



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*February 23, 2019*

## **Sabres place Kyle Okposo on IR; demote Pilut to AHL**

Associated Press

February 22, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres have placed forward Kyle Okposo on injured reserve and demoted defenseman Lawrence Pilut to the minors.

Okposo is out indefinitely after being diagnosed with his third concussion in less than three years. The 30-year-old was felled by a punch to the face during a fight with defenseman Tony DeAngelo in a 6-2 loss to the New York Rangers on Feb. 15.

Pilut became the odd man out on defense as he was sent down to AHL Rochester in moves made Friday, a day before Buffalo hosts Washington.

In corresponding moves, the Sabres recalled forwards Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson from Rochester. Wilson returns to Buffalo after he missed the first three months of the season with an ankle injury.

## **Sabres recall Danny O'Regan, Scott Wilson, send Lawrence Pilut to Rochester**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 22, 2019

General Manager Jason Botterill has finally reshuffled the Buffalo Sabres' roster ahead of Monday's trade deadline, sending defenseman Lawrence Pilut to Rochester and placing winger Kyle Okposo on injured reserve.

In corresponding moves, the Sabres have recalled forwards Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson from the Amerks ahead of a Saturday matinee against the Washington Capitals in KeyBank Center. The roster moves bolster the Sabres' forward depth while also giving Pilut an opportunity for more playing time.

O'Regan, 25, had 18 goals among 34 points in 53 AHL games, while Wilson, 26, had three goals among seven points in 17 games since clearing waivers and being sent to Rochester last month.

Pilut, a 23-year-old rookie, was a healthy scratch for Thursday's 2-1 shootout loss in Tampa Bay and would likely have a difficult time cracking the lineup since the Sabres had nine healthy defensemen with Casey Nelson's return last week.

Pilut had one goal among six points and a minus-3 rating in 25 games with the Sabres. He began the season in Rochester, where he had 22 points in 19 games.

Okposo was diagnosed with a concussion stemming from a fight against the New York Rangers' Anthony DeAngelo last Friday night. He joined the Sabres on their trip to Newark, N.J. last Saturday, only to return to Buffalo to undergo further testing. The 30-year-old has been diagnosed with at least three concussions since 2016.

A severe reaction to medication after a concussion suffered in practice in March 2017 landed him in the Neuro ICU unit of Buffalo General Medical Center. The Sabres have not released any additional updates on Okposo's status, but the injured reserve designation clears a spot on the roster.

O'Regan was acquired from San Jose as part of the Evander Kane trade last February and appeared in two games for the Sabres last season. He has one goal and four assists in 24 career NHL games.

Wilson, meanwhile, has yet to appear in an NHL game this season because he broke his ankle during a September practice. He had six goals and eight assists in 49 games for the Sabres last season.

## **Inside the Sabres: Amerks bracing for unpredictable trade deadline**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 22, 2019

ROCHESTER – Danny O'Regan had 24 hours to pack a bag, arrange for a car filled with his belongings to be shipped across the country and report to Rochester. O'Regan, a 25-year-old winger recalled Friday by the Buffalo Sabres, laughed Wednesday in Blue Cross Arena when recalling that unexpected, chaotic journey.

Yet, O'Regan knows his story – from being pulled off the ice at practice and told he was dealt to the Buffalo Sabres for Evander Kane to uprooting his life in San Jose – is like so many that occur leading up to the NHL's annual trade deadline. Some players choose to monitor every rumor and report. Others stay away from social media or TSN.

The former is a fruitless endeavor for most players in the AHL. After all, minor leaguers are rarely the subject of rumors during trade season, which officially ends Monday at 3 p.m. But Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill's ongoing roster overhaul, which began with Kane's move to California, has Amerks players aware that no one is safe.

"Anything can happen," winger Alexander Nylander told The Buffalo News. "Obviously, it's nothing we can control. You can't worry about it. Just focus on our games this weekend and whatever happens, happens."

Botterill did not sound eager to make a deadline splash when he spoke to reporters Wednesday in Tampa Bay, adding that his current focus was on internal improvement. He is also said to have no interest in acquiring a rental at the deadline, making any sort of trade less likely.

However, Botterill has the prospects and draft picks to make a significant move if he chooses, and has already shown he is not attached to players acquired by his predecessors.

In addition to moving Kane, Botterill traded Nicholas Baptiste, a former third-round draft pick, to Nashville in October and moved Justin Bailey, a former second-round pick, to Philadelphia last month.

His remaining trade chips could include three first-round picks in this year's draft – only one is currently tradable since the others are conditional – and a few Amerks. In theory, players such as defensemen Brendan Guhle and Will Borgen, both drafted by former GM Tim Murray in 2015, could be more likely to move than Botterill's draft picks or acquisitions.

That fact is not lost on Guhle after he saw Bailey and Baptiste depart.

"It happens in every organization," Guhle said. "Sometimes guys just need a fresh start. You saw it with Justin Bailey. Now he's in the NHL. Some guys need fresh starts, and I'm happy they're doing well. I just want to play the best I can. I want to be a Buffalo Sabre.

