



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 17, 2019*

## **Svechnikov, Williams lead Hurricanes past Sabres 4-2**

By Joedy McCreary

Associated Press

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — The Carolina Hurricanes climbed into playoff contention by stringing together victories and piling up points during two months. Nearly everyone took part in preventing their latest loss from turning into a losing streak.

Andrei Svechnikov and Justin Williams each scored goals, and the Hurricanes beat the reeling Buffalo Sabres 4-2 on Saturday night.

Jordan Staal scored a late goal for his 500th career point, Lucas Wallmark also scored early and Curtis McElhinney stopped 35 shots to help the Hurricanes win their third in four games and keep themselves in playoff position entering the final three weeks of the season.

Carolina has not gone consecutive games without a point since mid-January. The Hurricanes bounced back from a 3-0 loss a night earlier at Columbus — one of the teams also in the East's playoff race — by scoring four straight goals and winning their ninth straight in the series with Buffalo.

"That's what good teams do — when you have a tough one, you want to rebound and bounce back and come back with a good effort and build on that again," Staal said. "We've continued to do that. . You can tell the leadership and the character in the room and everybody believing in each other."

Carolina had 12 players show up on the score sheet, and no one had more than one point.

"Everybody's kind of doing their job right now," McElhinney said. "Critical time of year. It's been fun to be in that conversation, be in a spot and to keep picking up points. Huge efforts by everybody."

Jeff Skinner scored against his former team and Zengus Girgensons added a late goal to prevent the Sabres from being shut out in four straight games. Buffalo has lost seven in a row and is 0-6-1 in that span.

"It's tough when you don't get the results," captain Jack Eichel said. "We've got a big game (Sunday) at home, good hockey team (St. Louis), so just get ready for that."

Wallmark tied it at 1 with 6:08 left in the first, going fully horizontal to stuff in the puck after Jordan Martinook's shot slipped through Linus Ullmark's pads. Svechnikov's go-ahead goal came 67 seconds into the second, when he took a pretty cross-ice pass from Teuvo Teravainen and buried it past the Buffalo goalie.

Williams then added an insurance goal with 2:51 left in the second, when his shot from the boards trickled past Ullmark, and Staal reached his career milestone with a spinning backhand to make it 4-1 with 4:14 remaining.

"Not exactly my style," Staal quipped. "Maybe I should do that more often. Not exactly what I pictured it, but I'll take it."

Ullmark finished with 25 saves for Buffalo, which had Eichel back from a two-game suspension for his illegal check to the head of Colorado forward Carl Soderberg last week.

For the first time since March 7, the Sabres scored a goal. Just not enough of them.

They entered having taken shutout losses in three straight games, matching an unwanted club record — but they took care of that quickly, scoring at 2:18 of the first.

And nobody on the roster has more experience scoring goals in Raleigh than Skinner, who had 115 of them during eight seasons with the Hurricanes before his offseason trade to Buffalo. He put the Sabres up 1-0 with a goal that came on an attempted pass that bounced in off McElhinney for his first goal in 13 games — and his fourth goal in three games against his old team.

NOTES: Skinner also rang the post midway through the first. ... Carolina LW Micheal Ferland and Buffalo D Casey Nelson dropped the gloves about a minute after Svechnikov's goal, with Ferland dropping Nelson with one punch and both players receiving 5-minute fighting majors.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Play host to St. Louis on Sunday night.

Hurricanes: Play host to Pittsburgh on Tuesday night.

## **Jeff Skinner snaps scoring drought, but Linus Ullmark struggles in Sabres' seventh straight loss**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. -- Boos reverberated throughout PNC Arena Saturday night when Jeff Skinner ended the scoring drought that became symbolic of the Buffalo Sabres' fall from grace.

Skinner, facing his former team on his old home ice for a second time this season, shot the puck between Carolina Hurricanes goalie Curtis McElhinney's leg pads to halt the goalless streak at 199 minutes, 58 seconds that spanned nine days.

Skinner's heroics that avoided a fourth consecutive shut out could not expel the familiar problems that have plagued this team since opening night in October. Leaky goaltending, a costly defensive error and not enough offense caused the Sabres to drop a seventh consecutive game, as they lost to the Hurricanes, 4-2.

Buffalo (30-32-9) has lost 13 of its last 15 games and has won only one game in March, a month in which it needed to make an unprecedented run in order to not miss the playoffs for an eighth straight year.

"I think there's a lot to like about the way we played tonight, but it's tough when you don't get the result," Jack Eichel, who had six shots on goal in his return from suspension, said.

The Sabres out-shot the Hurricanes, 37-29, including 17-6 in the final 20 minutes, and scored only 2:18 into the game when Skinner snapped his own 13-game goalless drought. His 37th of the season, which matched his previous career high, relieved some of the pressure and angst that has followed the Sabres this week, Skinner admitted.

Failing to score a goal would have made Buffalo the sixth team in NHL history to suffer four straight shutouts. It has not been done in the expansion era since the first-year 1967-68 Oakland Seals.

