



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 10, 2019

Sabres' power play, Ullmark spark 3-1 win over Red Wings

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 9, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — A day after the Sabres clarified several comments made off the ice, coach Phil Housley was impressed watching his team clean up its various mistakes and deficiencies on it.

The power-play got goals from Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo, goalie Linus Ullmark didn't have to resort to acrobatics in stopping 28 shots behind a tighter-checking defense, and Buffalo beat the Detroit Red Wings 3-1 on Saturday.

"I think they refocused, but that's the thing for me is that's a tight group in there," Housley said. "I think it just brought us tighter together, the things that went on."

Housley was referring to himself and forward Sam Reinhart spending Friday clarifying eye-opening comments each made following a 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina.

Reinhart personally and publicly apologized to Ullmark and fellow goalie Carter Hutton, after saying he misspoke in saying "we need more from our goalies." What Reinhart said he meant to say is the team needs to do more for its goalies.

Housley clarified what some interpreted as him questioning general manager Jason Botterill, when asked to evaluate this group of defensemen.

There was little to complain about against Detroit.

The Sabres won for just the fourth time in 11 games (4-6-1) and improved to 10-14-5 since a 10-game winning streak in November briefly vaulted them into first place in the Eastern Conference standings.

Buffalo began the day four points behind Pittsburgh, which holds the East's second and final wild-card berth.

After being outshot 12-4 in the opening period, the Sabres broke through with three goals in the second.

Ullmark bounced back after allowing 10 goals on 75 shots in his previous two outings — and after Buffalo had allowed four or more goals in eight of its previous 10.

"We mostly talked about how we've got to clean up our end, and I thought we did a terrific job back there," Ullmark said.

The only costly miscue was on Ullmark, who was out of position in allowing Dylan Larkin to cut Buffalo's lead to 2-1 on a wrap-around goal with 2:46 remaining in the second period.

"It's definitely a bad goal on my part," Ullmark said. "Sometimes you screw up."

Okposo bailed him out 2:15 later by beating Detroit goalie Jimmy Howard high on short side with a shot from the left circle.

Howard finished with 18 saves, allowing three goals on 12 shots in the second period. Detroit has lost two straight since winning five of seven.

"Absolutely, it's a tough one to give up with, whatever, 50 seconds left or so," Red Wings forward Frans Nielsen said of Okposo's goal.

"But at the end of the day we've got to put more pucks in the net," he added. "It's not just bad luck right now. I think it's on us. We've got to find a way."

Ullmark made a difference, too.

His best save came with 8:03 remaining, and immediately after Buffalo's Tage Thompson squandered a 2-on-1 break at the other end. Ullmark held his ground to prevent Andreas Athanasiou's attempt to beat him through the legs on a wide-open breakaway.

Conor Sheary opened the scoring 75 seconds into the second period when he intercepted Justin Abdelkader's soft pass at Detroit's blue line.

Mittelstadt scored nine minutes later by one-timing in Jack Eichel's pass into the right circle for Buffalo's first power-play goal.

Buffalo's power-play went two for three, and has converted five of 10 opportunities in its last four games after going two of 30 in its previous 12.

NOTES: Red Wings D Trevor Daley is nearing his return after missing his 24th game with foot injury. Coach Jeff Blashill ruled out Daley from playing at Chicago on Sunday while saying he'll have an update on the player's status before the game at Nashville on Tuesday. ... Red Wings LW Tyler Bertuzzi (upper body) missed his sixth straight and Blashill expects him to miss at least the next two. ... Sabres Ds Marco Scandella played his 500th career game and Rasmus Ristolainen played his 400th. ... With an assist on Mittelstadt's goal, rookie Rasmus Dahlin became the NHL's fifth defenseman to reach 30 points before turning 19.

UP NEXT

Red Wings: At Chicago Blackhawks on Sunday.

Sabres: Host Winnipeg Jets on Sunday.

Sabres pounce on power play, setting stage for 3-1 win over Red Wings

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

For all the Buffalo Sabres' faults in Phil Housley's second season as coach, the franchise now possesses tantalizing offensive talent that can compete with the NHL's best.

At times, that strength has been a weakness. Gifted offensive players such as Jack Eichel or Casey Mittelstadt have an unwavering confidence that they can make the most difficult plays. That has led the Sabres to pass up open shots in search for the perfect scoring opportunity, particularly on the power play.

Alas, following a change in lines, the Sabres' dynamic players again bought into Housley's plea for simplicity, and the result was two power-play goals in a 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday afternoon in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres, now 27-20-7 with 61 points, are 5-for-10 on the power play this month after a 1-for-25 performance in January. This was one of their finer defensive performances in weeks and Linus Ullmark made 28 saves. However, power-play goals from Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo allowed Buffalo to hold a third-period lead rather than chasing to tie the score.

"I think the power play is really doing a good job possessing the puck in the zone," Housley said afterward. "I would like to see them shoot a little bit more. You saw two goals that came by just getting pucks to the net, but they have done a terrific job in the month of February. It's been a whole different story than it was in January. ... We're going to need them, especially in tight games like this."

Housley was unable to dedicate a significant portion of the little practice time he had to fixing the power play because the Sabres were forced to revisit the importance of finishing a check or being responsible without the puck. He and assistant coach Davis Payne would review weaknesses and basic tendencies through watching previous games, yet only so much can be accomplished on a whiteboard or through conversation.

Following a shutout loss in Dallas on Jan. 30, and a 1-for-3 showing against Chicago two days later, the Sabres revealed new-look power-play units this week with Mittelstadt skating with Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Dahlin.

The Sabres scored on both their opportunities in a 5-4 win Tuesday against Minnesota and went 2-for-3 Saturday afternoon.

After a failed attempt earlier in the second period Saturday, Dahlin received a pass near the blue line and sent the puck into the left faceoff circle, where Eichel immediately passed through three Red Wings to find Mittelstadt in the right circle. Mittelstadt's errant back-door pass attempt to Reinhart managed to find the back of the net for a 2-0 lead at 10:05 into the second period.

"I was excited when they told me I was going to work with those guys," Mittelstadt, who has eight goals in 54 games, beamed. "I knew I was ready. It doesn't change my job, though. I still have to move the puck well and keep possession. Both groups are doing that well right now."

Following Dylan Larkin's second-period goal to cut the deficit to one, Skinner drew a holding penalty against Michael Rasmussen. Twenty-one seconds later, with the Sabres' second power-play unit on the ice, Okposo collected the puck in the right-wing circle, patiently waited for a hole to emerge and fired a short-side snap shot over Jimmy Howard's glove for a 3-1 lead.

"Obviously when your [power play] clicks it helps the team out a lot," Okposo explained. "It creates some momentum. It created a couple big goals for us today so it's definitely nice to see."

Power-play success cannot only be measured by goals. After all, possession and shots create momentum — as Okposo noted — while wearing down an opponent, particularly a struggling one such as the Red Wings, who entered the game with the third-fewest points in the Eastern Conference.

The Sabres' recent offensive success — both on the power play and during 5-on-5 — stems from improved play with the puck. Their passes and zone entries have been crisp as of late. As important, they are getting the puck to the net, though they managed only four shots on goal in three power plays against Detroit. Entering Saturday, they had the fourth-most shots in the NHL over their previous 10 games.

"Our net-front guys have done a really good job all year long," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "They've been there. Maybe before these last few games, we just weren't shooting the puck enough. You've got to move it around but when you get the chance, you've got to take the shot. We've been pretty good at recovering the puck so that's been helping us too."

For much of this season, the Sabres have struggled to get an important insurance goal, and Okposo's helped them improve to 13-1-3 this season when leading after two periods. Like others around the NHL, they are a better defensive team when leading as opposed to chasing a deficit or trying to break a tie. Conor Sheary's goal at 1:15 into the second period — his ninth of the season — to make it 1-0 seemed to help the Sabres' defensive play.