"You see it all the time. It's a business. Every guy is kind of playing for himself in that way, but you have to do everything you can to put yourself in position to succeed."

Guhle, a gifted skater chosen in the second round in 2015, is only 21 years old and in the midst of his third full professional season. He has appeared in 23 NHL games, including two this season, and had a negative-7 rating through 53 games with the Amerks entering Friday.

Borgen, a 22-year-old fourth-round draft choice in 2015, is in his first full season with the Amerks and has a plus-4 rating through 53 games. Both could be useful in the Sabres' quest to improve their defense now and in the future, yet their upside would surely be coveted if Botterill chooses to upgrade before the deadline.

There is also Nylander, the struggling prospect whom the Sabres drafted eighth overall in 2016. The 20-year-old had only eight goals among 24 points through 42 games before returning from a lower-body injury Friday. Though he has yet to perform up to expectations, Nylander is still held in high regard by scouts around the NHL.

He and his teammates did not plan to pay attention to the trade winds until after the Amerks' three-game weekend.

"I don't think you can get too wrapped up in it," said O'Regan, an unrestricted free agent this offseason. "It's coming up again. You can't be checking your phone every five minutes to see if trades are happening. You just have to focus on whatever games you have that week. You can't think about it because you have no idea what can happen."

The Sabres' fading playoff hopes make any sort of significant deal unrealistic, and Botterill is more likely to engage in meaningful trade talks this offseason. Regardless, the Amerks don't want a move to be made.

Entering Friday's game in Utica, Rochester was on a three-game winning streak and sitting first in a tight North Division race. The Amerks have benefited from losing few players to the NHL – O'Regan and Scott Wilson were recalled Friday, while Lawrence Pilut was returned to Rochester – and not having to rely on call-ups from Cincinnati.

That sort of stability has allowed coach Chris Taylor to keep his dynamic second line of O'Regan, Victor Olofsson and Rasmus Asplund together. It has also helped players such as Guhle and Borgen develop. Constant roster moves between Buffalo and Rochester can stunt a player's progress.

Plus, the Amerks want the same group together once the Calder Cup playoffs begin in April.

"Everyone is watching TSN and all that kind of stuff," Taylor said of the upcoming deadline. "That's part of the process. It's part of it every year. As a hockey fan everyone is excited about it. Everyone wants to see where everyone is going and which team is going to make moves, what team isn't going to make moves. ... It's always exciting and nerve-racking for us because obviously we don't want to lose any players. They've become part of our family and it's tough to lose family members."

Most Amerks have already watched the deadline pass in previous seasons and some have even been traded. Goalie Scott Wedgewood was traded twice in four months last season, including his move from Arizona to Los Angeles before last season's deadline.

They have urged the younger Amerks to not worry about what could happen, but that's easier said than done in what can be a harsh business.

"You have to keep your head on straight," Wedgewood cautioned. "You have to play a hockey game no matter where it is. Obviously, you want to help the team that's paying you and you have to work for them in your time there. If you go somewhere else then that's the way it goes."

## **Sabres goalie prospect Jonas Johansson out for season**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 22, 2019

The goaltending depth in the Buffalo Sabres' farm system took a hit Friday with the announcement that Jonas Johansson underwent successful season-ending surgery.

The nature of the surgery was not disclosed in a news release.

Johansson, 23, had a .908 save percentage with three shutouts and 18 wins in 27 games for the Cincinnati Cyclones this season. He also appeared in five games for the Rochester Americans, posting a .926 save percentage.

"We're pleased that Jonas' surgery was successful and he will start the rehab process tomorrow," Sabres assistant general manager Randy Sexton said in a news release Friday. "He is a talented young goalie that has developed nicely over the past two seasons and we have every expectation this slight setback will in no way derail his continued development."

Johansson, a third-round draft pick of the Sabres in 2014, has appeared in 54 games for the Cyclones over the past two seasons and made his professional debut with the Amerks in 2017. He has a combined .891 save percentage in 19 games with Rochester over three seasons.

Johansson was named the CCM/ECHL Goaltender of the Week for Nov. 12-18 and had a season-long five-game win streak from Nov. 4-23. He is a restricted free agent following next season and will likely be surpassed by Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen on the organizational depth chart.

Luukkonen, a 19-year-old drafted in the second round by Buffalo in 2017, has a .919 save percentage in 42 games with Sudbury of the Ontario Hockey League and won a Gold Medal with Finland at the World Junior Championships. He told The Buffalo News last month that he intends to begin his professional career following the completion of Sudbury's season.

## **Lance Lysowski's Sabres Mailbag: Will Botterill make a trade before the deadline?**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
February 22, 2019

Jason Botterill does not sound like he is ready to push his chips to the middle of the table before the NHL's trade deadline. Still, the Buffalo Sabres' fan base will be waiting impatiently until 3 p.m. Monday.

Botterill has not strayed from his plan since the start of the season, even with the Sabres tumbling down the Atlantic Division standings since the 10-game winning streak.

Speaking of the deadline, and any possible moves Botterill could make, let's start there for my first Sabres mailbag ...

