in the group that was called out. It wasn't so much his work ethic but his desire to freewheel and not do what he was asked.

"I just need to be better," Eichel said. "All of us need to be better. Obviously, it's not good enough. It's look in the mirror. All you can really do is control yourself. You can't look to anyone else to be better."

Actually, they can. It's called asking people to be accountable.

"We all can step up in our own ways," Okposo said. "I put more pressure on myself than anybody else does, and I want to succeed more than anything. It's been a tough year for me like that, but I go into every game and I try and be the best player I can be, try and be the best player on the ice."

When they're not the best player they can be, someone needs to tell them. If it didn't hurt when Housley called them out, it shouldn't linger if a teammate does.

"We're all professionals here," Eichel said. "We're all grown men. I don't think anyone's feelings are getting hurt, so I don't think anyone has a problem with that and holding people accountable."

"It needs to happen. It's happened with a lot of teams I've played on. There's no reason that it shouldn't happen here."

Story topics: Jack Eichel/ Kyle Okposo/ phil housley/ Ryan O'Reilly

Sabres Notebook: Puny shooting percentage; Reinhart hits 20 goals

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK – The numbers are seriously ridiculous.

In the last four games, the Buffalo Sabres have taken 144 shots. They've scored twice. That's a puny shooting percentage of 1.3 percent.

Every team goes through a slump, but this is off-the-charts bad.

Not surprisingly, the Sabres have lost all four games. The skid continued with a 5-1 loss to the New York Rangers on Saturday, and the lone goal came on the power play with just 4:34 to play. It spared Buffalo the indignity of being blanked for the third time in one week.

The Sabres peppered rookie goaltender Alexandar Georgiev with 21 shots in the first period. As the scoring woes continued, the defensive awareness disappeared. So did any chance of winning.

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"All the things we did with the puck, we did really well," coach Phil Housley said in Madison Square Garden. "But when we didn't have it, we didn't defend well. We lost coverage. Guys were beating us up the ice.

"It goes back to having that respect for our own end and our own goaltender, keeping the puck out of our net. We didn't have that kind of respect."

The Sabres looked fried when they came out for the second period. They punched themselves out in the first, and it was obvious the hope tank was low, as Rangers assistant and former Buffalo bench boss Lindy Ruff would say.

"We have these good starts, we need to put one in because we need that spark, we need that momentum," said center Ryan O'Reilly, who had four shots in the first period. "It's tough. We open the door, and teams make us pay."

The Sabres' shooting percentage has fallen to 7.4 percent, remaining at the bottom of the NHL.

"I'm going to harp on it, and I'm going to continue to harp on it: Zone One," said Housley, referring to the front of the net. "We're not getting there enough. To score in this league at this time of year at five-on-five, even strength, you have to be willing to go there, especially the first guy, and try to take the goalie's eyes.

"We're getting there, then we're rolling out. We've got to make it more miserable for the goaltenders that we're facing."

For the second time in his three seasons, Sam Reinhart is a 20-goal scorer. There wasn't much to celebrate with this milestone.

"It would have been nicer to have that one impact the game a little more," the right winger said. "It's tough. Right from the start I had to be better tonight. It's a little disappointing, but hopefully now I can just relax a little bit and get back to my game."

Reinhart tipped Kyle Okposo's shot on the Sabres' late power play, ending a slump of three games without a point. The 22-year-old has 13 goals and 30 points in his last 31 games.

The Rangers showed no mercy, so Housley did.

New York beat goaltender Robin Lehner for four goals on four shots from late in the first to midway through the second. After the fourth goal, Housley sent in backup netminder Linus Ullmark.

Lehner finished with eight saves on 12 shots in 28:23.

"I can't fault Robin on any of those goals," Housley said. "Missed coverages. Missed picking up guys. I don't think he had a chance, but four goals went in on four shots. It was just trying to save him a little bit and maybe send a message to our team."

Yes, Georgiev began envisioning his first NHL shutout.

The 22-year-old from Bulgaria was appearing in just his ninth NHL game. He'd already become the first goalie in Rangers history to make at least 30 saves in each of his first five starts. He was ready to add a blanking until Reinhart found the net with 4:34 to go.

"Of course these thoughts creep into your mind," Georgiev said. "I try to push them away, 'I have to play still this many minutes.' Hopefully, it's coming next time."

The undrafted netminder spent the previous three seasons in the Finnish elite league. He has a save percentage of .908 in 31 games in the American Hockey League this season.

He turned aside 43 of the Sabres' 44 shots.

"Even if they had many shots," Georgiev said, "the guys were really battling to not let them have many good opportunities to score."

The Wraparound: Rangers 5, Sabres 1

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK – The Buffalo Sabres are used to losing to the New York Rangers. This one, however, was really bad.

After Buffalo failed to score early, the Rangers scored at will. They pounced on the Sabres, scoring five times on their opening 15 shots to roll to a 5-1 victory Saturday. The Rangers have won 13 of the last 16 games in the series.

Buffalo, of course, can't beat anyone. The Sabres have lost four straight games to fall to 23-40-12.

Jimmy Vesey beat up his "old team," scoring twice and adding an assist. The Sabres acquired the rights to Vesey two summers ago, but the forward signed with the Rangers. He has 17 goals.

No shutout: Sabres right wing Sam Reinhart ruined the shutout bid of Rangers rookie goaltender Alexandar Georgiev with 4:34 to play. Reinhart tipped Kyle Okposo's point shot for his 20th goal of the year. Georgiev was playing just his ninth NHL game.

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The Sabres have been blanked in 10 of their last 12 periods.

He shoots, he doesn't score: The Sabres bombarded Georgiev from the drop of the puck. They rolled to a 14-3 shot advantage through eight minutes. They had a 21-10 lead through one period.

The Rangers gladly scored the only two goals.

On the board: Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen was content to shove Chris Kreider behind the Buffalo net, then watched as Kreider skated to the front to easily deposit a pass from Mika Zibanejad with 3:31 left in the first. Ristolainen came back to knock Kreider to the ice after the puck was in the net.

Caught cheating: It appeared the Sabres were going to clear the defensive zone, so a few players took a step away from the net. It was a mistake. Vesey remained behind everyone, including defenseman Casey Nelson, and beat goaltender Robin Lehner with 1:58 left in the first.

Three more: The Sabres outshot the Rangers in the second period, too, though by a leaner 9-7 margin. Once again, New York was the only team to score. It built its lead to 5-0 and chased Lehner in the process.

Rush: The Rangers opened a 3-0 lead on a four-on-three rush. Vesey fed Neal Pionk for a one-timer, and the defenseman buried his first NHL goal. Pionk extended his point streak to seven games, matching the franchise record for longest run by a rookie defenseman. It was set by Brian Leetch in 1988-89.

Farewell: New York scored its fourth goal on its 12th shot, sending Lehner to the bench for backup Linus Ullmark. Zibanejad connected on his power-play chance with 8:45 gone in the second.

Another power-play goal: The Rangers made it 5-0 on another goal by Vesey. He got loose in the slot and put a low shot past Ullmark and off the post with 5:13 remaining in the second.

Same faces, different places: Coach Phil Housley dressed the same 20 players, scratching forward Justin Bailey and defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Justin Falk. The forward lines looked different, however.

Jack Eichel centered for left wing Zemgus Girgensons and right wing Kyle Okposo. Ryan O'Reilly was in the middle of Scott Wilson and Sam Reinhart. Johan Larsson was between Jordan Nolan and Jason Pominville. Evan Rodrigues centered for Benoit Pouliot and Nick Baptiste.

Back at center ice: U.S. sled hockey Olympian Luke McDermott, who took part in a ceremonial faceoff Friday in Buffalo, dropped a puck Saturday in New York. The Rangers saluted McDermott and teammate Jack Wallace for winning the gold medal in South Korea.

Salute: During a second-intermission commercial, the Rangers played a tribute video to longtime media mogul Stan Fischler, who is retiring from MSG Network after the season. He saw his first hockey game in 1939.

Next: The Sabres hopped on their charter after the game and flew to Toronto, where they'll face the Maple Leafs on Monday night. Buffalo will return home to host Detroit on Thursday in the penultimate home game of the season.

Inside the Sabres: Reviewing drive, passion of video coach Mat Myers

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 24, 2018

Mat Myers couldn't help it. He was living a dream bigger than his imagination, so of course he was going to smile every day.

Phil Housley noticed. There was something about Nashville's new video coordinator, a positivity that drew in the Predators' assistant coach.

"We built a unique relationship, Mat and I," Housley said. "Every time he came in in the morning, he had a smile on his face and was ready to go to work. We had a lot of great times."

There were dinners, concerts, coaching sessions and a Stanley Cup finals run.

"We had this immediate mutual respect for each other," Myers said. "We kind of formed this bond that was pretty close."

When Housley became coach of the Buffalo Sabres last spring, he brought Myers with him as the team's video coach.

"I saw how hard he worked and what he invested with Nashville," Housley said. "I can see the investment that he's making here. It's a great opportunity for him. It's a great opportunity for us because of what he's done up to this point and the work he puts into it."

The story of their friendship is compelling enough, especially for anyone who sees Housley brighten when talking about his pal. But there's more to the story, and it's what meets the eye.

Myers stands out in a sport where heights and weights are meticulously measured. The 27-year-old was born with achondroplasia, a form of dwarfism that occurs in approximately one in every 27,000 births. It's rarer still for someone with it to work in hockey.

But the size disparity is what started Myers on his path to the NHL. He grew up in a New Hampshire hockey family, and he loved being on the ice. At age 12, he was set to advance to a checking league. His dad, Marty, pulled him aside and said it was time to retire rather than endure the contact and physicality.

"He was concerned about my safety," Myers said. "It was obviously the right decision. It was a tough pill to swallow at the time, but in the long run it was the right decision."

While the games disappeared, Myers' love of hockey grew. He's the only one in the family with dwarfism, and his two younger brothers continued playing. Marty Myers is one of the most accomplished high school coaches in New Hampshire, so Mat kept coming to the rink.

"I've always watched and found other ways to stay involved," he said. "Coaching has always been a big part of me. My dad always allowed me into the locker room. I always admired the way he developed cultures and kind of brought teams together and motivated and built teams on and off the ice."

"Watching hockey from the stands, I've done it for a very, very long time, and now the fact that I'm watching it on video every day, it's just been something that's been easier because I've got a knowledge and experience of it that you wouldn't think someone at my age really has. I've been doing it my entire life, just watching hockey."

He really liked watching it at the University of New Hampshire. He was a season-ticket holder. When it came time to pick a college, he chose the home of the Wildcats.

Myers inquired about becoming a student-manager for the hockey team, but coach Dick Umile told him there were already four on the staff. Undeterred, Myers attended the team's practices and befriended forward Bobby Butler. The captain introduced Myers to Umile, and the coach added Myers to the group.

During his sophomore year, Myers saw the opportunity to expand his role. The tech-savvy millennial taught himself how to use video scouting software, and he became the Wildcats' video coordinator.

After graduating with a communications degree in 2013, Myers spent two seasons as the video coordinator for the U.S. women's national team. He jumped to the Predators as amateur scouting video coordinator in 2015.

"Mat was awesome, just a hard-working kid," Nashville coach Peter Laviolette said in KeyBank Center. "It was his first crack at the NHL, and he just did a terrific job. He works countless hours. He did for us, and I'm sure he's doing the same here."

One of the highlights of the countless hours in Nashville was bonding with Housley.

"Working with Phil has been awesome," Myers said. "He's very honest. He's very respectful, and he's very passionate for what he does with his players and staff."

"He's a hockey geek, and I'm a hockey geek, too, so it's just worked really, really well with the respect and trust that we've had that's been built because of it. It's good. It's fun."

Myers is certainly enjoying his expanded role in Buffalo. With the Predators, he compiled clips on opposing goalies and centers' faceoff tendencies. This year, he's widened his focus to the five-on-five play.

"I'm preparing our coaches on what we should expect to see from our opponent by watching the past three games," he said.

The NHL uploads all of its games into a digital database, and everything is searchable whether it's goals, faceoffs, hits or rushes. Myers examines breakouts and forechecks. He analyzes offensive-zone cycles and neutral-zone tendencies.

"I take all that information and try to condense it as much as possible for a package that we would show our players and prepare our players with," Myers said. "Just because it's my world, you want to show everyone everything. One of my bigger responsibilities, I think, is trying to provide a resource that's valuable and that people are going to absorb. Too much is never a good thing, so it's trying to find the right clip, the right information to give to the players."

He's found a receptive audience among the younger players.

"The league is so fast and so skilled right now that everyone is trying to find that extra inch or that extra competitive advantage," Myers said. "You've got guys now that are coming in asking for shifts and asking for specific things. They want to watch not only stuff of themselves but of other players, other role models that they kind of look up to."