"This is the way we have to play if we want to win games," Evan Rodrigues said. "It's not a hard recipe. ... We have enough talent to bury chances on power-play goals. That's what it comes down to. We defend, we're going to win."

Linus Ullmark stands tall again, backstops Sabres with 28 saves

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

Linus Ullmark was sitting at his stall in KeyBank Center following practice Friday while Sam Reinhart stood across the home dressing room surrounded by reporters.

Reinhart was explaining how he misspoke the previous night when it appeared he blamed Ullmark for a loss to Carolina and called the 25-year-old goalie "already one of the best in the world."

While it is likely too soon to measure Ullmark against the league's best, he showed Saturday afternoon why his teammates have expressed an unwavering confidence in his ability in net. Ullmark made 28 saves, including his third-period stop on Andreas Athanasiou's breakaway, to help the Buffalo Sabres beat the Detroit Red Wings, 3-1.

"Nothing goes through your mind," Ullmark said of his breakaway save. "He's a very fast guy. It's all about taking away as much as possible. Put the pedal to the metal. Luckily it bounced off, and I kept it outside the net."

The Sabres made Ullmark's job easier with their improved defensive play. Jake McCabe and Zach Bogosian laid out to break up 2-on-1 backdoor passes. For the most part, they kept the Red Wings' scoring chances to the short side and cleared traffic from in front of the net.

Still, Detroit received a few scoring chances because of unforced errors by Buffalo. Ullmark stopped Darren Helm during a 2-on-1 with 5:34 left in the first period — Lawrence Pilut closed off the passing lane to force Helm to shoot — and managed to stay in front of Justin Abdelkader's deflection in the second period.

The Sabres were controlling play in the third period when Tage Thompson and Vladimir Sobotka rushed toward Red Wings goalie Jimmy Howard for a 2-on-1. However, Thompson forced a pass and Athanasiou was sprung for a breakaway. Ullmark closed off his five-hole with a butterfly save and corralled the rebound to maintain a two-goal lead.

"It's a fine line," coach Phil Housley said. "We have a two-goal lead and a guy gets a breakaway. Those things, we just have to be aware, especially [against] a team that likes to stretch the zone. Realize and sense that danger when possession is in question because we got enough goals to win the game at that point. Let's let them crack and Linus made a couple big saves for us."

Ullmark had a .871 save percentage in his previous five games — two of which were relief appearances when Carter Hutton was pulled — while receiving little help from his teammates. In the 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina, five of the six goals allowed were scored within a few feet of the net.

He has made acrobatic, highlight-reel saves following ugly defensive plays, yet he won only two of his previous seven starts. His one weakness crept up against the Red Wings. With the Sabres leading 2-0, Dylan Larkin skated past Bogosian and behind the net.

Ullmark was slow to get to the right post, and Larkin buried a backhanded wraparound at 17:14 into the second period. It was the second such goal Ullmark allowed this week.

"I kind of misread that a little bit," Ullmark explained. "I got outside my post. It's definitely a bad goal from my part, especially now that it happened in a short amount of time. We know what to do, and sometimes you screw up."

Despite Marco Scandella taking a penalty with 3:32 left in regulation, Ullmark held on for the win. In Sabres history, no goalie has a better save percentage in their first 50 appearances with the team than Ullmark (.914).

Housley typically splits back-to-back games between his two goalies, however, he left the door open for Ullmark to start Sunday against Winnipeg. After all, the Sabres have not won back-to-back games in almost two months.

"We really played as a team today," Sabres center Casey Mittelstadt said. "When a mistake was made there was somebody there to help. Linus made some big saves to bail us out of situations. We have to be there for each other."

Mike Harrington: At least for one day, Sabres' defense doesn't rest

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

Lo and behold, the Buffalo Sabres actually can play some defense.

In the wake of Saturday's 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center, the takeaway will be to see if that game is the outlier, the aberration in a group of performances that have been among the franchise's worst defensively in many years.

There were plenty of sights for coach Phil Housley's sore eyes in this one.

Marco Scandella working over Luke Glendening in front of the Sabres goal and eventually putting him to the ice. Rasmus Ristolainen doing likewise with old friend Thomas Vanek, allowing Linus Ullmark to grab the puck and force a faceoff. Zach Bogosian going prone with his stick extended to knock the puck away and foil a 2-on-1 break.

There were few players easily strolling through the slot unimpeded for a chance at the net, not a lot of odd-man rushes against. And when there was a defensive misfire, like on Andreas Athanasiou's third-period breakaway, goalie Linus Ullmark was there to make a save and keep things flowing in the right direction.

Ullmark said it was a much easier game for a goalie to play because the Sabres held their position and were guarding the far side of the ice, allowing the goalie to mind the short side. Housley and defensive coach Steve Smith had been pleading with their players to stay home and not chase pucks behind the net or in corners, which was leading to the slot being left wide open at times.

Zach Bogosian breaks up a 2-on-1 in the second period. (Harry Scull Jr./Buffalo News)

Ullmark loved the Ristolainen play for its subtle impact.

"It's a small play that people might not notice because nothing fancy happened," Ullmark said. "It's just me putting my glove on top of the puck. It's what happening before that allowed me to do that."

"Systemwise, we've got to be all on the same page, know what we're we're doing out there," Ristolainen said "Everyone has to know their responsibility but today was a little better for sure. We got the result we wanted, goalie played great and we go on to the next one."

By the numbers

How much of a turnaround did Saturday's win mark?

The Sabres had given up 17 goals and 105 shots on goal in the last three games but still managed to go 1-1-1. In mid-January, meanwhile, they dropped three straight while giving up 16 goals on 85 shots. Just far too many goals.

Sabres 3, Red Wings 1

The Red Wings managed 29 shots on goal Saturday but weren't all that dangerous until the third period, when they were really pressing the action to try to overcome their two-goal deficit.

The Sabres entered Saturday having given up 51 goals in 13 games since the calendar turned to 2019. That's an average of 3.92 per game — and only Colorado (4.15) and Anaheim (4.0) have been worse.

It has been a total defensive failure the last three weeks. Forwards not coming back and cheating too much to go for offense. Defenseman dropping coverage and not using their bodies to clear a path in front of the net. And ultimately, goalies not making nearly enough saves.

The combined save percentage of Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark in that span was a paltry .875, ahead of only the woebegone Avalanche.

For the season, the Sabres stand 16th in the league in goals against (166) and 20th in goals-against at 5-on-5 at 112. Those are hardly terrible figures, but they have been driven up by the nightmare of the 10 games that led into Saturday.

The Sabres gave up 45 goals while going 3-6-1 in that stretch and also gave up 310 shots on goal. That's only a save percentage of .855.

"It's a choice you've got to make, protecting your own net and having respect for it," Housley said after Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina. "You look at the game and five of the six goals come right in front of our net. That's an area that players from the opposition should be very wary of going into. We've got to be tougher to play against. We've got to start pushing guys out, boxing guys out."

Sabres pounce on power play, setting stage for 3-1 win over Red Wings

Desperation on defense

The Sabres are currently playing with eight defensemen and a ninth (Casey Nelson) is on a conditioning loan to Rochester while trying to work his way back after being on the injured list since Nov. 30.

Housley has been forced to do plenty of shifting of his defensive pairs, some due to injury but most due to inefficiency. Ristolainen continues to be the workhorse, entering Saturday averaging 25 minutes 13 seconds per game. Bogosian (21:37) and 18-year-old wunderkind Rasmus Dahlin (20:47) are the only others averaging over 20 minutes.