John asks: Do you see the Sabres trading Nathan Beaulieu or Matt Hunwick? Or perhaps someone like Vladimir Sobotka, who has low production and a more significant contract?

Lance Lysowski: Botterill won't be too active leading up to the deadline, but he will consider moving one of his defensemen, whether it is Nathan Beaulieu, Matt Hunwick or Casey Nelson. This is a tricky situation since Beaulieu played well Thursday against Tampa Bay and brings an edge the Sabres have lacked. He's also 26 and a restricted free agent at season's end. Personally, I'd try to bring him back for next season. Beaulieu is well-liked in the room and there seems to be more upside there.

There won't be much of a market for Hunwick and the Sabres would have to surrender a third-round pick, instead of a fourth, to Pittsburgh if they deal the 33-year-old defenseman prior to the draft. They would also likely have to eat some of the \$2.25 million owed to Hunwick next season.

Who would want Sobotka? He doesn't have the speed that teams typically want on the penalty kill and went 41 consecutive games without a goal. He's also owed \$3.5 million next season. The more likely move is the Sabres trading Jason Pominville to a contender.

TNFP asks: It seems after every game it's a new issue. What's the problem? Or does it go deep into the organization?

Lance: The roster lacks depth and young players have made far too many mistakes since the winning streak, Rasmus Dahlin included. It is not unusual for a coach to limit his bench in tight games, but it seems as if coach Phil Housley has to do it more often than most. He can't trust Tage Thompson or C.J. Smith to play in tight games.

You need to roll four lines to win in the NHL, and look at how Housley has to piece together his defensive pairings every night. Lawrence Pilut, a 23-year-old rookie, should not have to play on his off side. That is not putting a young player in the best position to succeed. The roster is flawed, and some players have underperformed in important games.

Paul Mangefrida asks: What's the possibility of the Sabres finishing with a losing record?

Lance: It's not impossible. Take a look at the upcoming schedule: Washington, at Toronto, at Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, at Toronto, Edmonton, at Chicago, at Colorado. Trust me, it doesn't get easier the rest of the way.

The Sabres need to stop playing down to their competition. It has to be maddening to Housley and Botterill that their team can perform so well against Tampa Bay and struggle so badly against an opponent such as New Jersey. That can't continue.

Roni Sue Zolnowski asks: If you were in charge (general manager or coach), what would/could you do?

Lance: My initial answer to this question included calling up Danny O'Regan, but the 25-year-old winger will join the team for their game Saturday against Washington.

My next step would be to try to trade for New York Rangers center Kevin Hayes, who would be a perfect fit to play with Sam Reinhart and Conor Sheary. Hayes is an unrestricted free agent this summer, but the Sabres have the cap space to possibly extend him.

It appears Botterill intends to keep Victor Olofsson in Rochester, so I would place Sobotka on waivers -- he would go unclaimed -- and bring up Alexander Nylander. I know what you're thinking, but I get the sense he needs a change of scenery from Rochester. The Sabres should give him a chance before they consider moving him. See if the 20-year-old can regain some confidence by getting a look in the NHL.

The players most important to this franchise – Jack Eichel, Reinhart, Dahlin, Casey Mittelstadt – are showing enough progress to merit keeping Housley, so I would not consider a coaching change.

Wyatt Davenport asks: Does the GM/coach getting fired for the worst record in the league over two seasons jeopardize Jeff Skinner signing?

Lance: So much would have to go wrong for Botterill and Housley to both be fired before July 1. That won't happen. The big question here is whether the Sabres are willing to meet Skinner's asking price, which should be around \$9 million per season. He'll turn 27 in May and is on pace to shatter a career high for goals. However, Botterill does have to think long term.

Imagine how much Dahlin could cost someday. What about Reinhart? Skinner is worth \$9 million a year. Imagine where the Sabres would be if Botterill did not make that trade. Now the two sides need to finalize a contract. The team would be wise to match the asking price and figure the rest out later.

Jer Gage asks: Does Housley last the rest of the season, or does he get a chance to start next season?

Lance: Yes, and yes. I'm of the opinion that any coach or general manager should be given at least three years. They inherited a mess. The Sabres aren't in jeopardy of wasting Eichel's prime, or anyone else's for that matter. The fan base is starving for a taste of the playoffs and rightfully so, but I don't think it helps young players' development to have a coaching change every two years.

The Sabres would need to have a seriously ugly finish for management to even consider a change. They are committed to Housley. He is not blameless in the team's struggles since the winning streak, but it's also important to remember his hand in helping the Sabres to the top of the standings.

When the players execute his game plan, they can beat the league's best. Now the challenge is getting that done every game. I'm of the opinion that youth and roster deficiencies are responsible for all those issues.

Ron asks: Should they trade Rasmus Ristolainen?

Lance: The frustration surrounding Ristolainen is merited. He struggles with puck management and missed coverages. Inexperience is no longer an excuse, either. Sure, Ristolainen is only 24 years old, but he has played more than 400 NHL games. His on-ice awareness should be much better than it is.