"I pass around iPads for players to access whatever video they like. We can provide them with anything they need. A lot of the job is very rewarding when you see what you're teaching executed out on the ice. When the guys see it afterward, too, it gives them the reassurance."

[View image on Twitter](#)[View image on Twitter](#)[View image on Twitter](#)[View image on Twitter](#)

Phil Housley



@philhousley6

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11:02 PM - Aug 2, 2017

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Although he stopped playing more than a decade ago, Myers gets in the game on occasion. For any controversial goal, he quickly rewinds the video and informs Housley whether he should issue a coach's challenge.

"We have 20 to 30 seconds to make up our minds, analyze it and to make the call," Myers said. "We've got a really good system in place where we're able to evaluate and talk it out real quickly and give Phil the communication he needs to make a decision."

"Every inch is being analyzed. That's just a neat, new responsibility that's been added to my position that you take with a lot of pride because you can kind of impact the game in the moment."

Myers, who runs a Twitter account called @LittleMotivator, also takes pride in the fact he wasn't allowed to play hockey, but he's risen to its top level.

"There's a lot of time that gets put into video, and it's very rewarding when a coach values that time and sees it and understands it," Myers said. "I've been around coaches my entire life. This is definitely the route I've always wanted to go, so I love that I'm in the conversations with our coaching staff developing game plans and strategizing. It's been awesome."

With Botterill watching, Borgen's loss in NCAAs can get Sabres moving

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

March 23, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres are playing out the string to this season, but next year – and beyond – is already front and center for General Manager Jason Botterill.

Botterill was in the house Friday in Sioux Falls, S.D., for one of the biggest upsets in NCAA Tournament history as Atlantic Hockey champion Air Force became just the second No. 16 seed to beat the overall No. 1 with a 4-1 first-round victory over St. Cloud State.

That stunner had major ripple effects back to Buffalo as it meant the end of the junior season of St. Cloud defenseman and Sabres draft pick Will Borgen, and gives Botterill two major projects to attend to in Minnesota.

University of Minnesota center Casey Mittelstadt, the team's No. 1 pick last June, saw his freshman season end last week before the NCAAs. It didn't finish on the ice, as the Gophers were eliminated by a mind-boggling combination of six conference tournament results that went against them and dropped them just under the cut line for a tournament berth in the PairWise rankings.

With both players' seasons over, Botterill can now go to work trying to lure them to sign their professional contracts and leave school. While Sabres fans are clamoring to see Mittelstadt in Buffalo for a look, or at least in Rochester during the Calder Cup playoffs, the 19-year-old's decision could be on hold while awaiting what takes place with Minnesota's coaching search.

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Veterans Gophers bench boss Don Lucia stepped down on Tuesday after 19 seasons in the wake of the NCAA miss and declining attendance at the school's games. He won two national championships, including the 2003 Frozen Four title in Buffalo when future Sabres draft pick Thomas Vanek was the team's star.

One possible Lucia replacement? St. Cloud's Bob Motzko – who coached Mittelstadt on Team USA during the World Junior Championship in Buffalo earlier this year. With Motzko's season over, he becomes an instant top candidate in Minneapolis and Mittelstadt would have more food for thought about staying in school for another year and playing for a coach he's familiar with.

Botterill, in fact, may have more pressing work to do with Borgen in getting him signed before his senior season. NHL teams have become much more cognizant of getting their college players signed early because they can skip out on the team that drafted them and become unrestricted free agents after four years.

That's how Jimmy Vesey said no-thanks to Nashville and signed with the New York Rangers in 2016 (after also saying no to the Sabres, who had traded for his rights over the summer). And that's how former Notre Dame goalie Cal Petersen said no to Buffalo last summer and eventually signed with the Los Angeles Kings.

That was a big loss for the Sabres. Petersen leads all AHL rookie goalies with 20 wins while playing for the Ontario Reign. Among rookies still in the league, he is tied for the best save percentage at .916 and is second in goals-against average at 2.35.

The Sabres have an even more critical need for depth on defense. They definitely want to get the 6-foot-2, 195-pound Borgen into their organization and not risk losing him to free agency next summer.

Borgen, a fourth-round pick in 2015, was named the National College Hockey Conference's Defensive Defenseman of the Year this season and was also tabbed an honorable mention all-conference selection. He entered the NCAAs with two goals,

12 assists and a plus-10 rating in 35 games this season as St. Cloud State took a 25-8-6 record into the Air Force game and was tied for second in the nation in wins.

Borgen was one of four collegians to play on the U.S. Olympic team in Pyeongchang but did not play in any of the games. Team USA went 2-1-2 in the tournament and was eliminated by the Czech Republic in a shootout in the quarterfinals.

If the Sabres signed either player and brought them directly to the NHL, it would burn a year off their entry-level contracts. Another viable option could be an amateur tryout contract with Rochester and a ticket to the rest of the Amerks' season and possible ice time during the upcoming Calder Cup playoffs.

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Casey Mittelstadt/ NHL Draft/ Will Borgen

Sabres Notebook: Beaulieu takes seat; no help for Ullmark

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 23, 2018

With the Montreal Canadiens in town, Nathan Beaulieu joined old teammates for dinner Thursday.

He chewed on a healthy scratch Friday.

The Buffalo Sabres defenseman watched his two NHL teams face each other in KeyBank Center. A minor upper-body ailment kept Beaulieu away from an optional morning skate, but coach Phil Housley made it clear that was not why Beaulieu was off the ice against the Habs.

"He's a little sore, but he was not playing in this game," Housley said.

Missing the chance to face his old team was another low in a rough season for Beaulieu. Acquired from the Habs to provide offense, the defenseman has one goal and nine points in 54 games. He's also minus -20 and has been prone to defensive lapses and turnovers.

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"Beau had a tough start to the season," Housley said. "I think that affected his confidence. He had a great opportunity coming to a new team, and things just didn't work out for him.

"His last 20 games have been pretty solid. I think he's been better in his own end. I think he's trying to add to the offense, but again, there's a couple critical times and errors in the games that affected our team, and we're just giving some other guys an opportunity."

Victor Antipin and Josh Gorges returned to the lineup in place of Beaulieu and Justin Falk. Being scratched for the second time in seven games was not how Beaulieu envisioned his first year in Buffalo.

"I'm just trying to find my game," the 25-year-old said. "I obviously had a tough start with two injuries right off the bat. Lately, offensively I've been a lot better.

"Basically like the team has gone, it's been an up-and-down year for me. It's been difficult. The only thing I can do is finish strong."

Beaulieu missed seven games in October and November with what is believed to be a concussion. He missed five games in December after being decimated by the flu. It helped prohibit a positive first impression.

Beaulieu was scheduled to be a key part of a vastly improved defensive unit. It never worked out. The blue-liners have struggled, partly due to injuries to Beaulieu, Zach Bogosian and Jake McCabe.

"Bogo didn't even really get a chance to get his feet wet," Beaulieu said of the blue-liner who played just 18 games in December and January. "It was difficult for him, and Caber was playing extremely good for us when he went down. It's unfortunate."

Injuries aside, Beaulieu and the Sabres have failed to put up numbers. The team is last in scoring, and the defenseman will finish well below last year's output of four goals and 28 points.

"For me, it's just details in his game," Housley said. "Every day, how he prepares, how he comes to practice, practice habits, and I think that will translate into the games. His last 20 games, the body of work, he's going in a great direction. I think he's added to the rush. He's trying to create offense.

"Just his defensive reads and his defensive awareness, I think he's just got to get stronger in those areas."

Beaulieu will have eight games to get stronger, provided he gets back in the lineup.

"I talk to Phil a lot," Beaulieu said. "Every day matters. Practices are huge, especially this time of year just to end on a positive note and go into the summer with a clear head."

Sabres goaltender Linus Ullmark has made two starts since being recalled from Rochester. He's still waiting for someone on his team to score.

After watching from the crease as the Sabres got blanked, 4-0, by Nashville, Ullmark took the loss in Friday's 3-0 setback. He stopped 21 of 22 shots as Montreal added two empty-net goals.

The netminder says he's not frustrated by the lack of offense.

"It doesn't change what I'm going to do out there," Ullmark said. "My job is to stop pucks and stop pucks only. I'm going to try to do it for 60 or 65 (minutes), plus penalty shots. I'm going to try to keep doing that as long as it needs me to win the game."

The Sabres will complete their 15th of 16 sets of back-to-backs Saturday when they visit the New York Rangers. Buffalo is 5-7-2 in the second game.

The Rangers have won 12 of the last 15 games in the series, including the Winter Classic on New Year's Day. It's been close lately. Five of the last six have been decided by one goal, and two of the last three were decided in overtime.

Story topics: Nathan Beaulieu

The Wraparound: Canadiens 3, Sabres 0

The Buffalo News

Mike Harrington

March 23, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres' offense is back in a major funk, just above the historic ineptitude it showed around Thanksgiving.

Enduring their second shutout defeat of the week, the Sabres got 35 shots on Montreal backup Antti Niemi but were blanked by the Habs, 3-0, Friday night in KeyBank Center. Artturi Lehkonen's second-period goal stood up, allowing Montreal to break its four-game losing streak. Former Sabre Paul Byron hit the empty net with 1:15 left and Brandon Gallagher added another with 43.3 seconds to go.

The Sabres completed their six-game homestand with a 1-4-1 record -- and scored just one goal in losing the final three games. It's reminiscent of a stretch earlier in the season that saw Buffalo get shut out three straight times for the first time in franchise history. That run opened Nov. 25 with a 3-0 loss in Montreal and continued with home losses against Tampa Bay (3-0) and Pittsburgh (4-0).

The Sabres finished 0-2-2 this season against Montreal, suffering their first season sweep at the hands of the Habs since going 0-4 in 2013-14.

Key moment: The Sabres had a two-man advantage for 66 seconds in the third period and failed to score -- even though Montreal came into the game last in the NHL in penalty killing overall (74.7 percent) and on the road (66.7 percent). Niemi made saves on Jack Eichel and Rasmus Ristolainen but the big miss was by Ryan O'Reilly, who fanned with a wide-open net to the goalie's left after a slick pass from Kyle Okposo.

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"We definitely beat ourselves tonight," O'Reilly said. "They didn't do anything special. ...It's almost embarrassing. I had a chance there and missed it. It's disappointing. It was right there. I had a couple chances to tap pucks in and didn't. Those were the sparks we needed."

Mic drop: Coach Phil Housley's post-game news conference lasted just 90 seconds. No other questions were needed after Housley ripped his power play and clearly singled out Eichel for going solo during the two-man advantage.

"I think it's about time our leadership group stood up now," Housley said. "I challenged them yesterday and it definitely wasn't the response I was looking for. Lack of execution, lack of sticking with the game plan as far as what we're looking for on the 5-on-3. Some guys like to put things in their own hands and think that's gonna work. Well, it hasn't."

No home cooking: The Sabres continue to be the NHL's worst home team at 11-23-5 -- and have endured six of their seven shutouts this season downtown. They've lost back-to-back here to the NHL's two worst road teams in Arizona (10-18-7) and Montreal (10-24-4). The Habs were 0-5-2 in their previous seven road games and 1-11-3 in their previous 15.

In the nets: Niemi posted his first shutout with Montreal and his first in 83 games, since a 4-0 win over Chicago for the Dallas Stars on Dec. 22, 2015. Linus Ullmark made 21 saves for the Sabres. Robin Lehner served as the backup. Chad Johnson, who left Wednesday's loss to Arizona after taking a puck to the head but did not get a concussion, skated in the morning but remains day to day.

Fast start: The Sabres had nine of the game's first 10 shots on goal and outshot Montreal, 11-6, in a scoreless first period. The Habs had just five shot attempts over the first 14 1/2 minutes and barely challenged Ullmark at all.

"We had the start we wanted," Housley said. "That's the response I was looking for. We came out and played a really solid first period, stuck with the game plan and got pucks to the net. We hit a crossbar and that's just where we're at right now as far as scoring."

Breaking the ice: Montreal took the lead at 4:56 of the second period as Lehtonen scored his 10th goal of the season by taking a rebound off the back boards and stuffing it behind Ullmark. Ristolainen was caught in no-man's land on the play, unable to get to the puck or to Lehtonen in front.

Artturi Lehtonen gives the Canadiens a 1-0 lead with a second-period goal. (James P. McCoy/Buffalo News).

No Bailey: Forward Justin Bailey was a surprise healthy scratch after getting a chance to play on Eichel's line Wednesday against Arizona. Bailey had played in five straight games since being recalled from Rochester, scoring once. He had three shots in 11:32 against Arizona.

"Just changes," Housley said prior to the game. "We've lost the last two games in a row. I think he's playing hard, he's playing physical, but we haven't won in the last two games."