Dahlin is running the best Corsi rating among the defense regulars at 5 on 5, with just a shade over 51 percent of all shot attempts in Buffalo's favor while he's on the ice. Ristolainen (47.0) and Marco Scandella (46.9) are at the bottom of that list.

It's interesting to note that rookie Lawrence Pilut, who has played only 20 games, has a 51.8 percent Corsi and oft-healthy scratched Nathan Beaulieu is at 50.3. Social media has spent much of the season bemoaning the on-ice presence of the veteran Scandella while Pilut and Beaulieu often sit.

"We've got to be more desperate in front of our net," Scandella said. "Every play counts this time of year. You have to play like it's playoff hockey. I feel like everyone is excited about it. We have a hungry group. We're young and learning together. You have to embrace how hard it's gonna be."

Like any NHL team, the Sabres spent countless hours in video sessions. Some are fun to watch. Others can be horrifying.

"It's about time we translate our words to action," Ristolainen said. "We've been talking about it. It took a little while to do it. We saw when we do it, we'll get the result most of the nights."

"In split seconds, you've got to make decisions. The guy you're with makes decisions. Sometimes they are different, sometimes they are right ones. You have to read off each other, be on your toes and play hard."

A dilemma in goal

The defense hasn't helped the goaltending out at times and the goaltending hasn't bailed out its team at other times. They've been equal opportunity offenders, so both elements working in concert Saturday was especially important.

"The game's wide open. You look across the league and there's a lot of high-scoring games," goalie Carter Hutton said after practice Friday. "It's just the way the league is trending. I think they've changed the bunch of rules and it's the way the game is."

Hutton was clearly referring to the reduction in the size of goalie equipment and the emphasis on calling slashing penalties the last two years that has created more power-play chances. But that's the same, of course, for every team. What's different here?

"At certain points, our game fluctuates," Hutton said. "You look across the league at every game, there's a ton of Wild West shootouts. We need to do a better job in certain areas just like every team needs to do a better job."

Hutton is 15-15-3 on the season with a 2.86 goals-against average and .909 save percentage. Saturday's win pushed Ullmark to 12-5-4, 2.97/.911. The biggest test of the homestand comes Sunday at 3 against Winnipeg, which is fighting Calgary, San Jose and Nashville for the top spot in the West.

Housley has an interesting choice to make in goal. Does he make it a rare back-to-back for a goalie by coming back with Ullmark, especially with the team looking for its first two-game winning streak since mid-December? Or does he return to Hutton, who posted a shootout win over the Jets in Winnipeg in November but it just 2-7-2 in his last 11 starts?

Housley wasn't tipping his hand Saturday. And ultimately it won't matter which goalie plays against Winnipeg, which is fifth in the league in goals, if everyone in front of the net doesn't get the job done.

"Every team goes through it. You get into a rut," Housley said. "Sometimes your offensive game is in order, and your defense is lacking. Sometimes, you're shutting teams down and not getting production. I think guys have taken ownership with it and addressed it. We know what we have to do. We have to be harder in front of the net, that's obvious. We've talked about it and now we've just got to execute."

The Wraparound: Sabres 3, Red Wings 1

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

The idea of a possible rift in the Buffalo Sabres' dressing room made Zach Bogosian laugh. No matter the public perception surrounding Sam Reinhart's postgame comments Thursday or the apology that followed, Bogosian and his teammates insisted they were as close Friday as they were at the end of the 10-game winning streak.

They appeared to be anything but a broken team Saturday afternoon inside KeyBank Center. The Sabres picked each other up when defensive mistakes were made, and their talent up front yielded two power-play goals in a 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings.

The Sabres improved to 27-20-7, including 2-1-1 on this seven-game homestand, after allowing four or more goals in eight of their previous 10 games. They have not won back-to-back games in nearly two months.

In addition to their defense correcting previous mistakes, the offense continued to thrive. Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo scored power-play goals, while Conor Sheary broke a scoreless tie early in the second period. Linus Ullmark made 28 saves, perhaps none more important than his stop on Andreas Athanasiou's third-period breakaway.

Dylan Larkin scored for Detroit (21-27-7) in the second period. Facing practically a 6-on-3 in the final minute — Evan Rodrigues lost his stick with the Red Wings on a power play and having an extra attacker because of an empty net — the Sabres killed a penalty to hold on for the win.

Opening salvo: Sheary intercepted a pass in the neutral zone, skated toward the Red Wings' slot and shot above Howard's blocker to make it 1-0 at 1:15 into the second period. It was Sheary's ninth goal of the season and his third since Nov. 8.

Power-play breakthrough: The Sabres' other two second-period goals came on the power play, as they improved to 5-for-10 in February. First, Mittelstadt made it 2-0 with his eighth goal of the season with assists from Jack Eichel and Rasmus Dahlin. Secondly, two minutes after the Red Wings cut the deficit to one goal, Okposo scored with a high, short-side shot from the right-wing circle.

Wraparound: Amid an impressive game by his defensemen, Ullmark gave up another wraparound goal at 17:44 into the second period when Larkin sped past Zach Bogosian and tucked the puck around the far post using his backhand.

Finding iron: Though the game was scoreless after one period, the Red Wings outshot the Sabres, 12-4, and had five more shot attempts through 20 minutes. Buffalo's best scoring chance came when Casey Mittelstadt hit the crossbar with 11:50 remaining, and Bogosian nearly scored when he one-timed a backhanded pass from Eichel.

Streaking: Rodrigues assisted on Okposo's goal to extend his point streak to three games and has 10 points, including six goals, in his last 12 games. Mittelstadt also extended his point streak to a career-high four games, and Ristolainen has nine assists in his last nine games.

Milestones: Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella and Ristolainen appeared in their 500th and 400th career NHL games, respectively.

Lineup: In addition to Ullmark starting, Tage Thompson was inserted back into the lineup and C.J. Smith was a healthy scratch. Defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick were also out of the lineup. Detroit defenseman Trevor Daley and winger Tyler Bertuzzi did not play because of injury.

Next: The Sabres continue their 11th set of 16 back-to-backs when they host the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday at 3 p.m.

Inside the NHL: Winnipeg standout Mark Scheifele has developed friendship with Eichel

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
February 9, 2019

It's fairly well-known who Jack Eichel's top friends are around the NHL. They all have backgrounds from the Boston area or the U.S. National Development Team. Think names such as Calgary's Noah Hanifin and Johnny Gaudreau, Toronto's Auston Matthews and Detroit's Dylan Larkin.

The one player Eichel has developed a tight bond with since his NHL career began – and whom he had no prior relationship with – is in town Sunday. And that's Winnipeg standout center Mark Scheifele.

On the surface, there's not much in common there. Scheifele is a Canadian, from Kitchener, Ont. He's three years older than Eichel at 25. They first met with Team North America at the 2016 World Cup camp.

Remember the infamous story of that first night: The staff brought the players together on a Montreal hotel rooftop, but the Americans stayed with the Americans and Canadians stayed with the Canadians.

Coaches realized they had to forcefeed some crossover and eventually got players from opposite sides of the border talking. Amazingly, that group became one of the most memorable teams in hockey history in just three weeks. Eichel and Scheifele still stay in touch regularly.

"It was really kind of weird how it came about," Scheifele told this corner at the All-Star Game in San Jose. "It actually started out that we found out we both did skills work in the offseason with [former NHL star] Adam Oates. So you start bonding and talking about that. And then we went to a Starbucks before all our games together in that tournament. That's how it started, but it's grown into a really good friendship."

It didn't hurt in Eichel's eyes either that Scheifele is a big New England Patriots fan who has a signed Tom Brady jersey in his condo.