The lead nearly got pushed to two goals when Skinner hit the post, and Alex Nylander redirected Matt Hunwick's pass wide of the net. However, the Sabres failed to have a shot on goal for the final 10:23 of the first period. They had a number of chances in the second and third periods, only to be stopped by McElhinney, who finished with 35 saves.

Linus Ullmark could not do the same for the Sabres.

Jordan Martinook's wrist shot from the right-wing circle leaked past Ullmark and into the crease, where Lucas Wallmark jammed the puck over the goal line to tie the score, 1-1, with 6:08 left in the first period.

Ullmark was not at fault on the second goal, which came only 1:07 into the second period. Rather than staying in front of the net, Eichel chose to skate away from Andrei Svechnikov, who collected a backdoor pass from Teuvo Teravainen and chipped the puck into the back of the net.

"I have to be better there in that situation," Eichel said.

The other two goals were on Ullmark. Even Justin Williams could not believe that his bad-angle shot from near the left-wing boards and below the faceoff dot beat Ullmark for a 3-1 lead with 2:51 left in the second period.

Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour had tight defensive coverage on Jordan Staal in the high slot, only to see Staal spin left and fire a backhanded shot that beat Ullmark for a 4-1 lead with 4:14 remaining in the game.

Since the Sabres' 10-game winning streak, Ullmark and Carter Hutton own the league's second- and fourth-worst goals-against average, respectively, among goalies with at least 24 games played. Ullmark has lost seven of his last eight starts while allowing four or more goals five times.

"I'm trying my best out there, but it isn't enough," Ullmark lamented. "Not happy with how I've been playing lately. The boys are trying their best to create scoring opportunities, and I let the guys down tonight."

Coach Phil Housley defended Ullmark, noting how important the Sabres' goaltending has been when the team has been successful. While Housley said he was pleased with how his offense generated more chances, he was not entirely satisfied.

The Sabres failed to score on their three shots during two power-play opportunities and did not get their second goal until Zemgus Girgensons fired a shot from the high slot that beat McElhinney with 1:01 left in the game.

"It's tough, but we have to score more than one goal," Housley said when asked of Ullmark's critical self-assessment. "He's been a bright spot for us the whole season. Would he want to get some of those goals back? I'm sure he would. But that's just where we're at as a group. We need to find a way to score more goals, but we are creating."

The Sabres are tied with Ottawa for the fewest points (33) in the NHL since they won their 10th game in a row on Nov. 27. They are in jeopardy of becoming the first team in league history to win 10 games in a row and lose 10 games in a row in the same season.

They are also going to be only the second team in NHL history to not make the playoffs in the same season in which they had a 10-game winning streak. While one goal alleviated some stress, there are still 11 games remaining.

"Obviously when you're getting into a slide like that it sort of becomes the topic that snowballs into something bigger than it is," Skinner said. "For us, that's just the way it's going right now."

## **The Wraparound: Hurricanes 4, Sabres 2**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — With one shot on net Saturday night in PNC Arena, Jeff Skinner cast away the dark cloud that had been hovering over the Buffalo Sabres for nine days.

Skinner's shot between the legs of Carolina Hurricanes goalie Curtis McElhinney in the first period prevented the Sabres from being shut out for a fourth consecutive game.

His goal wasn't enough to end their slide, though. The Sabres' skid reached seven games with a 4-2 loss to the Hurricanes. Buffalo (30-32-9) has lost 13 of its last 15 games and nine in a row to Carolina (39-25-7), which swept the season series.

Lucas Wallmark, Andrei Svechnikov, Justin Williams and Jordan Staal scored goals for the Hurricanes, who have the second-most wins and points in the NHL since Dec. 31. They received 35 saves from McElhinney.

Skinner snapped his own goalless drought at 13 games — the second-longest mark of his career — with his first-period goal to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead, and Zemgus Girgensons scored with 1:01 left in regulation. Linus Ullmark made 25 saves while making his second start in three games.

Opening salvo: Skinner's 13-game scoring drought ended when the 26-year-old winger collected a puck off the end boards, skated to the front of the net and shot the puck between McElhinney's legs for a 1-0 lead at 2:18 into the first period.

Skinner matched his previous career high for goals in a season with 37, which he previous set with the Hurricanes in 2016-17. He has four goals in three games against his former team this season.

199 minutes, 58 seconds: With the goal, the Sabres snapped a scoring drought of 199 minutes, 58 seconds after they were shut out for three consecutive games. They had not scored since Kyle Okposo's third-period goal in a 5-4 shootout loss in Chicago last Thursday.

Failing to score another goal would have made Buffalo just the sixth team in NHL history to suffer four straight shutouts. It has not been done in the expansion era since the first-year 1967-68 Oakland Seals.

Meltdown: The Hurricanes capitalized on the Sabres' inability to exit their own zone, when Jordan Martinook's wrist shot leaked through Ullmark and Wallmark was there to jam the loose puck over the goal line to tie the score, 1-1, with 6:08 left in the first period.