No Friday fun: This was only the seventh Friday home game of the season, a radical departure from what used to be Buffalo's prime home date. The Sabres had not hosted a Friday game since their Dec. 22 win over Philadelphia.

Counting the House: The Sabres announced 18,594 tickets were sold. Many of the folks were dressed in red (wearing Canadiens jerseys) or dark blue (disguised as an empty seat).

Anniversary of big trade: Friday was the 19th anniversary of the Sabres sending defenseman Mike Wilson to Florida for popular blueliner Rhett Warrener and a fifth-round draft pick that June. Who did the pick turn into? Longtime Buffalo goalie Ryan Miller, then of Michigan State.

Up next: The Sabres hustled to the airport after the game for the flight to New York, where they will open a two-game road trip against the Rangers Saturday night in Madison Square Garden. They play Monday in Toronto against the Maple Leafs, who host Detroit Saturday in Air Canada Centre. Toronto enters that game holding a franchise-record 12-game winning streak at home.

Story topics: Buffalo Sabres/ Montreal Canadiens/ The Wraparound

At 47 and 'with a bullet in his head,' Clint Malarchuk shares his heartbreaking story

The Buffalo News

John Vogl

March 23, 2018

Former Sabres goaltender Clint Malarchuk is reconnecting with a sports audience in an effort to help those fighting with mental health issues — just like him.

Malarchuk shared his story of suicide attempts, depression and injury, already shared in his vivid autobiography in 2014. The first-person article for the Players' Tribune is titled "Bleeding Out," a reference to the 1989 night when he took a skate blade to his jugular vein in Memorial Auditorium and nearly died on the ice.

Here are excerpts from the article:

"How I ended up as a 47-year-old man with a bullet in his head and bag full of prescription medications may go all the way back to my early childhood for all I know, but it definitely has a lot of its roots in what happened on the night of March 22, 1989.

"I was the starting goalie for the Sabres at the time, and we were playing against the Blues at the old Aud in Buffalo. At first it was just like any other game. We were up 1-0 in the opening period, and I wasn't seeing a ton of action in goal. Then the puck goes down into the corner to my right, and their guy gets to it immediately. I take a look over my shoulder and I can see one of their forwards rushing the net on the opposite side. Steve Tuttle. He's a little ahead of our defenseman, so I know a pass is coming that way. I also know that I have to push hard off my post and get across to the other post as quickly as I can. Almost as soon as I get over there, though, Steve gets knocked over ... and that's when I see his skate come up.

"I felt it hit my mask, but there was no pain, and I didn't think much of it in that moment.

"Then I saw the blood.

"When you watch the video, it's hard to really make out, but those first few squirts from my neck? We're talking five or six feet in distance. That's how far the blood flew.

"I knew it was bad at that point.

"But there was still no pain. And I was definitely expecting it to come, believe me, because within seconds the blood was just gurgling out of me.

"So this is it, Clint. You are going to die. Tonight. Right here. In Buffalo.

"That's what I was thinking as I watched the blood splatter and stain that goalie crease.

"But the weird thing was, as I'm thinking that, my main focus wasn't on saving my life. Here are the two things that were on my mind ...

"First, I thought about something I'd been told going all the way back to peewee league: If you get hurt, don't lay there on the ice like a weakling. Get up and go. Get yourself off that ice. Show that you're tough.

"So that was the first thing. I didn't want to die on the ice, out there in front of all those people.

"But the other thing I thought about was my mom watching the game back home in Calgary on the satellite dish.

"I didn't want my mum to see me die on TV."

...

"When Richard Zednik had his throat slashed by a skate during a regular season game up in Buffalo in 2008 — same city, a full 19 years after my accident — I didn't think it would have much of an impact on me.

"Boy was I ever wrong.

"By that time, I'd been dealing with my mental health issues for several years. There had been good days and bad days ... and some really bad days, but I was surviving. And doing the best that I could. I'd even done some work I was very proud of as an NHL goalie coach.

"But I had come to rely on medication to get me through, and by that point the pills I was taking weren't working like they had in the past.

"So Zednik happens, and immediately I'm getting bombarded with interview requests and reliving my accident all over again, and....

"It didn't go well for me.

"All of a sudden I'm being asked to watch Richard's injury again and again, and then my own. The whole time, I thought I was O.K., but it affected me on the inside, you know?

"Something got triggered for me after that Zednik injury.

"I started drinking heavily again. And self-medicating.

"Before long, I found myself being checked into hospitals and mental health facilities. Not ever staying long enough to get any help or get my feet under me."

...

"These days I speak to groups all over the country about mental health issues. I tell them that there is no shame in needing help, or in asking for that help in whatever way you are able. I get emails and Facebook messages every day from people who have heard me speak, or have read my book, and when I'm speaking about these issues or responding to those messages, I feel like I'm on top of the world. Just knowing that I might be able to help someone in their journey through life is enough to make me so happy.

"I still struggle with mental health issues; I fully admit that. I sometimes even still get those nightmares where I see Steve Tuttle's skate come up in super slow motion and slash my throat. (My last one was about six months ago, if you're wondering.) And when I'm not out speaking to groups, or things just kind of slow down, I can get sad. But it's not the deep, deep depression like what I used to experience. And, in fact, maybe I'm just a normal person who struggles with a down day, or with distractions, or the everyday upsetting things in life. You know, like the sun sets at 4:45 or something in the middle of winter, and then I kind of get a bit depressed

"Just like everybody else in the world."

NHL

✓

@NHL

"Do not do what I did. Don't live in silence. Please don't."

- @cmalarchuk <http://atnhl.com/2G1CLQ0>

3:35 PM - Mar 22, 2018

Malarchuk to attend Mental Health Awareness Night hosted by Avalanche
When former NHL goaltender Clint Malarchuk woke up from a coma in 2008, in the intensive care unit, he felt he had been spared. And he felt there was a reason. It was his third brush with death, the...

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The Sabres sign Will Borgen

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 25, 2018

Toronto, ON (WGR 550) - Will Borgen is leaving school one year early and has signed a three-year entry-level contract with the Sabres.

Buffalo selected the 21-year-old in the fourth round on the 2015 Entry Draft, giving the Sabres and Tim Murray three players out of that draft. The first two, of course, were Jack Eichel and Brendan Guhle. Fifth round pick Devante Stephens has split time this season between Rochester and Cincinnati.

The defenseman played three seasons at St. Cloud State, which was ranked number one in the country until being upset by 16th-seeded Air Force in the NCAA Tournament.

I watched Borgen last season in Denver and he plays more than any defenseman on that team. He went against the eventual NCAA champs and played very well that night.

Borgen is not what you'd call an offensive defenseman, but he plays against the other team's best players. In 106 games with St. Cloud State, he scored five goals and 36 assists for 41 points.

This season, Borgen was named the NCHC Defensive Defenseman of the Year.

Borgen didn't get into a game, but he was one of four collegiate players to make the United States' Olympic Team. He also won a bronze medal for Team USA at the World Junior Tournament.

Borgen shoots right, joining Rasmus Ristolainen, Casey Nelson and Zach Bogosian on the right defense depth chart.

The Amerks signed another Sabres draft pick and former St. Cloud State player to an ATO. Judd Peterson is 24-years-old and had 37 career goals in his four-year collegiate career. This season with the Huskies, he had six goals and 12 assists for 18 points in 40 games.

Peterson was taken in the seventh round of the 2012 Entry Draft.

The Sabres had Sunday off in Toronto.

Rangers blast the Sabres 5-1

WGR550

March 24, 2018

As the end of the season nears, the Buffalo Sabres put out a very poor effort against the New York Rangers on Saturday night at Madison Square Garden. The Sabres lost in New York 5-1, despite outshooting the Rangers 44-23.

Here's how the game played out:

First Period:

11:00 - The Sabres are dominating the Rangers. Clear shots by Jordan Nolan and Ryan O'Reilly in the last two shifts. Shots are 14-3 in favor of Buffalo.

3:45 - RANGERS GOAL. Chris Kreider fights through traffic to bang it home. Not good that the Sabres are trailing after the period they're having. 1-0 Rangers.

2:30 - Nick Baptiste's speed is noteworthy. He emerged from a group of skaters trying to get the puck, and turned it into a nice zone entry for the Sabres.

1:58 - RANGERS GOAL. The Rangers take a 2-0 lead. Jimmy Vesey goes to the net and tips a Mats Zuccarello shot to himself, and puts it into the empty net. Robin Lehner tried to clear the puck out from behind the net, but failed to do so. 2-0 Rangers.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 16:29 - Chris Kreider (15) (Jesper Fast, Mika Zibanejad); 18:02 - Jimmy Vesey (16) (Mats Zuccarello)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: NONE

NYR: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 21, NYR - 10

Second Period:

15:59 - RANGERS GOAL. Undrafted college free agent defenseman Neal Pionk nets his first career NHL goal on a beautiful tick-tac-toe play. Pionk has played great for the Rangers with 12 points in 11 games coming into the night and is now on a 7-game point streak. 3-0 Rangers.

11:30 - RANGERS GOAL. Jordan Nolan takes a dumb penalty, and Zibanejad makes them pay immediately. Marco Scandella completely flubs on the pass coming across the ice, and Zibanejad had the whole net to shoot at. Scandella got in a fight just after, and Robin Lehner was pulled for Linus Ullmark. 4-0 Rangers.

9:54 - Neal Pionk is having a great night for the Rangers. Again he jumps into the rush for a one timer, this time it was stopped by Linus Ullmark. He picked up an assist on the goal by Zibanejad.

5:13 - RANGERS GOAL. It's getting ugly. After Jack Eichel takes a slashing penalty out of frustration, Jimmy Vesey gets a goal from the slot on the powerplay. It came after a nice pass from Ryan Spooner, one of the pieces New York got in the Rick Nash trade.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

NYR: 3:59 - Neal Pionk (1) (Kevin Hayes, Jimmy Vesey); 8:45 - Mika Zibanejad (PP) (27) (Chris Kreider, Neal Pionk); 14:47 - Jimmy Vesey (PP) (17) (Ryan Spooner, Kevin Hayes)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 8:23 - Jordan Nolan (2 min., holding); 9:17 - Marco Scandella (5 min., fighting); 13:28 - Jack Eichel (2 min., slashing)
NYR: 9:17 - Peter Holland (5 min., fighting); 10:25 - Chris Kreider (2 min., holding)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 9 (30); NYR - 7 (17)

Third Period:

16:00 - Phil Housley is clearly upset with the core of his team as he's taken Ryan O'Reilly, Sam Reinhart, and Kyle Okposo off the powerplay.

11:23 - Looked like Johan Larsson broke the shutout streak for the Sabres, but no. It continues.

5:00 - O'Reilly, Reinhart, and Okposo are back on the powerplay unit.

4:33 - SABRES GOAL. Okposo rips one from the point, and Sam Reinhart perfectly tips the puck past the goaltender. Sabres finally have a goal. 5-1 Rangers.

End of Game

Rangers 5; Sabres - 1

Goal Summary:

BUF: 15:26 - Sam Reinhart (20) (PP) (Kyle Okposo, Ryan O'Reilly)

NYR: NONE

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 15:33 - Jordan Nolan (2 min., tripping)

NYR: 4:50 - Ryan Sproul (2 min., hooking); 14:13 - Mika Zibanejad (2 min., tripping)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 14 (44); NYR - 6 (23)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 10 saves; Robin Lehner - 8 saves

NYR: Alexandar Georgiev - 43 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 1 for 3 (33.3%)

NYR: 2 for 3 (66.6%)

What's Next:

The Sabres make their first trip to Toronto of the season to face the Maple Leafs on Monday night. Puck-drop for Sabres vs. Leafs is at 7 p.m. on Monday night. The Paul William Beltz Pre-Game Show will start at 6 p.m. right here on the radio home of the Buffalo Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Sabres' leadership group respond to Housley's comments

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 24, 2018

New York, NY (WGR 550) - Phil Housley called out his leaders after Friday's home loss to Montreal. Housley said, "I think it's about time our leadership group stood up. I challenged them yesterday and it definitely wasn't the response I was looking for."

Jack Eichel is one of those team leaders and he has no goals in his four games since coming back. He said, "I just need to be better, I'm not happy with my game, so I look forward to being better."

Housley isn't in the habit of calling out players publicly, but Eichel said he's not concerned about it, "It doesn't really affect me at all, we're all professionals here, we're all grown men and nobody's feelings are being hurt, so I don't think anyone has a problem with that."

"Holding people accountable needs to happen and there's no reason why it shouldn't happen here."

Kyle Okposo has struggled this season. He's never really been the same since his major concussion at the end of last season. The winger said, "I think we all can step up here in our own ways and I put more pressure on myself than anybody else does."