"Jack is a guy I talk to on a regular basis, check in how he's doing, send him a note when he has a big game or whatever," Scheifele said. "He's a really smart guy, a guy whose game I really appreciate. I love watching him, really respect the way he plays. He's a guy, who still has only touched the surface. He's going to be a star in this league for a long time, but he's got a lot more in his game still."

"He's a guy I've been able to talk to all the time and not even about hockey," Eichel told me last season. "More about how things were going for him, things he likes doing. He's a real big hockey nerd and I give him credit. He eats, sleeps, breathes hockey and is a good guy to talk to."

The Jets were my choice to win the Stanley Cup in September, and I would still pick them as my choice to emerge from the uber-competitive Western Conference. The Cup choice now, however, has to be Tampa Bay.

But it would be no shock if Winnipeg won it all -- and made good on The Hockey News' 2015 prediction that the Jets would raise the Cup in four years.

The Jets are a team full of speed and savvy (think Patrik Laine and Kyle Connor) as well as size (Scheifele, Blake Wheeler, Dustin Byfuglien, Jacob Trouba and Tyler Myers). And they have a terrific goaltending tandem in Connor Hellebuyck and Laurent Brossoit.

Scheifele entered Saturday's game in Ottawa leading the Jets in goals (27, two more than Laine) and second to Wheeler in points with 63. He entered Saturday at 12th in the NHL in scoring while Eichel was tied for 24th.

The Sabres posted a shootout victory against Winnipeg in the teams' first meeting in November and Scheifele knows the Jets will be in for another tough test. Both teams will be on back-to-backs.

"Jack was out those few games, it really hurt that team," Scheifele said. "When you lose a guy of his stature, it's going to be a tough loss. That's hockey and that's what I told him.

"You'll go through good times and bad times. The teams that go through that adversity the best come out ahead. They don't go through a big slide, they figure it out quick. That's what makes the best teams and that's where Buffalo has to get better. They have a good core of players, budding superstars really. This kind of experience is going to be really good for Jack and for their team."

Money matters on Matthews deal

So Auston Matthews signed an extension with the Leafs for five years and \$58.17 million, putting his cap hit at just more than \$11.6 million. Starting next season, that would put him second in the league to Connor McDavid's \$12.5 million hit.

Matthews is getting \$54.4 million of the deal in signing bonuses, which is major lockout protection for him but has to be concerning for teams without the big pockets the Leafs have. Look for ownership to move on that issue in the next collective bargaining agreement, limiting the percentage of signing bonuses that can be handed out in a deal.

It's also interesting to note how he took a shorter term – not the max eight-year deals that McDavid and Eichel got – and can go for another big deal when he's 26. By then, how much might he be worth?

And now the Leafs turn their attention to Mitch Marner, who won't get as much money as he thought. Had Matthews gone for an eight-year deal that would have paid a higher cap than McDavid, Marner could have been looking at \$10 million-\$11 million per season.

But Matthews and Leafs GM Kyle Dubas agreed to a shorter and cheaper deal in part to give the Leafs a better chance to win. With John Tavares already in the fold, it would have been difficult for the Leafs to keep all their key parts otherwise. While Marner's camp might have wanted Matthews money, the Leafs can now use a comparable such as Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov at \$9.5 million to try to keep Marner's money down as well.

That's some really good work by Dubas and some understanding by Matthews of what it takes to keep a team together. Eichel's deal, by the way, should be looking better and better as it goes on at \$10 million per season. The way the league is trending, he might be well underpaid by Years 5-8.

1-2-3 from the '18 Draft

The top three players from last June's draft -- Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, Carolina forward Andrei Svechnikov and Montreal center Kasper Kotkaniemi -- all scored a goal Tuesday night, marking just the fifth time in NHL history that had been done in the season immediately following their selection.

The feat had not been pulled off in nearly 34 years, since Mario Lemieux (Pittsburgh), Kirk Muller (New Jersey) and Ed Olczyk (Chicago) did it on April 7, 1985.

The last time three 18-year-old players each scored on the same day was March 20, 1984. That trio was Calgary's Dan Quinn, Boston's Cam Neely and Detroit's Steve Yzerman.

Around the boards

* The Minnesota media swarmed former Eden Prairie High star Casey Mittelstadt following the morning skate here Tuesday when the Sabres played the Wild. What's life been like in the NHL so far? Mittelstadt said walking on airplane tarmacs and up stairs into private charters has been the biggest eye-opener for him.

"I was riding on a bus a couple of years ago going to Edina," Mittelstadt told the visitors. "That's been one of the biggest differences for me."

* Sidney Crosby played in his 916th game for the Penguins Saturday night in Tampa Bay, passing Lemieux for the most in team history.

* The Blues and Blackhawks got hot, which brought both teams back into the Western Conference playoff race. But so did the collapses of others. The Ducks entered the weekend having lost 18 of 20; the Avalanche have dropped 15 of their last 18; and the Canucks have lost eight of 12.

* More hating on the NHL schedule: Just one game Friday night (Carolina at New York) but eight matinees on Saturday. Like the Sabres, lots of teams are trying to cut down on their back-to-backs by not playing as many Friday nights.

And you wonder how much the league is looking to nudge up exposure in Europe by not having so many games at night in North America, which are on in the wee hours of the morning across the ocean.

* NBC is giving Mike Tirico a chance at hockey play-by-play for the first time in his long broadcasting career when he calls Wednesday's Chicago at Detroit game on NBC Sports Network. The network has used Tirico in host roles at last year's Stanley Cup final as well as this year's Winter Classic and All-Star Game. He will work with Ed Olczyk and Brian Boucher.

Linus Ullmark to start, C.J. Smith scratched for Sabres vs. Red Wings

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 9, 2019

Phil Housley chose not to make wholesale changes following another defensive letdown Thursday night. The Buffalo Sabres' coach will start Linus Ullmark in goal this afternoon against the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center. Opening faceoff is 1:08 p.m.

The only lineup change is Tage Thompson will replace C.J. Smith, who has scored in two of his last three games for Buffalo. Defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick will be the healthy scratches.

With two games this weekend, Housley opted to use Ullmark because the 25-year-old had 35 saves in a 3-2 shootout win in Detroit on Nov. 24. Carter Hutton will likely start Sunday against Winnipeg, which scored only one goal on 26 shots against him Nov. 16.

"Linus has played some very solid hockey for us," Housley told reporters Saturday morning. "He had a solid game against Detroit and we take that into [consideration]. Carter had a good game against Winnipeg. We'll see after this game who is going to get the next start, but Linus is playing today."

Ullmark has an .871 save percentage over his past five games; however, he has received little help from his teammates. That has forced him to make a number of acrobatic, highlight-reel saves. He has also allowed few soft goals and has done a better job controlling rebounds. Ullmark has started seven of the past 10 games for Buffalo.

Smith, who was recalled from Rochester on Monday, scored in the Sabres' 5-4 shootout win over Minnesota on Tuesday. He played 10:01 in a 6-5 overtime loss to Carolina on Tuesday, a performance that resonated well with Housley.

Thompson scored against the Red Wings earlier this season, which Housley said prompted the lineup change. The Sabres' defensive lineup was unclear during Friday's practice since Lawrence Pilut and Jake McCabe skated in a drill at the same time as Beaulieu and Hunwick.

In the past, Housley has chosen to change his pairings following a loss, but neither Pilut nor McCabe played particularly poor against the Hurricanes. While the personnel didn't change, Housley opted to switch the pairings.

Marco Scandella and Rasmus Ristolainen, who are playing in their 500th and 400th career NHL games, respectively, are on the top pairing. Rasmus Dahlin will again skate with Zach Bogosian, while Pilut is paired with McCabe, who will again play on his off-side.

The Sabres have allowed four or more goals in eight of their last 10 games and 45 goals over that span.