I understand plus-minus can be deceiving, but he's a minus-23 through 60 games after being a minus-25 in 73 games last season. Advanced analytics also reveal some serious concerns.

That said, the Sabres can't trade Ristolainen unless they have someone who is actually capable of replacing him. He's under contract for three more years at a very reasonable rate of \$5.4 million, and he showed Thursday night in Tampa Bay what sort of impact he can make without the puck.

The time will come when the Sabres can move him. I'm just not convinced their roster can handle losing a defenseman with that much upside, and it would be wise to see if he can be part of the solution here.



## **Sabres call up O'Regan, Wilson; assign Pilut to Rochester**

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

February 22, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres made a couple of roster moves on Friday just before Saturday's matchup with the Washington Capitals on Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center.

The team has called up forwards Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans in the American Hockey League. In a corresponding move, the Sabres have placed forward Kyle Okposo on injured reserve, while also sending defenseman Lawrence Pilut back to the Amerks.

O'Regan has had a pretty good season with the Amerks this season with 18 goals and 34 points in all 53 games played. The 25-year-old is fourth in overall team scoring this season, and tied for third on the team in goals. He was also on pace to set a career-high in goals through 76 games this season.

O'Regan was acquired by the Sabres at the 2018 NHL Trade Deadline as part of the Evander Kane trade with the San Jose Sharks. He went pointless with a plus-1 rating in two games with the Sabres last season.

As for Wilson, he returned to action on January 11 after missing the first three months of the season with a fractured ankle. In 17 games this season with the Amerks, the 26-year-old winger has three goals and four assists.

Wilson was acquired from the Detroit Red Wings in December of 2017, and appeared in 49 games last season, scoring six goals and registering 14 points.

The Amerks get Pilut back after losing him to his second recall to the Sabres back on November 27. At the time of his call up, Pilut led the Amerks with 22 points (3+19) in just 16 games, and was leading the AHL in scoring among defensemen.

In 25 games with the Sabres this season, the 23-year-old blue liner scored one goal and registered six points.

This transaction could also mean that defenseman Marco Scandella is close to a return to the lineup from an upper-body injury. Once Scandella returned to the lineup, the Sabres would have had nine defensemen on the roster with Pilut included. Pilut is one of only two defensemen on the roster (Dahlin is the other) who could be assigned to Rochester without having to clear waivers.

In another corresponding move to create a roster spot, forward Kyle Okposo has been placed on injured reserve. The 30-year-old forward is battling a concussion that he suffered last Friday in a matchup with the New York Rangers at KeyBank Center. Okposo was not originally diagnosed with a concussion as a result from a fight with Rangers defenseman Anthony DeAngelo, but he was later diagnosed on Tuesday after some further evaluation.

Okposo has struggled a bit to produce offensively this season, scoring just 10 goals and 22 points in 57 games played.

The Sabres did not practice on Friday. Faceoff against the Capitals on Saturday is at 1 p.m. with pre-game coverage on WGR starting at 12 p.m.

## **Larkin: Strongly believe the Sabres 'need to pay Jeff Skinner whatever he wants'**

WGR 550

February 22, 2019

Just three days sit between now and the official NHL Trade Deadline on Monday, February 25 at 3 p.m. A major move went down earlier on Friday as the Columbus Blue Jackets acquired forward Matt Duchene from the Ottawa Senators for a pair of prospects, and conditional first round picks in the 2019 and 2020 NHL Draft. Should Duchene sign with Columbus between now and the offseason, the 2020 first round pick would remain for Ottawa.

As for the Buffalo Sabres, it is more likely than not that the team does not make many drastic moves to try and bolster the current roster. Buffalo is focused on trying to get a long-term contract extension signed with forward Jeff Skinner before he becomes an unrestricted free agent on July 1.

For more ahead of the Trade Deadline, senior writer Matt Larkin from the Hockey News joined Mike Schopp and the Bulldog to discuss what's potentially to come over the weekend and into Monday for the Sabres, as well as the rest of the NHL.

Here is some of what Larkin had to say:

Larkin on the Sabres' deadline ahead:

"I strongly believe they need to pay Jeff Skinner whatever he wants. They don't need to acquire more first round picks. If you lost him in a trade, you might be stuck looking for another Jeff Skinner."

Larkin on Skinner:

"He may finish second in the NHL in goals. The Sabres have a lot of cap space, so he'll have a lot of leverage but Skinner has to know there's a cap on his value. If the asking price is \$7.5 to \$8 million dollars, the Sabres have to meet that demand. If he asks for around \$10 million dollars, then yes, that might be a point where you have to move on."

Larkin on Rasmus Ristolainen:

"I'm starting to wonder about him. There's always a market for rangy, right-handed defenseman. I'm a Ristolainen apologist and I think he brings a lot of great things to the table. He does make mistakes, though. What types of names would be a fair exchange? I don't think that happens at the deadline; it's too complicated. Jake Debrusk in Boston? Kasper Kapanen in Toronto? A guy that can be a legitimate top-six forward."

Larkin on the Columbus Blue Jackets:

"I always heard that they weren't moving Sergei Bobrovsky or Artemi Panarin. Getting Duchene as a rental sends the message that they're even more unlikely to trade those players."