Okposo is always honest when speaking with me and I assume it's the same in the room. Okposo said the way this team is going has to change, "The direction of the team is moving in a direction that we all don't want it to, it's maybe going sideways and it seems like it's been going on a long time."

"We've had new management, new coaches here this year and we've got to really look at ourselves. It's something that you have to have on a team and I think Phil's doing a pretty good job of holding guys accountable, but I think we have to do a better job with each other."

There are guys in that room who aren't going to listen to anybody. I don't know why you wouldn't respect a man like Okposo and I wondered if he just feels like he's spinning his wheels, "Personally I feel like if I have something to say that guys listen."

"I've been around for a little while now and I feel like I have the respect of the guys and I don't say a whole lot. If something needs to be said, then I say it, but I'm not a big rah, rah guy, but it's tough. When you're not playing the way you want to really lean on that leadership role, but I have to, I know I can do it, but I've got to do a better job of holding guys accountable."

The young guys see all this and it certainly doesn't help their growth. Okposo does worry about that, but said he knows what they're going through.

We all know Jason Botterill has a big job in front of him. He talks about changing the culture and he has a huge culture to change. The Rangers game of course did nothing to change that, just reinforce it.

From the Locker Room: Sabres-Rangers

WGR550

March 24, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres were throttled by the New York Rangers on Saturday night to the tune of a 5-1 drubbing at Madison Square Garden.

In a span of time between the end of the first period and the opening moments of the second, the Rangers scored goals on four consecutive shots en route to the blowout victory.

Buffalo starting goaltender Robin Lehner was pulled in the second period after allowing four goals on just 12 shots. Reliever Linus Ullmark allowed one goal the rest of the way.

Sabres forward Sam Reinhart tallied the lone goal for the blue and gold late in the third period on the powerplay.

Go inside the locker room to hear from Marco Scandella, Ryan O'Reilly, Sam Reinhart and Phil Housley following the loss.

Marco Scandella:

Short and sweet: "We have to get better with our decision making without the puck. Tonight was embarrassing."

Play for one another: "We have to respect each other. Tonight's not good enough at all. We have to get better. We have to wake up tomorrow, and get better. Shot totals don't matter, it's our play without the puck."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-24-marco-scandella-post-game>

Ryan O'Reilly:

Good start fell apart: "At the start we were doing things well. Then obviously, tonight's problem came to the forefront. Our defense as a team did us in and suddenly it got out of hand."

New York on cruise control: "We made it too easy on them tonight. They were flying; they were everywhere. They got their confidence and then took it and ran."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-24-ryan-oreilly-post-game>

Sam Reinhart:

Mellow 20th goal celebration: "It would've been nicer to have that one impact the game a little more."

Frustrated, pressure, all of the above: "I think everyone's gripping the sticks a little too tight at the same time. That doesn't lead to much success. Everyone knows that it's happening... two goals in the last four games. I think we have to be a little more urgent in all aspects of the game. These last few games have been a great example of how tough it can be to get pucks to go in the net."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-24-sam-reinhart-post-game>

Phil Housley:

Foot-race: "Guys were beating us up the ice all night. That goes back to having respect for our own end and our own goaltender. I can't fault Robin on any of those goals. His pulling was more of an attempt to send a message to the team."

Ho-hum mentality: "We've got a little bit of that urgency lately. We're forcing things instead of letting the game come to us. There has to be a serious urgency to play better defensively all around."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-24-phil-housley-post-game>

The Sabres will try to, at least, score a goal against the Rangers

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 24, 2018

New York, NY (WGR 550) - Just when you thought the Sabres can't sink any lower, they go out and score just one goal in three games.

It's no embarrassment to be shut out by Pekka Rinne, but they were also shut out by one of the worst goaltenders in the NHL in Antti Niemi. The Canadiens netminder is on his third team this year, but had a pretty easy night as the Sabres either shot at him, missed open nets or shot wide.

Buffalo got just one goal on Arizona's Antti Ranta.

The Sabres head to Madison Square Garden with two home losses to the two worst road teams in the NHL. Buffalo ended its six game home stand with one win and five losses.

In the win, they scored five goals on Chicago, in the five losses they scored four.

The Sabres are last in the league scoring 2.32 goals per-game. The next worst team is Arizona at 2.46.

In the four games since returning from an ankle injury, Jack Eichel doesn't have a goal and has just one assist. Ryan O'Reilly is pointless in five out of six games and six out of eight while the other captain, Kyle Okposo is pointless in five straight games. On Friday night, Phil Housley had had enough of his leaders, "I think it's about time our leadership group stood up. I challenged them yesterday and it definitely wasn't the response I was looking for."

The Sabres had a perfect chance to tie Montreal when they had a 1:06 five-on-three in the third period. They had two chances, but Eichel shot wide on a one-timer and O'Reilly fanned on a shot at an open net. Housley hated what he saw, "That was a perfect time for us, but the lack of execution, the lack of sticking with the game plan as far as what we're looking for five-on-three, but some guys like to put things in their own hands and think that's going to work, well it hasn't."

Linus Ullmark has played in the last three games and the Sabres have not scored a goal for him in his 150 minutes of work. Ullmark is 1-2-0 with a 2.01 goals against and .938 save percentage.

There was no morning skate in New York on Saturday.

The Rangers decided to trade away some players at the trade deadline and are now seventh in the Metropolitan Division tied with the Islanders at 72 points. Both teams trail Carolina by three and New Jersey by 12.

The Rangers have lost three straight and six out of eight.

Mats Zuccarello is their leading scorer with 49 points in 73 games. Mika Zibanejad leads New York in goals with 26.

The Rangers have been getting a look at goaltender Alexandar Georgiev. The 22-year-old was signed last July after playing three seasons with TPS Turku. So far he's 3-3-1 with a 3.09 goals against and .918 save percentage.

Henrik Lundqvist missed the last game with a back/neck problem.

Buffalo has lost twice to the Rangers with the Winter Classic loss coming in overtime.

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley and two players.

Sabres shut out by Montreal 3-0

WGR550

Pat Malacaro

March 23, 2018

Linus Ullmark made 21 saves for the Buffalo Sabres, but it was not enough as the Montreal Canadiens shut out Buffalo 3-0 on Friday night at KeyBank Center.

Here's a look at how the game played out:

First Period:

15:43 - It looks like Buffalo has picked things up where they left off on Wednesday. Slow start to this game as neither team is really controlling the early play. The Sabres do have the only three shots of the game to this point, however.

12:35 - Montreal has recorded their first shot on goal, but Buffalo leads in that category 6-1 so far. Brendan Guhle has been active along the blue line, trying to get the puck through from the point. That is one thing I have noticed so far.

5:31 - This has been a very vanilla period thus far. Scott Wilson had the best chance when he rang a shot off of the cross bar. Antti Niemi was bailed out by the pipes.

4:05 - Kyle Okposo is called for the first minor penalty of the game as he will sit for slashing. He got the stick close to the hands of a Montreal forward, but I am not sure there was much contact. Either way, Buffalo heads to the penalty kill.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

MTL: NONE

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 15:55 - Kyle Okposo (2 min., slashing)

MTL: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 11, MTL - 6

Second Period:

16:18 - For as vanilla and bland as the opening twenty minutes were, Buffalo was doing enough to be the better team and dictate play. That has continued on here in the middle frame. They still have a stranglehold on the shots on goal with a 3-1 edge early on, 14-7 overall.

15:04 - CANADIENS GOAL. Montreal finally gets some good, sustained zone time and they make it count. Artturi Lehkonen is able to pick the puck off of the end boards and score the game's first goal. Now Buffalo will have to play from behind. 1-0 MTL.

9:40 - The Canadiens found their legs after scoring the opening goal of the game. They own the shots on goal by a 5-4 advantage, meaning they have out-shot Buffalo 4-1 over the last seven minutes.

4:26 - Johan Larsson was called for a penalty but his teammates were able to kill it off. I never felt like they were in danger while down a man over the two minutes.

End of Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

MTL: 4:56 0 Artturi Lehkonen (10) (Jacob De La Rose, Alex Galchenyuk)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: 12:00 - Johan Larsson (2 min., slashing)

MTL: NONE

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 10 (21), MTL - 11 (17)

Third Period:

11:29 - Buffalo has had four or five "Grade-A" scoring chances on their first power play of the night, but fail to get the game-tying goal. Niemi has been good, he has also been a little lucky tonight. However, if the Sabres continue to get the puck to the net the way that they have been in this frame, I do not think it will be long before they get a goal.

7:36 - There has been a good pace and energy to this game over the last period and a half. The game may have started slow, but the "intensity" has definitely ratched up as this game has gone along.

4:03 - Shots are 10-4 in favor of the home team. This is another night where they have been the better team for the majority of the game, but just cannot get that first goal to break this one open. If they can finally figure our Niemi, I think they will score more than one.

2:08 - Time is running out for Buffalo, I would expect Linus Ullmark out of the goal for an extra attacker very soon.

1:15 - CANADIENS GOAL. Former Sabre Paul Byron gets the goal that should seal each team's fate tonight. He was able to chip the puck ahead, and when it hit the goal post, was able to shovel it into an empty net. 2-0 MTL.

:43.3 - CANADIENS GOAL. If there was any doubt, Brendan Gallagher just helped end it. 3-0 MTL.

End of Game

Montreal 3, Buffalo 0

Goal Summary:

BUF: NONE

MTL: 18:45 - Paul Byron (18) ENG (Jonathan Drouin, Charles Hudon). 19:16 - Brendan Gallagher (27) ENG (Logan Shaw)

Penalty Summary:

BUF: NONE

MTL: 5:58 - Nikita Scherbak (2 min., tripping). 6:53 - Artturi Lehkonen (2 min., tripping)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 14 (35), MTL - 7 (24)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 21 saves

MTL: Antti Niemi - 35 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2 (0%)

MTL: 0 for 2 (0%)

Three Stars:

Antti Niemi - MTL

Artturi Lehkonen - BUF

Linus Ullmark - BUF

What's Next:

The Sabres head out on the road for a couple of games away from KeyBank Center. First up is a trip to Madison Square Garden to take on the New York Rangers at seven o'clock on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol begins at six o'clock.

The Sabres try to erase the bad games at home

WGR550

Paul Hamilton

March 23, 2018

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres were so bad on Wednesday against Arizona, I wondered if some of these guys realize they're playing for their NHL lives.

Not only are players looking to impress Jason Botterill, they need to impress other teams just to stay in the league. Jason Pominville isn't sure his teammates realize what they're up against, "I hope everyone gets it, I mean everyone should have each other's back, but right now, it's just not happening that way, we should all be in this together and fighting for each other and try to help a teammate out for here or for somewhere else and just have a little more pride in that area as well and the rest will figure itself out."

The first period on Friday against Montreal was like night and day from the Coyotes game. The players looked like they were playing for each other and were working hard at both ends. As usual, it didn't result in any goals, but 10:23 into the period, Buffalo was outshooting Montreal 8-1.

The Sabres made one of the worst goaltenders in the NHL looks like Carey Price, but that's normal. Antti Niemi just got a piece of a Marco Scandella shot as he was open down the slot. Scott Wilson followed that up by hitting the crossbar.

Casey Nelson made a great decision to pinch through the right wing circle and had two teammates right on top of the crease. Instead of using the open lane to the net, Nelson took it around back and the play died there. Again, no shot mentality.

Montreal got it's best chance with three seconds left in the period. Scandella lunged for a puck at the red line and Brandon Gallagher skated right through him to go in alone. Linus Ullmark was aggressive with how he challenged the play and Gallagher shot high.

The first 10 minutes of the second period were more like the Arizona game. The Sabres stopped working and Montreal got some great chances on Ullmark. The Canadiens got a lucky break when Jacob de la Rose's shot went off the back wall and right to Artturi Lehkonen who had a wide open net.

The Sabres finally kicked it into gear, but it was time to make Niemi look like Price again. Sam Reinhart was alone in front and shot it right into Niemi's pads, twice.

Ryan O'Reilly came off the bench and stole the puck to walk in alone. He deked Niemi out of his jock, but couldn't tuck it back out in front and into the unattended net.

Jack Eichel had a good chance through the left circle but was stopped. Eichel hasn't scored a goal since coming back from his ankle injury.

After 40 minutes, Wilson had six hits while Zemgus Girgensons had five.

In the third period, the Sabres had a golden opportunity to tie the game with a 1:06 five-on-three advantage. Eichel ripped a one-time from the left circle that went wide and then O'Reilly fanned on an open net on a pass from Kyle Okposo.

I don't mean to rip into Niemi, but he certainly didn't stand on his head to get a 35 save shutout. The Sabres are just so bad at scoring goals.

Buffalo started the game well as I said earlier, they got away from it. Phil Housley said, "We have good success and then we get a little bit of cheat in our game."