The Sabres really paid attention to detail in win over Detroit

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 9, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - If the Sabres want to be a consistently good team they need to do some of the things they did in Saturday's win over Detroit.

Let's start with Evan Rodrigues. He spent almost two minutes killing a penalty without a stick. It was actually a 6-on-4 because the Red Wings had pulled their goaltender, but he used his brains to cut off passing lanes and play with a desperation. He was dead tired, but he finally saw an opening to sprint to the bench and grab a stick. After he did that, he intercepted a pass and got the puck out.

Later on a penalty kill, Rodrigues hustled into the offensive zone and shielded the puck along the wall with his body killing off many precious seconds. Detroit started out of the zone, but Rodrigues kept his feet moving and stole the puck back at the blue line.

Another huge play was Conor Sheary stealing the puck from Justin Abdelkader. Again, it was speed and the desire to make a play that got him there. Sheary wasn't done though. He showed patience and savvy to set Mike Green up to screen Jimmy Howard and get the Sabres out to a 1-0 lead.

Buffalo came out very deliberate and it didn't produce a lot of offense, but I think it's exactly what it needed to do. The players were careful in the first period, but in a good way. All five guys on the ice paid attention to detail. They paid attention to if there were open players and if there were, they were eliminated.

Phil Housley asked for the team to be tough to play against and I saw an improvement. Luke Glendening set up in front of Linus Ullmark and Marco Scandella showed up and cross checked him at least five times to get him out of there. I saw Zach Bogosian, Rasmus Ristolainen and Rasmus Dahlin also eliminating guys in front. If they're on their backside, they can't score.

Saturday they played together as five-man units. When mistakes were made, they helped each other and when he had to, Ullmark made huge saves.

Tage Thompson over passed the puck on a 2-on-1 and Detroit went the other way. Andreas Athanasiou was sprung on a clear cut breakaway, but Ullmark made the save.

Detroit was able to create a 2-on-1 while killing a penalty, but Ullmark was big. Jake McCabe sacrificed the body to block a third period shot. These are the details that good teams do to win hockey games.

The power play has scored five goals in four February games and secondary scoring is picking up.

Kyle Okposo has three goals in seven games, Rodrigues has 10 points in 12 games, Casey Mittelstadt has eight points in 12 games and Ristolainen has 11 points in 13 games.

Even Sheary has 10 points in 14 games.

Buffalo came back against Carolina a squeezed out a point. With Saturday's victory the Sabres have picked up five of six points. You have to go back to mid-December for the last time that happened.

There's no time to rest as Winnipeg was in Ottawa on Saturday and will be here for a 3:00 on Sunday. The Jets have struggled lately and if Buffalo does the little things well again, I think they'll have a good chance to win.

Sabres down Detroit 3-1

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 9, 2019

The Sabres used two power play goals in the second period to help secure a 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center.

Casey Mittelstadt nearly gave the game its first score halfway through the first period, but hit the cross bar with his shot attempt. Sam Reinhart was called for the first penalty of the game. He was whistled for a slashing minor that gave Detroit the chance at the man advantage. However, the blue and gold were able to kill off the opportunity without surrendering a goal.

Buffalo was outshot by the Red Wings in the opening period 12-4. Linus Ullmark made all 12 saves for the blue and gold, while Jimmy Howard stopped all four Buffalo shots he faced in the period.

Conor Sheary took advantage of a Red Wings turnover in the neutral zone, and give Buffalo a 1-0 lead. Justin Abdelkader was the Detroit player who gave the puck away, and Sheary used him as a screen to beat Howard with a wrist shot. The goal was unassisted.

The Sabres took advantage of their second power play of the period, extending the lead to 2-0 over Detroit. Jack Eichel used his vision to feed a pass across the ice to Mittelstadt, who beat Howard with a low wrist shot along the ice. Abdelkader was the opponent in the penalty box at the time of the goal. Eichel and Rasmus Dahlin assisted on the score.

Dylan Larkin took advantage of a power play opportunity to cut into Detroit's deficit, 2-1, in the second period. Jeff Skinner was in the penalty box for high sticking at the time of the goal. Thomas Vanek and Andreas Anthanasiou assisted on the Red Wings' first goal of the game.

Kyle Okposo answered right back on the man advantage to make it a two-goal lead once again for the Sabres, 3-1. Okposo's 10th goal of the season came while Michael Rasmussen was penalized for holding. Rasmus Ristolainen and Evan Rodrigues assisted on the goal that came with less than one minute to go in the middle frame.

Buffalo did a good job of penalty killing in the third period, twice able to handle the shorthanded chance. The Red Wings failed to capitalize on a 6-on-4 four chance with the goaltender pulled late in the final period. Rodrigues was a key contributor to the penalty kill for Buffalo, along with several others blocking shots from reaching the net.

Scoring Summary

Goal Summary

First Period

BUF: none

DET: none

Second Period

BUF: 1:15 - Conor Sheary (9) (unassisted). 10:05 - Casey Mittelstadt (8) PPG (Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin).

19:29 - Kyle Okposo (10) PPG (Rasmus Ristolainen, Evan Rodrigues)

DET: 17:14 - Dylan Larkin (23) PPG (Thomas Vanek, Andreas Anthanasiou)

Third Period

BUF: none

DET: none

Penalty Summary

First Period

BUF: 11:19 - Sam Reinhart (2 min., slashing)

DET: none

Second Period

BUF: 16:46 - Jeff Skinner (2 min., high sticking)

DET: 2:23 - Niklas Kronwall (2 min., holding). 9:41 - Justin Abdelkader (2 min., interference)

Third Period

BUF: 12:20 - Tage Thompson (2 min., tripping). 16:28 - Marco Scandella (2 min., high sticking)

DET: none

Shots on Goal

BUF: 21 (4, 12, 5)

DET: 29 (12, 5, 12)

Saves

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 28 saves

DET: Jimmy Howard - 18 saves

Power Play Chances

BUF: 2 for 3

DET: 1 for 4

What's next

The Sabres are right back at it on home ice on Sunday afternoon. Buffalo and the Winnipeg Jets drop the puck at three o'clock on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550. Pregame coverage with Brian Koziol begins at 2 p.m.

Defensive-minded Sabres respond after rough loss, beat Red Wings

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 9, 2019

BUFFALO – See, the Sabres can still showcase a strong defense. It's just that sometimes, most notably throughout the disturbing 10-game stretch that preceded their tight 3-1 victory over the Detroit Red Wings, they rarely showed much interest in it.

"Mentality, we wanted to defend," Sabres center Evan Rodrigues said of what changed Saturday afternoon, two days after an ugly 6-5 overtime loss. "We didn't want to the other day. Today, we made a conscious effort of keeping the puck out of our net."

The Sabres sorely needed a sturdy effort. They kept breaking down Thursday against the Carolina Hurricanes, suffering arguably their most frustrating loss this season.

Following that game, they sounded frustrated, even angry. Sabres coach Phil Housley and winger Sam Reinhart both issued mea culpas Friday for some of their words after that defeat.

If the Sabres roar back and snatch a playoff spot, perhaps Saturday's win before a capacity crowd of 19,070 inside KeyBank Center will be looked at as a turning point.

"They refocused, but the thing for me is that's a tight group in there," Housley said. "They care for each other. Our coaching staff has done a great job. I think it just brought us tighter together, the things that went on."

The Sabres controlled most of Saturday's contest, going up 2-0 in the second before ending the period up 3-1 thanks to two power-play goals.

Then unlike so many recent efforts, they locked down late and controlled the front of their net, showcasing an aggressive defense.

The Sabres also received solid netminding from Ullmark, who made 28 saves, including a breakaway stop on Andreas Athanasiou with about eight minutes left in the tilt.