Larkin on the Pittsburgh Penguins:

"They're nearing the end of Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin's prime years. They should want to go for it. The problem is, they don't have anything remotely resembling a top prospect in their system."

We'll have complete coverage of the NHL Trade Deadline on WGR from 6 a.m. to 7 p.m. on Monday.

## **Sabres mailbag: John Vogl answers questions on the team's trade deadline plans, Skinner's future and more**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 22, 2019

When I first started covering the Sabres in 2002, the late, great Jim Kelley said that for story purposes, it was best to have either a really good team or a really bad one.

This is the first time they've been both in the same year.

Buffalo was No. 1 in the NHL two months into the season. Over the past three months, it is 29th. The bandwagon hit a brick wall, causing whiplash, heartbreak and high blood pressure across Sabreland.

General Manager Jason Botterill seemingly had opportunities to apply a Band-Aid, but he chose to let the team self-medicate. It didn't work, and the once-certain playoff spot is on life support.

Questions abound regarding the Sabres' past, present and future, so here's the inaugural Athletic Buffalo Mailbag. It starts with a guy on the minds of many.

#AskVogl Think the Sabres regret that O'Reilly trade yet? How much will Skinner get?

Unless Ryan O'Reilly did something truly dastardly to his teammates, moving him because he "lost his love of the game" seems extremely short-sighted. This couldn't have been the only reason he was moved. What were the other reasons? #AskVogl

#AskVogl Should the Sabres have kept ROR, or was it truly necessary for him to leave to fix the apparently broken team chemistry?

We can all see it coming, right? St. Louis will keep roaring right through the Stanley Cup final, and O'Reilly will score the winning goal in overtime. They'll remake the Conn Smythe Trophy into a guitar in his honor.

And trading him will still have been in Buffalo's best interest.

Look, O'Reilly is a really good hockey player. As each day passes, the return Buffalo got for the center is looking worse and worse ... and worse. Patrik Berglund quit in December, and he was still tied with Vladimir Sobotka in goals over the past three months (zero) until his trade partner finally potted a meaningless one this week, ending a 42-game drought. Tague Thompson is young and raw, and the first-round pick might be late in the round.

So scream about the trade result – go ahead, let that scream out – but don't bemoan the trade. O'Reilly wasn't going to lead the Sabres out of the cellar, so the team chose to be a seller.

I know everyone wants salacious stories and tantalizing tales that will make the departure easier to stomach. Sorry, this isn't the National Enquirer. He just wasn't the role model that a young team needed to be its leader and competitive conscience. The Sabres knew that.

It sure would have been nice to get more for him, though.

How does it feel to have run O'Reilly out of town now that he and his team are doing great and all of the problems the Sabres had last year are still here?

While I've never wavered in my belief that a deal had to be done, I didn't plant the thought in Botterill's brain. He watched the daily interactions and made the change.

As for Buffalo's problems, there's actually a new batch of woes. Last year, the Sabres suffered from apathy, lack of cohesion, off-ice problems and dearth of talent. This season, they can't consistently play defense, don't create enough offensively, are way younger and still lack talent.

Here was a typical lineup last season.

Here was the lineup Thursday night in Tampa.

The Eichel and Larsson lines are a wash. O'Reilly would take advantage of Mittelstadt. The Josefson line was bad, but Sobotka produces little. This year's defense has more talent but still makes the same number of mistakes, starting with Rasmus Ristolainen. Goaltending is better this year.

Clearly, this team is still struggling, but it's for different reasons.

Will life always be so painful? #AskVogl

Nope. You just get a new job with great co-workers, and life improves immeasurably.

Oh, that's my life. You mean for Buffalo sports fans? Yes. Pain is inevitable. But someday ... someday ... there will be a someday.

#AskVogl I'm fairly certain the upper management is holding the players accountable and not the coach. Makes sense. The big question, how does one force/convince/beg a team to play the system 100% of the time?

2:04 PM - Feb 20, 2019

Twitter Ads info and privacy

See Brian Curtis Ph.D.'s other Tweets

That's the question Phil Housley has been asking himself since Nov. 29. He is taking heat for roster choices, for not showing fire and personality, and for failing to get results.

But as he and Botterill point out, the team looks good when it does what the coach asks. The players obviously don't do that enough. It's worth wondering if they just don't have the mental and physical capabilities to do it every night, or is Housley asking them to do too much? It's like they need to be perfect to win, and they are not perfect.

#AskVogl exactly how many players even have playoff experience on this roster? Is the overwhelming amount who have none holding this team back and collapsing from the pressure?

Of the Sabres' 24 players, only eight have appeared in the NHL playoffs. Jason Pominville leads the way with 81 games, followed by Conor Sheary (57), Sobotka (51), Marco Scandella (39), Matt Hunwick (26), Kyle Okposo (24), Nathan Beaulieu (17) and Carter Hutton (three).

The Sabres have been getting their first taste of playoff-type games, and it tastes like limburger mixed with tuna fish covered in fondant. Nearly everyone is gagging on it, not just the inexperienced guys.