For those of you that think the reason this team is bad is because it doesn't have a captain, I keep telling you there are no captains in that room. Housley said, "It's about time our leadership group stepped up now, that definitely wasn't the response I was looking for. Some guys like to put things into their own hands and think it's going to work and it hasn't."

I think that says it all.

From the Locker Room: Sabres-Canadiens

WGR550

March 23, 2018

The Buffalo Sabres' scoring woes continued on Friday night as they were felled by the Montreal Canadiens by a final score of 3-0 at KeyBank Center.

It was a one-goal game through 58 minutes of play before Paul Byron and Brendan Gallagher netted consecutive empty-net scores to extend the eventual victorious effort for the Canadiens.

Linus Ullmark stopped all but one shot for the Sabres while he was on the ice, but he was bested by Montreal's Antti Niemi, who recorded his first shutout since 2015.

Go inside the locker room to hear from Jason Pominville, Linus Ullmark, Ryan O'Reilly and Phil Housley following the loss.

Jason Pominville:

The start: "I thought we had a good start... we played fast. It was something we talked about. Good looks came from it. Montreal came back with a push and found a way to get a bounce unfortunately."

Look in the mirror: "To a man, we have to look at ourselves and see if we're really truly working at things or just assuming we're getting better each day."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-23-jason-pominville-post-game>

Linus Ullmark:

Tough break: "It was a fluky goal, but until I get a good look at it on the plane, I'm going to feel like I did something other than stopping a puck for this team."

On the rest of the team's offensive woes: "My job is to stop pucks and stop pucks only. That won't change my mentality, I'm going to keep trying to do my job best I can for 60, or 65 minutes of play."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-23-linus-ullmark-post-game>

Ryan O'Reilly:

5-on-3 missed opportunity: "I had a chance there and missed it. It's disappointing. That would've been the spark we needed to change the game, but it didn't happen. It's my fault there."

Own worst enemies: "We definitely beat ourselves tonight. They didn't do anything special tonight... it's almost embarrassing. We could've at least made a game out of it."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-23-ryan-oreilly-post-game>

Phil Housley:

Straying: "We had the start we wanted. We came out and played a really solid first period and stuck with the gameplan. From there, not as much... guys seemed to take matters into their own hands."

Wanting to take a step forward in the leadership department: "I think it's about time our leadership group stepped up. We challenged them yesterday, and this definitely wasn't the response we were looking for."

AUDIO: <http://www.wgr550.com/media/audio-channel/3-23-phil-housley-post-game>

Sabres, Maple Leafs going in opposite directions as rivals meet

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 26, 2018

TORONTO – Given the Maple Leafs' torrid run and the Buffalo Sabres' futility, tonight could get ugly.

Right now, having won two straight games and six of the last seven, the Maple Leafs are scorching. They've scored a whopping 29 goals in that stretch.

They've won a franchise-record 13 straight games at home. They haven't lost at the Air Canada Centre in more than two months.

For some perspective, the Sabres have won 11 home games all season.

The Maple Leafs, who are celebrating their 100th anniversary, can set the franchise's all-time single-season wins record tonight by earning their 46th.

"It's a pretty cool accomplishment for a team that's been around a really long time," center Tyler Bozak, the Maple Leafs' longest-tenured player, told reporters in Toronto on Sunday. "It just gives us a lot of confidence, which is something you need at this time of year. I think we're doing a good job of building that."

The Sabres, meanwhile, have completely imploded during their four-game losing streak, getting outscored a stunning 16-2.

So will tonight be a blowout? Can the Sabres at least make the outcome respectable? They beat the Maple Leafs 5-3 on March 5 in Buffalo. But Toronto, which dropped its fourth straight contest that night, has only lost once since then. The Maple Leafs won 5-2 on March 15 in Buffalo.

Incredibly, they've done much of their damage without slick center Auston Matthews, who recently missed a month with a shoulder injury.

Of course, showcasing a balanced attack means losing a player as talented as Matthews probably won't stymie your season. Eleven Maple Leafs have compiled 40 or more points. Five have scored at least 20 goals.

Three Sabres – centers Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly and winger Sam Reinhart – have all hit the 20-goal and 40-point mark. No one else, however, has scored more than 13 times.

Eichel, the Sabres' leading scorer with 22 goals and 54 points in 60 games, has a season-high four-game point drought entering tonight. Since returning from a high-ankle sprain March 17, he has just one assist.

Before Reinhart's late power-play goal in Saturday's ugly 5-1 road loss to the New York Rangers, the NHL's lowest-scoring team (2.3 a game) had gone 163:44 without scoring a goal.

Since beating Chicago 5-3 on March 17, the Sabres have converted only two of the 144 shots they've pumped on goal. That's a shooting percentage of just 1.4 percent!

So why can't the Sabres, who averaged 36 shots an outing last week, finish more opportunities? They don't get gritty and stand in front of the net enough.

"We're not getting there enough to score in this league at this time of year," Sabres coach Phil Housley told reporters Saturday in New York. "At five-on-five, even strength, you have to be willing to go there, especially the first guy and then try to take the goalie's eyes."

Having scored only 173 goals through 75 games, at their current pace, the Sabres would score 189 goals this season, 10 fewer than a year ago. The Maple Leafs have already scored 248 times. The Sabres haven't scored 200 goals in a full season since 2011-12.

Last week, Housley lamented how his goalies must play a perfect game to win. On Saturday, the Sabres outshot the Rangers 21-10 in the first, yet ended the period trailing 2-0.

After four straight shots beat goalie Robin Lehner, Housley mercifully yanked him.

“I can’t fault Robin for any of those goals, missed coverages, missed picking up guys,” Housley said. “I don’t think he had a chance on any of those. When four goals went in (on) four shots, it was just trying to save (him) a little bit and maybe send a message to our team.”

Reinhart’s goal was first the Sabres scored for goalie Linus Ullmark, Lehner’s replacement, in 175:44 of action over four games.

Notes: The Sabres had Sunday off. ... Tonight is the Sabres’ first visit to Toronto since Feb. 11, 2017. ... Eichel and Matthews, two young American stars, will face each other for the first time this season. ... The Sabres have won at least 46 games in a season eight times. The last time, 2006-07, they won a franchise record 53 contests.

Sabres sign defenseman Will Borgen to entry-level contract

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 25, 2018

BUFFALO – The Sabres have signed Will Borgen, one of their top defense prospects, to a three-year, entry-level contract, the team announced today.

Borgen, who just finished his junior season at St. Cloud State University, will sign an amateur tryout and report to the AHL Rochester Americans. His NHL contract will kick in next season.

The Sabres selected the 6-foot-2, 188-pound Borgen in the fourth round, 92nd overall, in 2015.

Borgen, 21, compiled five goals and 41 points in 106 career NCAA appearances, including two goals and 15 points in 36 contests this season. He was named the National College Hockey Conference's top defensive defenseman for 2017-18.

He earned a spot on Team USA's Olympic squad for the recent Ryeongchang Games, although he didn't play.

On Friday, Air Force upset No. 1 seed St. Cloud 4-1 in the first round of the NCAA Tournament.

In other news, the Amerks also signed forward Judd Peterson, Borgen's St. Cloud teammate, to an amateur tryout today.

The Sabres drafted Peterson in the seventh round, 224th overall, in 2012.

Peterson, 24, compiled 37 goals and 65 points in 151 career NCAA games over four years. He had six goals and 18 points in 40 contests this season.

The 6-foot, 193-pound Peterson was one of two captains for St. Cloud this season.

Phil Housley calls out Sabres' leadership group following loss to Canadiens

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 24, 2018

BUFFALO – For the Sabres, the NHL's worst team, any minor success is usually fleeting. A bad period quickly overshadows the good one.

For the opening 20 minutes Friday, the Sabres responded strongly after two home losses, following their game plan and pumping pucks on net.

Then they started freelancing following a scoreless first period, fell behind and lost 3-0 to the hapless Montreal Canadiens.

Watching it all happen again angered Phil Housley so much the rookie coach called out his top players for the first time all season.

“Even though it's 1-0 game, there's still plenty of time to go in the game, and again we're forcing things that aren't there and we fed it to them,” Housley said. “It wasn't anything that Montreal did, it's what we didn't do once again.

“I think it's about time our leadership group stood up now. I challenged them yesterday, definitely wasn't the response I was looking for.”

The leadership group – the Sabres have four alternate captains and no captain – has done zilch recently. The Sabres have scored once during their three-game losing streak.

Of course, they generated some terrific chances Friday. But center Ryan O'Reilly couldn't convert three glorious opportunities. Then trailing 1-0 in the third period, they mustered only two shots during a 1:06 two-man advantage against the league's 30th-ranked penalty killers.

“If you look at the percentages, the teams that score on their five-on-threes usually have good success,” Housley said. “That was a perfect time for us. Lack of execution, lack of sticking with the game plan as far as what we're looking for five-on-three.

“Some guys like to put things in their own hands and think that's going to work. Well, it hasn't.”

Housley was clearing talking about center Jack Eichel, who zoomed into the slot and shot the puck instead of setting up on the two-man advantage.

O'Reilly, meanwhile, missed a prime chance on the five-on-three.

“I had a couple chances to tap pucks in and didn't,” O'Reilly said of his night. “Those were the sparks we needed, it would've helped us take over the game, but it didn't happen. I got to be better. It's my fault there were some money chances to score and get us going and didn't.”

Canadiens goalie Antti Niemi, who's on his third team this season, recorded his first shutout. None of his 35 saves before the crowd of 18,594 inside KeyBank Center were notable.

O'Reilly said the Sabres “definitely beat ourselves tonight.”

“They didn't do anything special,” he said. “We just missed the chances, didn't handle the puck the way I wanted to tonight, I think the other guys felt the same. It's almost embarrassing. We could've at least made a game of it.”

The Sabres could've won the game if they simply kept playing the style they showcased early. Instead, the Canadiens, who snapped a four-game losing streak, earned just their 10th road victory this season.

“We had the start we wanted,” said Housley, whose team held an early 10-2 shot advantage. “That's the response we were looking for. We came out and we played a really solid first period and just stuck with the game plan and got pucks to the net. We hit a crossbar, it's just where we're at right now as far as scoring.

“But then in the second period, we get away from it. That’s the thing I’ve talked about in the past about handling that success. We have good success, recognize what we get and then we totally get away from it, and then we’re forcing pucks and turning pucks over. We have a little bit of cheat in our game, we’re on the wrong side and that’s what happens.”

Winger Jason Pominville said the Sabres “have to look at ourselves.”

“Sometimes it might feel like we’re working, we think we’re doing the right things, but I don’t think we are,” he said. “That’s why we’re getting those results. If you want to win consistently, you can’t play that way for a long period of time.”

Winger Artturi Lehkonen scored 4:56 into the second period. Wingers Paul Byron, a former Sabre, and Brendan Gallagher added empty-net goals.

Goalie Linus Ullmark made 21 saves for the Sabres, who play a road tilt tonight against the New York Rangers.

Sabres notes: Nick Deslauriers thriving with Canadiens

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

March 24, 2018

BUFFALO – Six months ago, Nick Deslauriers' future in the NHL looked iffy. Following a career-worst season in which he scored zero goals for the Sabres, it became apparent the popular winger wasn't part of the new regime's plans.

On Sept. 30, the Sabres waived Deslauriers. Four days later, they traded him to the Montreal Canadiens, who promptly assigned him to the Laval Rocket.

Deslauriers, 27, hadn't played in the AHL since 2013-14.

To Deslauriers, he needed the "fresh air" changing teams quickly provided him. He said the fit with the Sabres was no longer there. Going through waivers and playing 14 games with Laval provided "a good wake-up call."

These days, Deslauriers is happy. In 51 games with his hometown Canadiens, he has already scored a career-high eight goals. Last month, he signed a two-year, \$1.9 million contract extension.

"I went from having a really tough year to getting a slap in the face, going on waivers and playing in the AHL," Deslauriers said prior to Friday's 3-0 win against the Sabres. "That's what I needed, (I) rebuilt everything. It's been good. I'm happy with what I came through this year."

He added: "I took advantage of going to a new organization ... and I just proved I could be an NHL player again."

But Deslauriers, the Sabres' top fighter for years, was happy in Buffalo. After all, they gave him his first opportunity in the NHL shortly after acquiring him late in 2013-14.

"I liked it here, I wanted to stay here," he said. "Just from my last season, I didn't play much, I didn't produce at all. Everything was going the opposite way. If I stayed here, would I have had the same season? I don't know."

If Deslauriers had stayed, he'd still be making his teammates laugh. Mentioning his name inevitably leads to a smile. His passion and fun-loving personality made him perhaps the most popular teammate in the dressing room.