"The guys responded really well," Housley said. "I thought we did a much better job in front of our net. When they did get to the interior, (our) guys tied them up and we were able to box them out to give Linus a good line of sight to the puck."

To illustrate how much Sabres changed in a two-day span, goalie Linus Ullmark described a nondescript play very few probably noticed.

In the third period, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen boxed out an opponent around the crease, allowing Ullmark to freeze the puck.

"We can get a whistle, get the guys changed," Ullmark said. "It's just one of those small plays people don't really notice it. It's because nothing fancy happened. It's just me putting the glove on top of the puck. But it was what happened before that that enabled me to do it."

He added: "We mostly talked about we got to clean up our own end. I thought we did a terrific job back there. We didn't give them anything, and once we did give them something, we recovered very well."

Saturday's win certainly offers the Sabres a blueprint for success.

"This is the way we have to play if we want to win games," Rodrigues said. "It's not a hard recipe. We defend. We have enough talent to bury chances on power-play goals. That's what it comes down to. We defend, we're going to win."

The power play, which converted just one of its 25 opportunities in January (4 percent), has scored five times in 10 chances this month.

After winger Conor Sheary opened the scoring 1:15 into the second period, center Casey Mittelstadt scored on the power play at 10:05. Detroit's Dylan Larkin scored a power-play goal before winger Kyle Okposo capitalized on the man advantage at 19:29.

Why has the power play suddenly started humming?

"It's a mix of everything," Mittelstadt said. "I think we're moving the puck really well and taking shots when they're there. I think what we did really well tonight was working on recovery, getting the puck back. I think before my goal they had a chance to get it out three or four times, and we had guys there.

"Same thing on Okie's goal, just a good job getting the puck back and then getting the puck to the net. I guess when you start shooting, they go in."

The Sabres host the Winnipeg Jets this afternoon, the fifth tilt of their seven-game home stand.

Sabres notes: Conor Sheary scores, keeps building confidence

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 9, 2019

BUFFALO – Barely a minute into Saturday afternoon's second period, Sabres winger Conor Sheary intercepted Justin Abdelkader's weak backhand pass outside the opposing blue line and zoomed into the slot before beating goalie Jimmy Howard.

The slick goal, just Sheary's third in the last 34 outings, served as another reminder the diminutive UMass product ranks among the Sabres' most talented forwards.

"Once I got the turnover, I think I just tried to attack quick," Sheary said following the Sabres' 3-1 win against the Detroit Red Wings inside KeyBank Center.

But after scoring six times in the first 16 contests, Sheary endured a marathon slump, going 28 games without scoring past a goalie. His only goal over that stretch was an empty-netter Dec. 22.

In recent weeks, however, the two-time Stanley Cup winner has started looking more like his regular self, compiling two goals and 10 points in the last 14 outings.

Coach Phil Housley said Sheary's game-winning goal in a 5-4 road victory Jan. 29 against the Columbus Blue Jackets generated some confidence.

Over the past few games, Sheary, center Casey Mittelstadt and Sam Reinhart have been perhaps the Sabres' most aggressive line.

"That line, for me, has been really tenacious," Housley said. "The chemistry is forming. They're getting some opportunities now. A lot more offensive zone faceoffs. I think they just read off each other very well."

Sheary said the trio plays fast.

"When we're good, we're effective on the forecheck and we're creating turnovers and making plays off of that," Sheary said. "I think lately we've been making simple plays, getting pucks behind the D-men and just going to work. I think simplifying our game has really changed our dynamic."

–

Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella doesn't remember much about his NHL debut with the Minnesota Wild on Nov. 12, 2010.

"I feel like it's a blur," said Scandella, who played his 500th NHL game Saturday.

Scandella, 28, said he was already in bed when his phone rang at 11 p.m. the previous night. Minnesota needed to summon a defenseman for its tilt against the Panthers because the NHL had suspended Brent Burns for elbowing.

So Scandella, who was playing for the Wild's old AHL affiliate, the Houston Aeros, took a 6 a.m. flight to Florida.

"I remember playing a few shifts, but I feel like everything happened so fast," Scandella said.

Scandella shuttled between Houston and Minnesota for two more seasons before finally sticking in the NHL in 2013-14.

Meanwhile, Rasmus Ristolainen, Scandella's defense partner, made his 400th NHL appearance Saturday.

–

The Sabres made one lineup change, inserting winger Tage Thompson, a healthy scratch for Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes, for rookie C.J. Smith.

"I liked C.J.'s game, but it's part of his development," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I thought Tage had a really good, solid game against Detroit last game. We're just getting him back in the lineup."

Thompson scored in the Sabres' 3-2 shootout win Nov. 24 in Detroit.

–

Well-traveled former Sabres star Thomas Vanek is in his second stint with the Red Wings this season.

Incredibly, the Austrian has played for seven teams – the New York Islanders, Montreal Canadiens, Minnesota Wild, Red Wings, Panthers, Vancouver Canucks, Columbus Blue Jackets and Detroit again – since the Sabres sent him to Long Island on Oct. 27, 2013.

Vanek, 35, signed a one-year, \$3 million contract to return to Detroit.

The winger has become a popular late-season acquisition, having been traded three times – in 2014, 2017 and 2018 – before the deadline.

Vanek could be moved again this year. The Red Wings likely won't make the playoffs.

The former fifth overall pick has kept producing in his 14th season. He recorded an assist Saturday, his 10th point – four goals and six assists – in the last nine outings.

Overall, Vanek who played his 1,000th game Jan. 4, has compiled 11 goals and 27 points in 47 games this season.

–

The Sabres welcomed back former coach Dan Bylsma, who's in his first year as an assistant with the Red Wings, during a stoppage in play.

–

The Sabres also scratched defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Matt Hunwick. Beaulieu has sat out 17 of the last 21 games as a healthy scratch. Meanwhile, Hunwick has been scratched 18 of the last 19 contests.

–

It will be interesting to see if Housley starts goalie Linus Ullmark again this afternoon against the Winnipeg Jets.

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton made 25 saves against the Jets in a 2-1 shootout win Nov. 16 in Winnipeg.

Hutton has some terrific numbers – 5-4-1 with a 2.02 goals-against average, a .936 save percentage and one shutout – in 11 career games against the Jets.

Hutton hasn't played since getting yanked from a 7-3 loss to the Chicago Blackhawks on Feb. 1.

Sabres' Tage Thompson back against Red Wings; Linus Ullmark to start

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 9, 2019

BUFFALO – Some quick notes on this afternoon's Sabres tilt against the Detroit Red Wings inside KeyBank Center:

– The Sabres will make one lineup change, inserting winger Tage Thompson, a healthy scratch for Thursday's 6-5 overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes, for rookie C.J. Smith.

"I liked C.J.'s game, but it's part of his development," Sabres coach Phil Housley said this morning. "I thought Tage had a really good, solid game against Detroit last game. We're just getting him back in the lineup."

Thompson scored in the Sabres' 3-2 shootout win Nov. 24 in Detroit.

– Housley said goalie Linus Ullmark will start. Ullmark made 35 saves Nov. 24.

– The Sabres are 4-1-0 in afternoon games this year. Why have they been so successful?

"The just the preparation of guys being ready," Housley said. "We talked about that. You have to get your head geared up and your mind geared up to get ready, because you've just eaten some scrambled eggs and now you're expected to go out and perform."

5 Observations: Sabres top Red Wings 3-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 9, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Three goals in the second period lifted the Buffalo Sabres to their second win of the season against Detroit, knocking off the Red Wings 3-1. Conor Sheary, Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo scored for the Sabres, who improve to 27-20-7 on the season [61 points].