#AskVogl Besides a 2C, how do you fix the overall compete of the Sabres? Is it more talent they need, more grit, both?

See Jason Gifford's other Tweets

There's nothing wrong with saying both. Obviously, they need talent all over. Grit can mean just being physical in front or in the corners, and opponents are not scared to go to either place.

It's too early to ask, especially since he's still recovering in private. He emerged just fine from his previous concussion. But because they keep coming, you have to wonder. Okposo is an intelligent man who reads voraciously, so he knows the risks. He'll be weighing them with his family.

#AskVogl Kane gone, but successful in SJ... O'Reilly gone, but successful in STL... Lehner finding success on the Island. What is the problem? We've seen all the line combos, changes On PP1, coaches, GMs... I'm going nuts here man!! It's awful hockey that's getting worse.

Evander Kane and O'Reilly went to good situations, for sure. Robin Lehner cleaned up his life, and the Islanders clean up the defensive zone way better than Buffalo did.

The Sabres are digging out of bad drafts and bad decisions.

#askvogl I don't think anyone thought the Sobotka and Berglund (now gone) trade would have crashed and burned this badly. What/ who can Botterill do to find a capable center to help Mittelstadt? Certainly not promoting from within for a 2C.

Buffalo really thought Berglund would handle that No. 2 role and allow Casey Mittelstadt to ease into the league. When that didn't happen, Botterill should have sought help. Instead, the Sabres have essentially mixed and matched the same 12 guys. They haven't won two games in a row since Dec. 13.

Indeed, no one from Rochester is in line to play second-line center. The GM will have to make a trade or free-agent signing this offseason.

#AskVogl Do you think we still have 3 first round picks after monday?

#AskVogl Could Bott's plan be intent on keeping 3x 1st to build a prospect foundation since common opinion is there is no one to call up from Roc that can help Sabres? Bots went heavy on D last draft but scoring forwards are obviously lacking. Botts might be focused on 2020-2021?

I can't see Botterill unloading any of his first-round picks at the trade deadline. As a reminder, Buffalo has its own and the ones belonging to San Jose and St. Louis. I also can't see him following Tim Murray's lead and shipping out all the picks for players during the offseason. Botterill might move one at the draft, but the organizational needs should prompt him to pick a couple of times.

##AskVogl do you know or have you seen what this Housley "system" is supposed to look like? Do you think it works in theory and is poorly executed, or is it as chaotic as it seems to the viewers?

At the most basic level, it starts in the defensive zone with a blue-liner crisply moving the puck up to a winger, who then goes wide and hits the center in stride in the middle of the ice. The Sabres don't get past that first part, and chaos ensues.

#AskVogl how likely is it that Skinner is with another team come next year?

The obvious question of what's going on with Skinner. Aside from him, most viable players of value to move and for what? #askvogl

The Sabres will sign Skinner, possibly soon. If they want to add another forward – which is what they need most – they may have to move a defender such as Brendan Guhle or Jake McCabe in order to bring back a usable piece. There's more on that here.

Is Red Light Racicot available? 📧 #AskVogl #Sabres

During his last pro season, former Montreal backup Andre Racicot had a .780 save percentage for Greensboro of the ECHL. That was back in 2002, so he's probably a little rusty. Why, do you need someone for your beer league? My colleague Matthew Fairburn is ready and willing.

The best linemate and goalie that a guy could ask for. Good times and thanks to those of you who stopped by.

But I don't think Linus Ullmark and Hutton have been the problem this season, so Fairburn can keep providing stellar coverage of the Bills while Racicot does whatever it is he's doing.

#AskVogl Do the Sabres have to trade a core piece, maybe someone they really don't necessarily want to, in order to jolt the room?

A case certainly can be made for that. Which leads us to ...

#AskVogl Do you see Ristolainen getting traded this summer?

While trading the aforementioned Guhle or McCabe would get a respectable player, shipping out Ristolainen could bring a serious haul. Toronto gave up a first-round pick and two prospects drafted in the second round for Jake Muzzin. He is much sturdier defensively than Ristolainen but is six years older and doesn't have as much offensive skill.

I figured Ristolainen would benefit from having Rasmus Dahlin in the lineup, but it looks like the Finn could be with Bobby Orr in his prime and would still make the same mistakes. The Sabres need to consider a deal.

#AskVogl if you were making out the lineup, what would your d pairs be? Disregarding current injuries and salary considerations

Dahlin-Bogosian

Pilut-Ristolainen

Beaulieu-Hunwick

#AskVogl do you think management's goal is to make playoffs?

That was the final question for Botterill on Wednesday. It sounded like the playoffs would be a much-appreciated bonus, but he's not willing to sacrifice assets to make it happen. Basically, no, the playoffs are not the goal this season. I realize that's painful for you to hear.

Who would you like the Sabres to look at via trade that fit what botterill might be looking for #askvogl

A guy like Kasperii Kapanen would fit Botterill's thinking. He's a right winger who could alternate on the top lines with Reinhart. He's 22 years old and will be a restricted free agent. Toronto is hoping to extend his contract, but he's the kind of player Buffalo could use.