On Friday morning, Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly grinned recalling feeding Deslauriers for a short-handed goal.

"He had the real intense (celebration) and bear hugged (me) in the huddle," O'Reilly said. "He's a guy like that, always had that energy. He just always had that excitement and could do so many things."

The Canadiens had a day off Thursday in Buffalo, so Deslauriers visited his house, which he is renting to Sabres defenseman Justin Falk. He said walking from the team hotel to KeyBank Center was "kind of weird."

"It was to good see where it all started," he said of visiting Buffalo for the first time as an opponent.

Deslauriers said when the Sabres waived him, general manager Jason Botterill told him he would try to find him the best place. Little did he know it would work out so well.

While the Canadiens have endured a brutal season, they're still hockey's most storied franchise. Deslauriers grew up about 20 minutes outside Montreal in LaSalle, Quebec.

"It's unbelievable," Deslauriers said of playing for the Canadiens. "It's hard to describe, you know? You see the history and ... when you put your bucket on, you see all the alumni. It's very special ... especially being a French home."

xxx

Sabres defenseman Nathan Beaulieu was a "little sore" and missed Friday's tilt against his old team.

But if Beaulieu, 25, hadn't taken a puck to his upper body last game, he would still be scratched.

“He was not playing in this game,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

Defenseman Josh Gorges, a Canadiens regular for eight seasons, returned. Gorges, 33, had sat out four straight games and nine of the last 11.

Beaulieu has endured a rough season, never getting on track. He struggled from the get-go after Housley awarded him a spot beside No. 1 defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen on opening night. Beaulieu has also battled an injury and two illnesses.

“Beau had a tough start to the season,” Housley said. “I think that affected his confidence. He had a great opportunity coming to a new team and things just didn’t work out for him.

“But his last 20 games have been pretty solid. I think he’s been better in his own end, I think he’s been trying to add to the offense. But again, there’s a couple critical times and errors in games that affected our team. Just giving some other guys an opportunity.”

He added: “His defensive reads and his defensive awareness, I think he’s just got to get stronger in those areas.”

Is Housley sending Beaulieu a message benching him against the Canadiens? It certainly seems like it.

“I don’t know,” he said. “I think it’s just the timing of the game. It wouldn’t have mattered who we played this night.”

The Sabres also scratched Falk and winger Justin Bailey. Defenseman Victor Antipin played after sitting out two games.

Why scratch Bailey, 22, a prospect whose speed the Sabres sorely need?

“Just changes, we’ve lost the last two games in a row,” Housley said. “I think he’s playing hard, he’s playing physical.”

Winger Zemgus Girgensons, out the two games with an upper-body injury, also returned.

Area youngsters learn the basics from former Sabres

Olean Times Herald

Sam Wilson

March 24, 2018

OLEAN — For the last eight Tuesdays, youngsters from the surrounding Olean area received special instruction from current and former professional hockey players, thanks to the NHL's Learn to Play Program.

Former Buffalo Sabre Patrick Kaleta, the Angola native known for getting under opponents' skin in his eight-plus years with the team, now works for the Sabres as their youth hockey ambassador. Kaleta heads the team's Learn to Play events in Western New York, including an eight-week run that finished Tuesday at the William O. Smith Recreation Center for 35 young skaters ages 4-9.

Kaleta's brother, Chris, a former SUNY Cortland forward, joined former Sabre Cody McCormick and current Buffalo Beaut rookie Hayley Scamurra in helping instruct the Olean program.

Olean Area Youth Hockey Association President Eric Keller said in addition to learning basic skills, the participants received equipment to keep at a more affordable price.

"So anybody age 4-9 is welcome," Keller said, "they signed up, they paid \$100 per kid and that included full equipment from head to toe: sticks, skates, helmets, jerseys and a hockey bag, probably about \$500 worth of equipment.

"They keep the equipment, so hopefully next year the kids will come out and play for Olean Hockey. They've been introduced to the sport and they have all the equipment now. That's a big commitment for a 4- or 5-year-old, to buy them all that equipment and have them not like it. So this way they're provided it. They're doing it all over Buffalo, Jamestown's doing it and apparently it's been pretty successful."

To mark the end of the eight-week program, the coaches split the youngsters into six teams for three games running simultaneously for families and community members to watch.

How much progress did these first-timers make in the program?

"It's actually amazing," Patrick Kaleta said. "You get guys like my brother, Cody McCormick, Hayley Scamurra and myself coming down here, it's Olean's first time in the Learn to Play Program and it's actually quite entertaining to see the kids come on the ice and see how much they progress but it's also amazing in how much kids nowadays pick up things and they're like a sponge. So the first day we have a bunch of beginners that are barely standing on their feet and now at Week 8 we have three games going on and everyone's moving around and skating."

Keller, in his second year as Olean Hockey president, said the organization typically draws interest "all over the Big 30 area" — including Great Valley, Bradford, Cuba and Allegany — as one of the few available ice rinks in the Southern Tier.

Sabres sign highly touted prospect Will Borgen

WKBW

Matt Bove

March 25, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - At long last, highly touted prospect Will Borgen is joining the Buffalo Sabres organization. Borgen will forego his senior season with St. Cloud State and join the Rochester Americans as they prepare for a playoff push. His three-year entry-level deal with the Sabres will begin at the start of the 2018-2019 season.

[View image on Twitter](#)

[View image on Twitter](#)

Buffalo Sabres

✓

@BuffaloSabres

We've signed defenseman Will Borgen of @scsuhuskies_mh to a 3-year entry-level contract.

Borgen will sign an ATO and report to @AmerksHockey. The entry-level contract will begin starting with the 2018-19 season.

3:40 PM - Mar 25, 2018

823

280 people are talking about this

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Borgen, 21, was a fourth-round selection of the Sabres in the 2015 NHL Draft. In his junior season with the Huskies, Borgen logged big minutes with St. Cloud State, while tallying 15 points in 36 games. Borgen was also on the United State Olympic roster but did not appear in any tournament games.

Bove's take:

Will Borgen immediately becomes one of the Buffalo Sabres top prospects, especially on the blue line. Despite never putting up huge numbers in college or even in high school, Borgen has been a consistently dominant defenseman at every level. He's by no means a lock to be a productive NHL player but certainly an intriguing prospect the Sabres couldn't let slip away.

ADVERTISING

Borgen should also provide a big boost for the Amerks, who clinched a playoff berth Saturday. While it's certainly not the NHL, experiencing high-pressure games in the AHL will only help Borgen's long-term development. With a scarce cupboard of defensive prospects, this is a big win for Sabres GM Jason Botterill.

5 Observations: Rangers top Sabres 5-1

WKBW

Matt Bove

March 24, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - In a year full of lopsided losses, the Buffalo Sabres may have had one of their most embarrassing outings of the season, falling to the New York Rangers 5-1. The Sabres have now lost four straight, scoring only two goals during that span.

Five observations from Saturday's loss:

They still can't score

[View image on Twitter](#)

[View image on Twitter](#)

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt_Bove

The #Sabres have hit rock bottom

8:23 PM - Mar 24, 2018

154

49 people are talking about this

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In their last four games, the Sabres have two goals. Let that sink in -- two goals in four games! For those keeping track at home, the Sabres now have 12 fewer goals than the Arizona Coyotes, who have the second-fewest goals in the NHL. Rangers goaltender Alexandar Georgiev certainly deserves some credit, stopping 43 of the 44 shots he faced.

ADVERTISING

At one point during the Sabres broadcast, analyst Rob Ray said: "let's just go home....let's just leave." No truer words have ever been spoken.

If you care to be entertained, check out this thread. Warning, some language may be inappropriate.

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt_Bove

Describe the #Sabres season with one word

8:53 PM - Mar 24, 2018

12

212 people are talking about this

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Four in a row

It took the Rangers just four shots to turn a 0-0 tie into a 4-0 lead. After the Sabres came flying out of the gate the Rangers found the back of the net on four straight shots, turning what was once a close game into a blowout less than nine minutes into the second period.

His last game?

With only seven games left this season, there's a chance we never see Robin Lehner start another game for the Sabres. To be clear, I think Lehner will get at least one more start this season, but I wouldn't be shocked if Phil Housley rode Linus Ullmark until their last game.

*The status of Chad Johnson plays a major factor in how many starts Ullmark/Lehner/Johnson get in the final seven games.

Phil's Future

With their recent struggles and atrocious year, Housley has to be on the hot seat, right? Well, sort of...

It seems like after every loss somebody on Twitter suggests that the Sabres need to move on from Housley. After just one season, I'd be shocked if the Sabres parted ways with another coach. Sure, Housley deserves a ton of criticism for how this season has gone. But I don't know if there is a coach on this planet who could've had success with the current Sabres roster.

#MittelstadtWatch

During the second intermission of Hockey Night In Canada, we received a bit of an update on Sabres top prospect Casey Mittelstadt. According to Chris Johnston of Sportsnet, Mittelstadt is still weighing his options and will likely decide whether or not he wants to sign a pro contract sometime in the next few days. Johnston added that he believes the Sabres would like to sign Mittelstadt, but says the 19-year-old is also strongly considering returning for his sophomore season at Minnesota.

24 Mar

Sabres Buzz
@SabresBuzz

Mittelstadt has to do what is best for his development. Not what's best for Minnesota Gophers.

Sabres Buzz
@SabresBuzz

@reporterchris says there is "pressure" on @CMittelstadt to return to Minnesota for next season. By whom? Will Bob Motzko be his head coach? Mike Guentzel? The kid is in the driver's seat. Lucia recruited Mittelstadt. Lucia is gone. The kid has leverage and should use it wisely

9:08 PM - Mar 24, 2018

8

See Sabres Buzz's other Tweets

5 Observations: Sabres shut out by Canadiens 3-0

WKBW

Matt Bove

March 23, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - For the seventh time this season, the Buffalo Sabres were shut out, this time falling to the Montreal Canadiens 3-0. It's the sixth time the Sabres were held scoreless on home ice this season as the Sabres fall to 23-39-12.

Five observations from Friday's loss:

Housley: "Some guys like to put things in their own hands and they think it's going to work. Well it hasn't." #Sabres 🙄🙄

— Matthew Bové (@Matt_Bove) March 24, 2018

Dude, where's the offense?

In three games played this week the Sabres have only one goal [one goal in nine periods]. Friday proved to be another glorious example of why the Sabres have found the back of the net fewer than any other team. For those keeping track at home, the Arizona Coyotes, who have also spent the entire season in the league basement, now have 11 more goals than the Sabres.

Their best opportunity to score a goal came in the third period when they had a 1:06 two-man advantage. Buffalo maintained good zone pressure but couldn't beat Niemi. Along with bolstering the blue line, Buffalo desperately needs to add some secondary scoring in the offseason. Aside from Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, and Sam Reinhart, no other player has more than 38 points.

The #Sabres have played three games this week. They have scored once. pic.twitter.com/L03F9L4n5v

— Matthew Bové (@Matt_Bove) March 24, 2018

Nifty Niemi

Credit where credit is due, Canadiens goaltender Antti Niemi was the best player on the ice Friday. Buffalo actually outshot the Canadiens 35-24, but Niemi was perfect from start to finish. That said, it's ridiculous that the Sabres have only one goal in their last nine periods played.

Ullmark Update

In only his third start of the season, Linus Ullmark was once again impressive, making a few big saves to keep his team within striking distance. With only eight games left this season, Ullmark should get at least four more starts as the Sabres determine whether or not he's ready to be a full-time starter in the NHL next season.

It's the final countdown

It's hard to believe that the Sabres have only two games left on home ice this season. When considering how badly they've performed at KeyBank Center, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

Buffalo has only 11 wins on home ice this season, the fewest in the NHL. No other team in the Eastern Conference has fewer than 15 wins at home. Everything is not fine.

#BorgenWatch

How can this be an observation from the game? Well, it isn't, but Will Borgen's season ended a half an hour before puck drop between the Sabres and Canadiens, so this seemed relevant.

Borgen, who just finished his junior season with St. Cloud State, joins Casey Mittelstadt as the second most highly touted prospect GM Jason Botterill would like to get signed. As Kris Baker from SabresProspects.com said:

"Season done for third-year D Will Borgen as St. Cloud State, the top overall seed, is defeated by Air Force 4-1. Not being overdramatic, but Borgen is a must-get for Botterill to build depth."

#BorgenWatch has been engaged.

Will Borgen signs with Sabres, will report to Amerks

WIVB

Nick Filipowski

March 25, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — Defenseman Will Borgen has signed with the Buffalo Sabres and will report to their AHL affiliate in Rochester to join the Amerks during their playoff run, the team announced on Sunday.

[View image on Twitter](#)

[View image on Twitter](#)

Buffalo Sabres

✓

@BuffaloSabres

We've signed defenseman Will Borgen of @scsuhuskies_mh to a 3-year entry-level contract.