5 Observations from Saturday's win:

Fewer mistakes, more success

After allowing 17 goals in their last three games, the Sabres played a much tighter game defensively and committed significantly fewer mistakes. When Red Wings' players were standing in front of the Sabres net, they were covered or knocked to the ice. When the Sabres coughed up a puck, defenders were diving into the passing lane to ensure they didn't squander an odd-man rush. It was by no means a perfect defensive effort but it was a lot cleaner than what we've seen since the Sabres returned home.

Lights Out Linus

Aside from over-committing on a wrap around from Dylan Larkin in the second period, Linus Ullmark played a near perfect game. In the first period, Ullmark came up big, turning away two separate shots on a 2-on-1 from Luke Glendening and Darren Helm. After stopping all 12 shots he faced in the first period, Ullmark was strong to start the second, turning away a great scoring chance on a tip from Justin Abdelkader. His best and most clutch save came in the third period, closing the door on an Andreas Athanasiou breakaway that would've made it a one-goal game with plenty of time left.

With the Sabres back in action tomorrow, Carter Hutton will likely be in goal for the Sabres as they take on the Jets.

Salvaging the Homestand

Before the Sabres returned to KeyBank Center for their seven-game homestand I said they needed at least nine of the 14 points up for grabs. After an ugly loss to the Blackhawks to start the seven-game stretch it didn't look like the Sabres would have much of a shot at my somewhat lofty goal. Well, thanks to their win against Detroit, the Sabres have locked up five of a possible eight points in their last four games. With three-games and six more points available before the Sabres head back on the road, it's not crazy to think they could meet that nine-point goal.

Here are the games to finish their homestand:

Sunday, Feb. 10, vs. Jets

Tuesday, Feb. 12, vs. Islanders

Friday, Feb. 15, vs. Rangers

It by no means is the easiest three-game stretch but with a few days off before the Islanders game and a few more days separating the Rangers game, crazier things have happened.

Pinball Wizards

After an absolutely abysmal 10-game stretch for the Sabres, the power play appears to be turning a corner. In the second period on Saturday, the Sabres scored twice with the man advantage thanks to some pretty passing.

On their first power play goal, Mittelstadt beat Red Wings goaltender Jimmy Howard with a wrist shot from the slot. It appeared Howard reacted late, likely because of the perfect cross-ice pass from Jack Eichel to set up Mittelstadt.

In the dying seconds of the period, the Sabres capitalized with man advantage yet again, as Kyle Okposo ripped a shot over Howard's shoulder. Rasmus Ristolainen and Evan Rodrigues set up the play, as they continued passing the puck back and forth to give Okposo some space. Once the shooting lane was clear, Okposo was fed the puck and he made no mistake.

Heating Up

Casey Mittelstadt is starting to heat up. With his goal against the Red Wings, Mittelstadt now has eight points in his last 12 games. While that might not sound like an offensive explosion, it's important to remember he had only 11 points in the previous 42 games. After a relatively slow start to the season for the 20-year-old rookie, Mittelstadt is starting to look more comfortable at both ends of the ice. His talent is obvious and we're starting to see the numbers reflect his ridiculous potential.

Second period surge lifts Sabres past Red Wings 3-1

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

February 9, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y.(WIVB) - The Sabres scored three times in the second period while Linus Ullmark continued his strong play between the pipes to power Buffalo to a 3-1 win over the Red Wings Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center.

With the victory the Sabres push their season total to 61 as they try to keep pace in the wild card standings. Buffalo entered the day with 59 points and four points back of the wild card spot, which is held by Pittsburgh.

Conor Sheary scored for just the third time since November 8th, 2018, capitalizing on a Red Wings turnover to Jimmy Howard and give Buffalo a 1-0 lead 1:15 into the second.

On the man advantage a little later in the period, Casey Mittelstadt, who fired a shot off the crossbar earlier in the game, collected his eighth goal of the season, firing home a beautiful pass from Jack Eichel to give Buffalo a 2-0 lead.

The rookie centerman has now seven points (2G, 5A) in his last nine games.

Detroit would pull within one with a power play goal of it's own. Dylan Larkin potted his 23rd of the season, beating Linus Ullmark on a wrap around.

Special teams would continue to light it up, this time with Kyle Okposo adding another power play goal for the Blue & Gold in the seconds, to push the Sabres' lead back out to two at the end of the second period.

Sabres score three times in second period, defeat Red Wings

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

February 9, 2019

BUFFALO -- The Buffalo Sabres scored two power-play goals for the second time in three games in a 3-1 win against the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

The Sabres are 5-for-10 on the power play in four games in February after going 1-for-25 in January. They scored two power-play goals in a 5-4 shootout win against the Minnesota Wild on Tuesday.

"The power play is really doing a good job possessing the puck in the zone," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said. "I would like to see them shoot a little bit more. You saw two goals that came by just getting pucks to the net, but they have done a terrific job in the month of February. It's been a whole different story than it was in January. They're contributing. We're going to need them, especially in tight games like this."

Conor Sheary, Casey Mittelstadt and Kyle Okposo scored in the second period, and Linus Ullmark made 28 saves for the Sabres (27-20-7) .

Dylan Larkin scored, and Jimmy Howard made 18 saves for the Red Wings (21-27-7).

"We've got to get back to getting dirty with our offense," Detroit coach Jeff Blashill said. "We've got to get back to getting pucks to the cage with a guy at the cage, finding ways to score those dirty goals. That's been one of the biggest improvements from the beginning of the year to the midway point but now all of a sudden it looks like we want to pass at the net. You can't pass at the net, you have to shoot it."

Sheary intercepted Justin Abdelkader's pass and used Red Wings defenseman Mike Green as a screen to make it 1-0 from the high slot at 1:15 of the second period.

Mittelstadt extended his point streak to four games with a power-play goal from the right face-off dot at 10:05 to give Buffalo a 2-0 lead.

"You get a bounce here and there, it kind of gets you going a little bit," Mittelstadt said. "But I never lost confidence or anything like that. It's important to keep working on what you know you need to do to get better, and eventually they start coming."

Detroit cut the lead to 2-1 on the power play when Larkin used his speed on a wraparound to slide the puck into the right side of the net at 17:14. Okposo made it 3-1 on the power play from the top of the right circle with 31 seconds left in the period.

"It's a tough one to give up," Frans Nielsen said. "Coming out (for the third period in) a one-goal game, it's nothing, but two it's a little more difficult. It was a tough one, but at the end of the day we've got to put more pucks in the net."

Andreas Athanasiou came close to pulling the Red Wings back to within one at 11:55 of the third period. Nielsen sprung the speedy wing on a breakaway, but Ullmark closed his pads and held tight as he slid backward in his crease to preserve Buffalo's two-goal lead.

"He's a very fast guy," Ullmark said. "It's all about taking away as much as possible. Put the pedal to the metal. Luckily it bounced off and I kept it outside the net."

They said it

"I don't think there's any question that Dylan is taking huge steps towards being that good all-around centerman that you have to be to be a successful hockey team. I think he's a huge building block for this team because of it." -- Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill on Dylan Larkin

"I thought the guys responded really well. I thought we did a much better job in front of our net, and when they did get to the interior [our] guys tied them up and we were able to box them out to give Linus a good line of sight to the puck. ... It was a big improvement from last game." -- Sabres coach Phil Housley

Need to know

Ullmark's .914 save percentage through 50 NHL games is the best by any goalie who played his first 50 games with the Sabres. ... Rookie Rasmus Dahlin had an assist and became the fifth defenseman in NHL history with at least 30 points (six goals, 24 assists) before his 19th birthday (53 games). Housley is the leader with 57 points (17 goals, 40 assists); he did it in 66 games. ... Athanasiou has six assists in his past five games. ... Thomas Vanek has 10 points (four goals, six assists) in his past nine games.