You got shot, Bubba. And, unfortunately, it wasn't Alexei Zhitnik doing the firing. He'd have shot high and wide.

How does this team fix the defense? Has been an issue for so many years. Dahlin isn't enough on his own.

As we all know, prospects can turn into suspects and rejects. The Sabres are banking on viable careers for Will Borgen and recent draft picks Oskari Laaksonen and Mattias Samuelsson.

#AskVogl with only 2-3 contracts coming off books for next year. How does GMJB realistically make a go at improving this team for '19-'20

You bring up a point I've made in several previous stories. The Sabres can make a few tweaks next season, but the real breakthrough will come in 2020-21. Buffalo frees up nearly \$18 million with the expiring deals of Sobotka, Sheary, Bogosian, Scandella and Hunwick.

Some of that money will go to Mittelstadt and Reinhart, but roster spots and cap money will be available to plug holes with impact players.

Can all of Mittelstadt, Smith, and Pilut play in Calder Cup playoffs if season ends early in Buffalo? #AskVogl

Yes, and Tage Thompson can go down, too. Dahlin would be eligible, but I doubt they'd send him. He's been going nonstop since the draft lottery last April and could use a break more than the AHL experience.

#AskVogl Do you think Eichel is showing his body language too much in game now?

Losing is clearly weighing him down again. It's not the petulant body language of his early days, but he's in a rut and it shows at times. It's understandable.

Why did Botterill fail to improve the team in December or January, when it would have made an impact on this season? There were trades to be made. Nino Niederreiter, for example.

The GM said he believes in his group. He felt by letting it stay together, it would come out stronger. That hasn't happened as the standings free fall illustrates.

How big of impact could a true hockey person as team President, not named Pegula, make at a time like this?. Seems like from the GM down, it's a tire fire

Is it time for the Sabres to hire a VP of hockey operation as in Toronto and Boston? Maybe someone who has a different perspective of how well team is performing. Has Mr. Pegula become too much a fan and less an owner?

I think Botterill has a pretty good handle on hockey hierarchy. Assistant GM Randy Sexton has put together a first-place team in Rochester. Assistant GM Steve Greeley is on the road looking at potential trade candidates and courting college and European free agents.

When the Sabres hired Botterill, the hockey world was unanimous in its belief that he was ready to lead an organization. It's hard to be patient, but he had a lot to fix.

What do you feel is the #1 priority of need for this organization?

Plain and simply, the Sabres need scorers at every level. Skinner is a 40-goal guy, Eichel can pot 30 and Reinhart is in the 20-25 range. After that, it's bleak. Victor Olofsson has real potential with 19 goals in his first 50 AHL games, but the pipeline is barren after him.

For all our talk about defense in here, no team is going to win scoring twice per game.

With buyers remorse being so prevalent with ROR, what's one Sabres trade in the last 10 years you would reverse?

There have been a lot of trades, but few are blatantly lopsided. I'd have to go with Buffalo giving up Brayden McNabb, two-second round picks and Jonathan Parker for Hudson Fasching and Nicolas Deslauriers. McNabb has been a reliable defender on winning teams, and the Sabres' lack of depth can be attributed to poor picks and lack of selections. Maybe they could have hit on those second-rounders.

@BuffaloVogl, am I a masochist for still watching #Sabres games?

Probably. But you're not alone.

## **Sabres' Jeff Skinner might've found long-term home in Buffalo**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 22, 2019

BUFFALO – Three-quarters into the season, Jeff Skinner hasn't shown many signs of cooling off. Having scored a team-high 36 goals through 60 games, the slick winger could become the first Sabre to hit the prestigious 50-goal mark in 26 years.

Entering this afternoon's home game against the Stanley Cup champion Washington Capitals, Skinner is scoring at a torrid 49-goal pace over his first season with the Sabres.

While Skinner, 26, hasn't scored in the last three outings, he has displayed dynamic consistency all season, never going more than four games without scoring.

It's hard to imagine where the Sabres, who rank 10th in the Eastern Conference, would be without Skinner, an NHL All-Star.

Would they be the league's worst team?

Skinner, whom general manager Jason Botterill fleeced from the Carolina Hurricanes on Aug. 2, is set to hit unrestricted free agency following the season. The trade deadline hits at 3 p.m. Monday, meaning this afternoon's game at KeyBank Center could, theoretically, be his last with the Sabres.

But given the supreme chemistry Skinner shares with captain Jack Eichel and how much he seems to like the organization and Buffalo, it seems highly unlikely the Sabres will deal him.

"I like it, I'm having fun," Skinner said last week.

Trading Skinner would essentially wave a white flag on the season, which has slipped away from the Sabres following a terrific start. They began Friday's games six points out of the Eastern Conference's final playoff spot.

Skinner will probably command upwards of \$8 million a season over a long-term contract. Only the Sabres can give him an eight-year deal.

What else do the Sabres have going for them?