Borgen will sign an ATO and report to @AmerksHockey. The entry-level contract will begin starting with the 2018-19 season.

The defenseman, who is leaving college after three years, was a fourth round pick by the Sabres in the 2015 NHL Draft, scored 15 points (2 G, 13 A) this past season with the Huskies, who were the #1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

Borgen was also a member of the US Men's Hockey team that competed in the Winter Olympic Games in Pyeongchang but did not see any ice time. During the Under-20 World Junior Championships in Helsinki in 2015, Borgen collected three assists as the United States won a Bronze medal.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Borgen has been a top defensive D in college hockey over the past two seasons. NCHC Best Defensive Defenseman this season. Mobile with some nasty. Finishes every hit. Smart with his stick. Holds his ground post-whistle. Projects as rock-solid top four D when ready. #Sabres

Borgen isn't the only player from St. Cloud State to be joining the organization. The Amerks announced they signed Judd Peterson who served as captain this past season with the Huskies. The 24-year-old forward was selected by the Sabres in the seventh round of the 2012 NHL Draft.

Peterson had six goals and 12 assists in 40 games this past season at SCSU. He found the back of the net 11 times as a junior and 16 times during his sophomore campaign.

[View image on Twitter](#)

[View image on Twitter](#)

Rochester Americans

✓

@AmerksHockey

NEWS: The #Amerks have signed @SCSUHUSKIES_MH forward Judd Peterson to an Amateur Tryout. The senior captain led the Huskies to an NCHC championship this season.

READ MORE --> <http://amerks.co/nMi21L>

Sabres homestand ends with another loss

WIVB

Josh Reed

March 24, 2018

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB)- The offense was ineffective, the effort was inconsistent, and the outcome was incredibly predictable. The Sabres 6-game homestand came to end with another loss, 3-0 to the Montreal Canadiens. Buffalo only managed one win during the 6-game stretch at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres offensive slump continued on Friday when Montreal backup goalie Antti Niemi stopped all 35 shots he faced, it was Niemi's first shutout since Dec. 22, 2015. It's the second time in three games the blue and gold have failed to score a goal.

Montreal grabbed a 1-0 lead in the second period when Artturi Lehkonen sent home a puck that bounced off the end boards. Former Sabres forward Paul Byron and Brendan Gallagher also scored goals for the Canadiens.

Next up: Sabres at Rangers on Saturday

Vesey has three points in Rangers win against Sabres

NHL.com

Dan Rosen

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK -- Mika Zibanejad scored for the fifth consecutive game, rookie Neal Pionk scored his first NHL goal and the New York Rangers defeated the Buffalo Sabres 5-1 at Madison Square Garden on Saturday.

Jimmy Vesey had two goals and an assist. Zibanejad, Pionk and Chris Kreider each had a goal and an assist, and Kevin Hayes had two assists to give him 100 in his NHL career.

Rookie Alexandar Georgiev made 43 saves for his third win in five starts (3-1-1) since March 12.

The Rangers (33-34-8), who ended a three-game losing streak (0-2-1), are 12 points behind the New Jersey Devils for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference with seven games remaining.

"We have a very minimal chance on the playoffs and it's a very tough situation, but personally you want to still develop," Zibanejad said. "I don't know if prove yourself is the right word, but you want to continue growing and prove to yourself that you can do it."

Zibanejad leads the Rangers with 27 goals, including seven during his NHL career-long five-game goal-scoring streak and eight in his seven-game point streak (eight goals, four assists).

He had eight goals in 34 games from Dec. 19-March 8 after missing nine games with a concussion.

"Especially the situation I've had this year and the opportunity I've had this year, I think [a strong finish] could only be positive and more of a motivation for this summer and the upcoming season to step up and be a leader and keep playing well," Zibanejad said.

The Sabres (23-40-12), who have been eliminated from playoff contention, lost their fourth in a row in regulation. Buffalo has two goals in the past four games.

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner, who started for the first time in five games, allowed four goals on 12 shots before being relieved by Linus Ullmark with 11:15 remaining in the second period. Ullmark made 10 saves.

"We didn't defend well," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We lost coverages. Guys were beating us up the ice. I think it goes back to have that respect in our own zone and for our goaltender. We have to keep the puck out of our net, and we didn't have that type of respect tonight."

Kreider, Vesey, Pionk and Zibanejad scored on four straight shots in a span of 12:16 bridging the first and second periods.

"Some pretty passing plays and it's in the back of the net," Zibanejad said. "Sometimes you get that momentum and pucks go in."

Kreider gave the Rangers a 1-0 lead at 16:29 of the first period with a tap-in from the left post off a cross-crease pass from Zibanejad. Vesey made it 2-0 at 18:02 when he knocked down Mats Zuccarello's shot and slipped the puck past Lehner.

Pionk scored at 3:59 of the second off a one-timer from the left circle off a pass from Vesey for a 3-0 lead, and Kreider set up Zibanejad for a power-play goal at 8:45 to make it 4-0.

Vesey scored a power-play goal at 14:47 to boost the lead to 5-0.

Sam Reinhart pulled the Sabres within 5-1 with a power-play goal at 15:26 of the third period. It was his 20th goal of the season.

"We had some Grade-A chances that we were able to capitalize on," Rangers coach Alain Vigneault said. "Unfortunately, we lost [Georgiev's] shutout there, but for the most part we had some good looks, we were able to capitalize and our goaltender was able to make some big saves."

They said it

"I can only really speak for myself, but I just have to be better. I have to compete better [defensively] and make it more difficult for the guys I'm playing against because it was too easy for them tonight." -- Sabres forward Ryan O'Reilly

"It's just disbelief when it first went in. You don't even realize it. Those guys come over, they give you a big hug, you go through the line and all of a sudden you look up at the scoreboard, take a deep breath and kind of say to yourself, 'Wow, I actually did it.'" -- Rangers defenseman Neal Pionk on his first NHL goal

Need to know

The Rangers top line of Zibanejad, Kreider and Jesper Fast (one assist) has 25 points (13 goals, 12 assists) in the past five games. ... Fast extended his NHL career-long point streak to eight games (three goals, 10 assists), the longest by a Rangers player this season. ... Pionk has points in seven straight games (one goal, nine assists) to tie Brian Leetch (1988-89) for longest by a Rangers rookie defenseman. ... Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist didn't dress for the second consecutive game because of back and neck pain.

What's next

Sabres: At the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday (7 p.m. ET; TSN4, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Rangers: Host the Washington Capitals on Monday (7:30 p.m. ET; NBCSN, NHL.TV)

Niemi gets first shutout for Canadiens in win against Sabres

NHL.com

Joe Yerdon

March 23, 2018

BUFFALO -- Antti Niemi made 35 saves for the Montreal Canadiens in a 3-0 win against the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Friday.

Niemi got his first shutout since Dec. 22, 2015 and his first with Montreal. He has 36 in the NHL.

"When you look at how his season started and coming to us and obviously playing so well, there's no doubt he's been a real positive for our hockey club and it's been positive for him as well," Canadiens coach Claude Julien said. "Tonight's shutout, he earned it."

Niemi was claimed on waivers by the Canadiens from the Florida Panthers on Nov. 14. He started the season with the Pittsburgh Penguins before he was put on waivers and claimed by Florida on Oct. 24.

"I'm really happy for [Niemi]," Canadiens forward Artturi Lehkonen said. "He has been unreal for us for a long time now; he's been really playing great. Today was a really good example of how hard he competes and what kind of goalie he is. I'm really happy for him."

Lehkonen, Paul Byron and Brendan Gallagher scored for the Canadiens (27-36-12), who ended a four-game losing streak.

The Sabres and Canadiens have been eliminated from contention for the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"It's always good to win on the road," Julien said. "And we know the circumstances. There's two teams here playing each other that are out of the playoffs. A lot of it is for honor. A lot of it is for guys showing their professionalism and trying to keep jobs and fighting for jobs and all that stuff."

Linus Ullmark made 21 saves for the Sabres (23-39-12) who have lost three straight and five of the past six (1-4-1).

"We definitely beat ourselves tonight," Buffalo forward Ryan O'Reilly said. "They didn't do anything special. We missed the chances, didn't handle the puck as good as we wanted to tonight. I think all the guys felt the same, it's almost embarrassing. We could've at least made a game of it."

Lehkonen gave the Canadiens a 1-0 lead at 4:56 of the second period when he scored on a rebound of a shot by Jacob de la Rose. Lehkonen has five goals in the past eight games after scoring five in his first 51.

"You always want to get progress," Lehkonen said. "Now the bounces are going my way, so that's a good thing."

The Sabres had an opportunity to tie the game with 1:06 of 5-on-3 power-play time in the third period when Nikita Scherbak (5:58) and Lehkonen (6:53) were each called for tripping, but Buffalo got two shots on goal during the two-man advantage.

"If you look at the percentages, the teams that score on their 5-on-3s usually have good success," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "That was a perfect time for us. Lack of execution, lack of sticking with the game plan as far as what we're looking for at 5-on-3. Some guys like to put things in their own hands and think that's going to work. Well, it hasn't."

Byron scored an empty-net goal with 1:15 remaining in the third period to make it 2-0, and Gallagher scored into an empty net with 44 seconds left for a 3-0 lead.

They said it

"I was lucky I had the puck at the end of the game and I asked him if he wanted it. Some goalies like that and he told me [it was his first shutout since 2015] and I was like, it's hard to believe as good of a goalie as he is for that to be the case. It's nice to be a part of it and nice to be there for him to get it. It's just good for this team to have a game where we can get pucks out of the net like that." -- Canadiens defenseman Karl Alzner on Antti Niemi's first shutout with Montreal

"Even though it's a 1-0 game, there's still plenty of time to go in the game, and again we're forcing things that aren't there and we fed it to them. It wasn't anything that Montreal did, it's what we didn't do once again. I think it's about time our leadership group stood up now. I challenged them yesterday; definitely wasn't the response I was looking for." -- Sabres coach Phil Housley

Need to know

The Canadiens ended a seven-game road losing streak (0-5-2). ... Montreal swept the season series (Buffalo 0-2-2). ... Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons returned after missing the past two games with an undisclosed injury. He had five hits in 17:36.

What's next

Canadiens: Host the Washington Capitals on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; NHLN, SN, TVAS, NBCSWA, NHLTV)

Sabres: At the New York Rangers on Saturday (7 p.m. ET; MSG, MSG-B, NHLTV)

Sabres lament defensive lapses following loss in New York

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK - Sam Reinhart scored his 20th goal of the season on Saturday. He wishes it would have meant more.

Reinhart's was the lone goal scored for the Sabres in a 5-1 loss to the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, their fourth in a row. The Sabres have been outscored 16-2 in those games despite outshooting their opponents in each of them.

"I think everyone's kind of gripping a little bit too tight at the same time, and that doesn't give you very much success," Reinhart said. "I think we can be better as forwards at getting ourselves in position for second and third opportunities. I don't think we've had many of those in the last couple."

The Sabres got the start they wanted following a shutout loss to Montreal on Friday. They were outshooting the Rangers 18-6 when Chris Kreider opened the scoring for the Rangers with 3:31 remaining in the first period, on a crossing feed from Mika Zibanejad. Jimmy Vesey added a second goal 1:33 later.

New York poured on three more goals in the second period - one at even-strength from Neal Pionk followed by two on the power play from Zibanejad and Vesey - to extend its lead to 5-0.

"All the things we did with the puck, we did really well," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "But when we didn't have it, we didn't defend well. We lost coverage. Guys were beating us up the ice, and I think it goes back to having respect for our own end and our own goaltender."

On all five of their goals, the Rangers found space and were able to take uncontested shots. Kreider was alone at the doorstep when he caught the pass from Zibanejad to open the scoring, then later returned the favor when he burst behind the defense and made the same pass to set up Zibanejad's goal.

Vesey was alone on both of his goals. Pionk's goal came on a one-time shot from the left faceoff circle.

"It's just decisions without the puck," defenseman Marco Scandella said. "We have to get better. We got a lot of shots on net, but we didn't play defense. ... We've got to play harder, that's it."

Robin Lehner, making his first appearance since March 15, was pulled after allowing four goals on 12 shots in 28:23. Linus Ullmark allowed one goal on 11 shots in relief.

"I can't fault Robin for any of those goals," Housley said. "We missed coverages, missed picking up guys. I don't think he had a chance. But you give up four goals on [12] shots, I was just trying to save him a little bit and maybe send a message to our team."

Reinhart finally found the back of the net on the power play with 4:34 remaining in the third period, ending rookie goaltender Alexandar Georgiev's bid for his first career shutout. Reinhart was stationed in front of Georgiev and deflected a slap shot from Kyle Okposo, reaching the 20-goal mark for the second time in his young career.