What's next

Red Wings: At the Chicago Blackhawks on Sunday (3 p.m. ET; NBCSCH, FS-D, NHL.TV)

Sabres: Host the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday (3 p.m. ET; ESPN+, MSG-B, TSN3, NHL.TV)

Sabres rebound with strong defensive outing in win over Red Wings

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 9, 2019

It was a scene that Buffalo Sabres fans are all too familiar with: Thomas Vanek lurking near the crease late in the third period, looking to cash in on a rebound after a shot bounced off Linus Ullmark.

In order to get to that rebound, Vanek would first have to go through Rasmus Ristolainen. The 6-foot-4 defenseman acted as a wall in front of the Buffalo net, jostling the former Sabre to the ground while Ullmark covered the puck.

It wasn't a play that will show up on the highlights - there were those, too - but it was the one that came to Ullmark's mind when describing the defensive effort that earned the Sabres a 3-1 win over the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday.

"Risto does a terrific job of boxing the guy out and I just laid my glove on top of it," Ullmark said. "We can get a whistle, get the guys changed. It's just one of those small plays people don't really notice it. It's because nothing fancy happened.

"It's just me putting the glove on top of the puck. But it was what happened before that that enabled me to do it."

Coming off a pair of games in which they allowed a combined 10 goals, the Sabres rallied behind coach Phil Housley's message of defensive awareness for all three periods against the Red Wings. They were outshot, 29-21, but kept most of the Red Wings' attempts to the outside while making sure to prevent second-chance opportunities.

The Sabres also blocked 14 shots, including five apiece from Ristolainen and Marco Scandella.

"I thought the guys responded really well," Housley said. "I thought we did a much better job in front of our net and when they did get to the interior [our] guys tied them up and we were able to box them out to give Linus a good line of sight to the puck. ... It was a big improvement from last game."

Next home game: Sunday vs. Winnipeg

Buffalo combined that inspired defensive effort with another productive night from its resurgent power play, which received goals from Kyle Okposo and Casey Mittelstadt, to extend its point streak to three games (2-0-1). Conor Sheary also scored.

Ullmark, making his fourth start in five games, made 28 saves, including a breakaway stop on Andreas Athanasiou while protecting the two-goal lead with 8:02 remaining in the third period. Detroit's lone goal was scored by Dylan Larkin, a wrap-around on the power play that made it 2-1 in the second.

"We mostly talked about how we've got to clean up our own end, and I thought we did a terrific job back there," Ullmark said. "In other words, we didn't give them anything. When we did give them something, we recovered very well."

The victory was a strong response to what Housley admitted was an emotional overtime loss on Thursday night, when the Sabres dropped a point to a Hurricanes team they had been tied with in the standings.

It ended with a gut-check effort - the Sabres were down two men with Scandella in the box for high-sticking and Red Wings goalie Jimmy Howard on the bench. Evan Rodrigues was on the ice without a stick, but still dived to break up a pass through the middle.

"I think they refocused, but the thing for me is that's a tight group in there," Housley said. "They care for each other. Our coaching staff has done a great job. I think it just brought us tighter together, the things that went on."

"You could see in the effort tonight - we're going to need a really good effort tomorrow - but we're going to take this and really learn from what we did well. One of those things is coming together."

More success for the power play

Buffalo is now 5-for-10 on the power play since the beginning of February after receiving goals from Mittelstadt and Okposo on Saturday. Mittelstadt credited the increased production to players' tenacity on the forecheck.

"I think it's a mix of everything," he said. "I think we're moving the puck really well and taking shots when they're there. I think what we did really well tonight was working on recovery, getting the puck back. I think before my goal they had a chance to get it out three or four times, and we had guys there.

"Same thing on Okie's goal, just a good job getting the puck back and then getting the puck to the net. I guess when you start shooting, they go in."

Mittelstadt's goal was the product of a seeing-eyed pass through traffic from Jack Eichel, who faked a shot before finding Mittelstadt on the opposite flank. It was the sort of pass one might not expect to make its way through the middle of the ice, had they not known who it was coming from.

"I mean, yeah, I guess if it's Jack you do," Mittelstadt said. "I saw the D kind of flex out and the way he wound up to kind of fake a one-timer looked like it was coming my way. I lost it for a sec, it was behind of one their guys, but it got to me and obviously it was a pretty lucky goal, but I'll take it for sure."

Sam Reinhart was in his office, draping Howard with a net-front screen, on Okposo's goal, which restored Buffalo's two-goal lead with 31 seconds remaining in the second period.

"It's nice to get a two-goal lead there going into the third," Okposo said. "You're able to play a little bit. You're just really hammering your structure in the third period. You're not taking too many chances, you're just trying to lock the game down and we were able to do that."

Sabre-metrics

- Conor Sheary now has points in eight of his last 10 games (2+6), while Mittelstadt extended his career-best point streak to four games (1+3). Housley praised the trio of Sheary, Mittelstadt and Reinhart after the win.

"That line, for me, has been really tenacious," Housley said. "The chemistry is forming. They're getting some opportunities now. A lot more offensive zone faceoffs. I think they just read off each other very well."

- Evan Rodrigues earned the secondary assist on Okposo's goal, extending his point streak to three games (2+1) and giving him 10 points (6+4) in his last 12 outings.

"I'm not going to lie. I'm pretty confident right now," Rodrigues said. "I think I want the puck on my stick every chance I can get it. It's a nice feeling."

- Ullmark improved to 21-18-6 with a .914 save percentage through 50 career appearances. That save percentage is the best by any goaltender who played his first 50 games with Buffalo, according to Sabres PR.

Up next

The homestand continues with a visit from the Winnipeg Jets on Sunday. Coverage on MSG-B begins at 2:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 3.

Thompson returns to lineup against Detroit

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 9, 2019

Tage Thompson will step back into the Buffalo Sabres' lineup for their matchup with the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center this afternoon.

Thompson was a healthy scratch for Buffalo's overtime loss to Carolina on Thursday. C.J. Smith will be scratched in his place.

"I liked C.J.'s game but it's part of his development," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "I thought Tage had a really good, solid game against Detroit last game. We're just getting him back in the lineup."

The rest of the lineup will remain the same, including a fourth start in five games for goaltender Linus Ullmark. Housley said the team considered Ullmark's prior success against the Red Wings - he made 35 in a 2-1 shootout win in Detroit on Nov. 24 - when making his decision.

That also means a potential start in net for Carter Hutton on Sunday, when the Sabres host the Winnipeg Jets.

Next home game: Sunday vs. Winnipeg

"I think Linus has played some really solid hockey for us," Housley said. "He had a good game against Detroit. We take that into effect, and Carter had a good game against Winnipeg. We'll see after this game who's going to get the next start, but Linus is playing tonight."

The Sabres are looking for an improved defensive effort after addressing the checking lapses that cost them a point in the standings in their loss to Hurricanes. The Red Wings rank 25th in goals per game but boast speed throughout their lineup, starting with leading scorer Dylan Larkin (51 points).

"We've always talked about it, and this is going back to day one, just our checking detail," Housley said. "That leads to possession. We have to do a better job of it. There's going to be times - let's face it - where we're going to be caught in our end and we're going to have to suck it up and defend and grind that out."

"That's going to happen during the game. But if we can counter that and move the puck quick and get our transition game in order, we're a much faster team when we're on the attack and we're on the forecheck."

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 12:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 1.

Projected lineup

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
43 Conor Sheary - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 23 Sam Reinhart
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
17 Vladimir Sobotka - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 72 Tage Thompson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 4 Zach Bogosian
24 Lawrence Pilut - 19 Jake McCabe

35 Linus Ullmark