Well, the grass likely wouldn't be greener for Skinner somewhere else. In Buffalo, Eichel has essentially become his personal center. If he stays, they would almost certainly remain a tandem for years. Thirty or 40 goals could become a regular thing.

In Buffalo, Skinner is also close to his family in Ontario.

Naturally, the Sabres and Skinner have said little about a contract extension, although Botterill has acknowledged talks are ongoing.

"His group and ours have obviously continued our dialogue," Botterill told reporters Wednesday in Tampa Bay. "We haven't done play-by-play in the media just because that's the way we wanted to go about things. Both sides continue to work to try and find a resolution."

Skinner said: "There's no point in really talking about it now, because there's nothing really to talk about for me."

The fan favorite usually says little about himself, preferring to let his play do the talking. The mix of skill and tenacity he showcases should help him become the Sabres' first 40-goal scorer since Thomas Vanek in 2008-09.

Skinner has already exceeded expectations. Many figured he could hit at least the 30- or 35-goal mark playing beside Eichel. His numbers right now – he also has 18 assists – would've been considered a terrific full season.



Thanks to a background in figure skating, Skinner can contort his body and maintain his edges like few other players. He also constantly hounds the puck and pesters opponents.

In Thursday's 2-1 shootout loss in Tampa Bay, Skinner had enough of Brayden Point hectoring, so he took the Lightning forward's stick and threw it. Within seconds, Skinner and Point began scrapping.

Skinner needs just one more goal to tie his career high set in 2016-17. The Sabres haven't had a 50-goal scorer since Alexander Mogilny scored 76 and Pat LaFontaine tallied 53 in 1992-93.

Skinner is already the fifth player to score at least 35 goals in his first season with the Sabres, joining LaFontaine (46 in 1991-92), Rick Martin (38 in 1971-72), Gilbert Perreault (38 in 1970-71) and Ray Sheppard (38 in 1987-88).

Dishing a player enjoying a season that good with the Sabres still playing meaningful games seems unlikely.

So far, Botterill hasn't made a trade this season that brought a player back to Buffalo.

"We are always looking to make moves that are going to help our group," Botterill said. "I'd also say we're going to trust our players, we're going to trust our group. We've made a lot of changes to this group over the last year or so here. There's confidence in our group here, and they've proven in games (against) some of the top teams in the league, whether it's home or on the road, we've proven we can be with the teams.

"But have we done it on a consistent basis? No, and that's why our record's at where it's at."

## **Sabres recall Danny O'Regan, Scott Wilson, send Lawrence Pilut down**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 22, 2019

BUFFALO – The Sabres added two forwards this afternoon, recalling Danny O'Regan and Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans.

They also sent defenseman Lawrence Pilut back to the AHL and placed winger Kyle Okposo, who has a concussion, on injured reserve.

The Sabres host the Washington Capitals on Saturday, their last game before Monday's trade deadline.

O'Regan, 25, has enjoyed a strong season, scoring 18 goals and 34 points in 53 games with the Amerks. The former AHL Rookie of the Year, part of the Evander Kane trade with the San Jose Sharks last season, has made 24 NHL appearances, compiling one goal and five points.

The Boston University product, a former linemate of Sabres captain Jack Eichel and forward Evan Rodrigues in college, played two games with Buffalo last season.

Meanwhile, Wilson, 26, has scored three goals and seven points in 17 AHL outings this season. The Sabres sent Wilson down in January so he could receive game action after recovering from a broken ankle that sidelined him three months.

Pilut, 23, had been with the Sabres since late November, scoring one goal and six points in 25 games.. The Swede started his first North American season in Rochester, compiling three goals and 22 points in 16 contests.

## **Glotov scores highlight-reel goal as Cyclones continue to roll**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 22, 2019

"The Michigan Goal." "The Lacrosse Move." Call it whatever you want. Vasily Glotov (seventh round, 2017) pulled it off last weekend for the Cincinnati Cyclones and it stood up as the game-winning goal against Toledo.

After posting another two points in last night's 4-1 win over Wheeling, Glotov has 13 goals and 23 assists through 49 games in his first full professional season in North America.

With 82 points in 53 games, the Cyclones (38-9-3-3) sit atop the ECHL standings. They're seven points ahead of the second-place Florida Everblades.

Brett Murray (fourth round, 2016) leads the USHL with 29 goals. He's second in scoring with 57 points (29+28) in 43 games, two points shy of the league lead.

He posted a hat trick last Friday against Team USA in an 8-3 win for Youngstown.

Christopher Brown (sixth round, 2014) had a pair of assists in each of Boston College's two games last weekend, but B.C. lost both games to UMass. One of the helpers was on defenseman Casey Fitzgerald's (third round, 2016) first goal of the season.

In other prospects news, defenseman Ivan Chukarov (seventh round, 2015) has left UMass and has signed an ECHL contract with the Worcester Railers.

"The Railers are excited to have Ivan make his professional debut with the club," Worcester head coach Jamie Russell said in a statement. "We look forward to working with him as he develops his game for the next level."

Chukarov recorded three points in 25 games this season for UMass. In collegiate four seasons, he compiled 25 points (6+19) over 128 games.