It's that sort of net-front presence that Housley has been imploring his team to create at even strength.

"I'm going to harp on it and I'm going to continue to harp on it: zone one," Housley said. "We're not getting there enough. To score in this league at this time of year, five-on-five, even-strength, you have to be willing to go there, especially the first guy and try to take the goalie's eyes."

"We're getting there and then we're rolling out, we're not staying there. We've got to make it more miserable for the goaltenders that we're facing."

Up next

The Sabres conclude their road trip against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Monday night. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.

The team returns home on Thursday to host the Detroit Red Wings.

Sabres look to end scoring drought in New York

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 24, 2018

NEW YORK - Following a loss at home to Montreal on Friday, Phil Housley called upon the leadership group of the Buffalo Sabres to step up and get the team on track. The message from their coach, Jack Eichel said, was received and even welcomed.

"We're all professionals," Eichel said. "We're all grown men. I don't think anyone's feelings are getting hurt. I don't think anyone's got a problem with that and holding people accountable. It needs to happen. It's happened on a lot of teams I've played on and there's no reason it shouldn't happen here."

The Sabres will look to end a three-game slide when they visit the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Saturday night. Buffalo has scored just one goal in those three games, including shutout losses to Nashville and Montreal.

The Sabres outshot the Canadiens, 35-24, on Friday and had multiple grade-A scoring opportunities that they were unable to capitalize on. It's the details of their game that left Housley disappointed, such as one-on-one battles and their presence at the Montreal net.

"Shot mentality, that's going to create offense," Housley said. "More important is getting to zone one. Even though we had all those attempts, we had the shots on net, we had the chances, there wasn't a lot of second opportunities.

"Yeah, we had some glorious looks. We didn't finish. That's going to happen in games but if we keep pounding the message of getting to zone one, getting traffic in front of the net, eventually that's going to crack."

Buffalo's lineup will remain the same, with the exception of Robin Lehner getting the start in net. It will be Lehner's first appearance since March 15, when he made 34 saves in a loss to Toronto. The goaltender missed time with an injury in addition to being part of a three-man rotation with Chad Johnson and Linus Ullmark.

The Sabres are 0-1-1 against the Rangers this season, with both losses having come in one-goal games.

"They've come out in both games that we've played against them and they were able to get that one or two-goal lead," Housley said. "We fought and battled back, which is great on our part, but I think just being ready to play, we gave up a goal early in the first period here right on our first shift.

We can't afford the luxury of chasing games, so we're going to try to come out and have a good start, establish our forecheck and create some momentum off it."

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.

Projected lineup

20 Scott Wilson - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 23 Sam Reinhart
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
17 Jordan Nolan - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
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40 Robin Lehner
35 Linus Ullmark

Sabres unable to capitalize on chances in shutout loss

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 23, 2018

For one period on Friday night, the Buffalo Sabres delivered exactly the type of response that Phil Housley was looking for. Coming off a loss to Arizona in which their effort was deemed unacceptable by the coach and his players alike, the Sabres came out and dominated the Montreal Canadiens for most of the first period.

The one thing the Sabres were unable to do in that period - in which they outshot the Canadiens, 11-6 - was score. Then the second came, and things changed. Artturi Lehkonen scored for the Canadiens off a defensive-zone draw early in the period, which would stand as the deciding goal in a 3-0 loss for the Sabres.

"We had the start we wanted," Housley said. "That's the response we were looking for. We came out and we played a really solid first period and just stuck with the game plan and got pucks to the net. ... But then in the second period, we get away from it.

"That's the thing I've talked about in the past about handling success. We have good success, realize, recognize what we get, and then we totally get away from it, and then we're forcing pucks and turning pucks over. We have a little bit of cheat in our game, we're on the wrong side, and that's what happens."

The Sabres finished the night with a 35-24 advantage in the shot column. Antti Niemi earned the shutout for the Canadiens despite various grade-A chances for the Sabres, many of which ended up going wide of the net. Scott Wilson had Buffalo's first great chance, which rung off the post in the first period.

In the second, Wilson fed Sam Reinhart for a shot from point-blank range the hit Niemi's pad. On that same shift, Ryan O'Reilly deked his way behind the goaltender and had an open net, only to send the puck through the crease.

"I've done that move in practice hundreds of times," O'Reilly said. "I get in the game and when it matters, I don't do it. Just letting the guys down. It's an easy play. It's an open net, tap it in. Again, I get in my head and don't bury it. It's frustrating."

Buffalo's best chance of the night came in the third period, when they held a 5-on-3 advantage for 1:06. They managed just two shots on goal in that span.

"That was a perfect time for us," Housley said. "Lack of execution, lack of sticking with the game plan as far as what we're looking for five-on-three. Some guys like to pull things in their own hands and think that's going to work. Well, it hasn't."

The Sabres did have one great look during the two-man advantage, when O'Reilly once again found himself staring down an open net from point-blank range. Kyle Okposo hit him with a pass from the slot, but O'Reilly was unable to connect on his one-time attempt.

"We definitely beat ourselves tonight," O'Reilly said. "They didn't do anything special. We missed the chances, didn't handle the puck as good as we wanted to tonight. I think all the guys felt the same, it's almost embarrassing. We could've at least made a game of it."

Linus Ullmark made 21 saves in the loss. Paul Bryon and Brendan Gallagher capped the scoring with empty-net goals for the Canadiens.

The Sabres have lost three-straight games, with just one goal to show for them. In spite of all the scoring chances and the strong start, Housley was left disappointed with the consistency from his team once again.

"It wasn't anything that Montreal did," Housley said. "It was what we didn't do once again. I think it's about time our leadership group stood up now. I challenged them yesterday. It definitely wasn't the response I was looking for."

Sabres recognize McDermott, Page

The Sabres honored Paralympic gold medalists Adam Page and Luke McDermott during a ceremonial puck drop prior to the game. Afterward, the two Western New York natives caught up with Dan Dunleavy to share their stories.

Up next

The Sabres begin a two-game road trip against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Saturday. Pregame coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen to the game live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.

The team returns home for another Atlantic Division matchup when they host the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center next Thursday.

Sabres look for rebound performance against Canadiens

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

March 23, 2018

If there's one area in which the Buffalo Sabres have excelled as of late, it's the way they've performed against teams within their own division. The Sabres are 7-2-1 in their last 10 games against Atlantic Division opponents, a stretch that includes five wins against the division's top three teams in Tampa Bay, Boston and Toronto.

The Sabres will play seven of their final nine games against divisional opponents, beginning when they host the Montreal Canadiens on Friday night.

"We have seven divisional games remaining, these games are meaningful," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "This is one area in our season that we can hang our hat on. ... It's got to start tonight."

FAMILY PACKS AVAILABLE FOR TONIGHT

INDIVIDUAL TICKETS ON SALE NOW

The Sabres are looking to rebound from a disappointing loss to Arizona on Wednesday night, a game that presented itself as an opportunity to climb out of last place in the standings. Housley said afterward that their effort in the game was "unacceptable."

Preview: BUF vs MTL (3/23/18)

02:21 • March 23rd, 2018

Just one game prior, the Sabres had put forth a strong effort in a loss to the NHL's best team in the Nashville Predators. It was the continuation of a recent trend in which they've performed well against top-tier opponents but struggled against teams near them in the standings.

"I just think our work needs to be there," alternate captain Kyle Okposo said. "Just put our heads down and grind and play a hard-nosed game. I think that's pretty much the only thing we can think about right now."

With back-to-back losses comes changes to the lineup, of which there will be a few on Friday. Zemgus Girgensons will return from a two-game absence caused by an injury, replacing Justin Bailey at forward. Josh Gorges and Victor Antipin will step in for Nathan Beaulieu and Justin Falk on defense.

Girgensons will skate on a line with Jack Eichel and Jason Pominville.

"I think Zemgus has been terrific," Housley said. "... He's taken his game to a new level. I like his physicality. He will be playing on that line with Jack and Pommer. He brings a physical element, he's one of our best penalty killers and he's willing to block shots, get in harm's way. But I think he brings a work ethic that we're looking for.

"Getting in on the forecheck, going to the net, getting to the tough areas. That's how he's going to complement Jack."

Housley said that Beaulieu is dealing with a minor upper-body injury sustained in practice on Thursday but added that the defenseman was coming out of the lineup either way.

"His last 20 games have been pretty solid," Housley said. "I think he's been better in his own end, I think he's trying to add to the offense, but again there's a couple critical times and errors in games that affected our team and we're just giving some other guys an opportunity."

Phil Housley Pregame (3/23/18)

05:46 • March 23rd, 2018

Linus Ullmark will start in net for Buffalo. Robin Lehner, a scratch for the past three games due to an undisclosed injury, will dress as his backup. Chad Johnson is day-to-day after taking a shot off his mask on Wednesday.

The Canadiens are currently without forward Max Pacioretty and defenseman Shea Weber, both of whom are on injured reserve. Brendan Gallagher leads the team with a career-high 26 goals and 45 points this season.

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m., or you can listen to the game on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7.

Projected lineup

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35 Linus Ullmark

40 Robin Lehner

Sharpen Up: March 23, 2018

Sabres.com

Chris Ryndak

March 23, 2018

Buffalo will look to end their six-game homestand on the right note tonight when they host the Montreal Canadiens at KeyBank Center.

If you can't make it to the rink, join us for the GMC Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. Faceoff is scheduled for just after 7 with RJ and Rayzor on the call.

Family Packs for tonight's game are on sale now.

Here's what you need to know.

Yesterday's practice

Sabres Now (3/22/18)

01:45 • March 22nd, 2018

From the Ice Level Practice Report...

Phil Housley was vocal in expressing his frustrations with the way his team played in a 4-1 loss to the Arizona Coyotes on Wednesday night, a performance he deemed "unacceptable." He continued to voice his disapproval when the Buffalo Sabres returned to practice on Thursday.

The Sabres had a short but intense practice session, and at one point Housley had to stop them to demand better execution.

"I just thought that we weren't doing what I told them to do, which was a simple execution play of just attacking with wide speed and a middle lane drive," Housley said. "So I just tried to get their attention. The execution after that point was good."

Jason Pominville said he hadn't watched Housley's press conference with the media on Wednesday but noted that it likely resembled the coach's comments to the team after the loss. The message continued in the team's film session on Thursday morning.

Phil Housley (3/22/18)

05:02 • March 22nd, 2018

"When we reviewed the game, it was very quiet in the room," Housley said. "So, to me, I hope that they're angry, I hope they're upset. Now we have to get ready for tomorrow and what we can control. We have to learn from that, though. Sometimes you take three steps forward and you take one, two steps back."

The Sabres have 11 wins at home this season with three games remaining at KeyBank Center. Jack Eichel could only empathize with fans who have been critical of their performance.

"I think they have a reason to be negative," he said. "What have we really put on the ice as a product for them this year? We don't score goals. We really haven't made them coming to the game worthwhile. Can you blame them? No, you can't. This is the third year that I've been here, and we haven't put a steady product on the ice for them, and it's frustrating for us because they've been so loyal."

"They've continued to come here, continued to support the team and continued to be positive. I think that's probably the hardest part."

Lineup news

Linus Ullmark will start in net while Robin Lehner will dress as his backup. Chad Johnson was absent from practice after taking a shot off the mask on Wednesday, forcing him to leave the game in the second period. Housley said that Johnson has not been diagnosed with a concussion and is day-to-day.

Zemgus Girgensons returned to practice after missing the past two games with an injury and expects to be ready to play against Montreal. Girgensons practiced on a line with Eichel and Pominville.

Marco Scandella and Rasmus Ristolainen were given maintenance days and did not practice.

The Sabres assigned Seth Griffith to Rochester after practice.

We'll have more from the morning skate here on Sabres.com.

Tonight's matchup
From the Game Notes...

This is the fourth and final meeting between the Sabres and Canadiens this season.
Last meeting: Montreal defeated Buffalo 3-0 in Montreal on Nov. 25
The Sabres are 3-4-3 in their last 10 games vs. the Canadiens; 3-4-3 at home.

The Sabres enter tonight's game with a 7-2-1 record in their last eight games against Atlantic Division opponents and a 10-8-3 record against the division this season.
The Sabres are 7-5-4 against the Canadiens since the beginning of the 2014-15 season, including a 3-2-3 record at home.
The Sabres are 0-1-2 against the Canadiens this season and need a win to avoid the first series sweep since they went 0-4-0 against Montreal in the 2013-14 season.

Sam Reinhart has totaled 29 points (12+17) in his last 29 games.
Ryan O'Reilly has 15 points (5+10) in 18 career games against the Canadiens, including nine (2+7) in 11 games since joining the Sabres.
Jason Pominville (7+2) has nine points in his last 10 games against Montreal.