The Sabres failed to record a shot on goal in the final 10 minutes, 32 seconds of the first period, while the Hurricanes had nine during that span.

All alone: Svechnikov gave the Hurricanes a 2-1 lead at 1:07 into the second period when Jack Eichel left him alone in front of the net, and Teuvo Teravainen made a backdoor pass through traffic.

Trick shot: Even Williams could not believe he gave the Hurricanes a 3-1 lead at 17:09 into the second period when he took a bad-angle shot inches away from the left-wing boards and below the faceoff dot.

500: Staal recorded his 500th career NHL point with by surprising Ullmark with a spinning backhanded shot for a 4-1 lead with 4:14 left in regulation.

Lineup: Defenseman Zach Bogosian returned to the lineup after missing one game with an upper body injury, while Marco Scandella was unavailable and remains day to day with an upper body injury. Forwards Scott Wilson and Vladimir Sobotka were healthy scratches with Eichel back from a two-game suspension and Girgensons drawing back into the lineup.

Next: The Sabres will host the St. Louis Blues (37-27-7) in KeyBank Center on Sunday at 5 p.m. Buffalo is 5-6-2 on the second game of back-to-backs this season.

## **Sabres Notebook: A rare, 'frustrating' season for Brandon Montour**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — This has not been the type of season Brandon Montour is accustomed to.

The 24-year-old defenseman reached the Stanley Cup playoffs in each of his first two NHL seasons, helping the Anaheim Ducks reach the Western Conference Finals in 2017, only five months after making his debut.

He saw the Ducks fire coach Randy Carlyle in February and General Manager Bob Murray took over as interim coach before Montour was traded to the Buffalo Sabres on the eve of last month's trade deadline.

Entering Saturday night's game in Carolina, Montour's two teams this season had gone a combined 25-35-10 — including 1-6-1 with the Sabres — with him on the roster. He endured a 12-game losing streak in Anaheim, and the Sabres were amid a three-game scoring drought before this one-game road trip.

"It's definitely been frustrating," Montour told The Buffalo News in PNC Arena on Saturday. "My first couple years in the league we had some success and some good teams with a lot more wins than losses. That experience with having more lows in a season is a little different, but the season is so long. I think it's one of those things where you're always going to have ups and downs. It's just a matter of how well you can take that and kind of recover, worry about that next game or next shift. I think I've grown into knowing what I can do to help."

Montour, acquired by Buffalo in exchange for defenseman Brendan Guhle and a first-round draft pick, had two goals with two assists and a minus-1 rating in his first eight games with the Sabres. He has tantalized with his speed, while contributing to an offense that has been one of the NHL's worst since its winning streak ended Nov. 29.

Montour didn't expect to be traded. Upon joining the Sabres in Toronto on the day of the trade deadline, he told reporters he intended to show the Ducks they made a mistake by choosing to begin a roster rebuild without him.

The move to Western New York did not come without challenges. Montour had to learn coach Phil Housley's system, including the power play, which has led to breakdowns in his own zone at times.

Injuries have forced Montour to play with different partners in seemingly every game, though he and Rasmus Dahlin were finally united in the Sabres' 5-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday in KeyBank Center and Saturday's game against the Hurricanes.

"Obviously, I'm not focusing too much on next year, but if I look back at it, I'm getting familiar with the guys and the area and what the staff and management is about," Montour said. "Going into next year, it's one of those things that's a positive and it's something to look forward to where I already know everybody. ..."

"They know I'm a part of this team now. I want to be here. I've seen strides and see what the strengths are with this team. I'm excited about what's going to happen here. It's a matter of building that and kind of getting through this tough time in the season."

Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill did not acquire Montour for only this season, though. Montour is under contract next season at a \$3.38 million cap hit and will only be a restricted free agent this summer, making him a possible long-term answer for the Sabres' need of a right-shot defenseman.

The trade allows Montour to become acclimated with teammates, staff and management. While Montour hasn't been a catalyst for immediate change, he has quickly earned Housley's trust.

"He's adjusted well within our structure and with his speed, the way he attacks the game," Housley said. "He plays to win. He's doing the right things. Just continue working with him in the defensive zone to get his reads, but he's a horse. He likes to jump up in the play, he likes to get up in the attack and we're really encouraged by that."

#### O'Reilly's return

Former Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly will return to KeyBank Center on Sunday for the first time since he was traded to the St. Louis Blues in July. The Blues (37-27-7) are third in the Central Division after a 5-1 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday that ended a 0-2-1 slump, and defeated the Sabres, 4-1, in St. Louis on Dec. 27.

The Blues got five of six points on their recent California road trip, losing only in overtime at San Jose. Their leading scorer, Vladimir Tarasenko, has been out for five games with an upper body injury. Sabres goalie Carter Hutton, who played two seasons in St. Louis before signing with Buffalo in free agency, is expected to face his former team.

#### Scandella day to day

Defenseman Marco Scandella was unavailable to play Saturday against Carolina and remains day to day with an upper body injury but skated inside PNC Arena with the team not holding a morning skate.

Scandella suffered the injury during the loss to Pittsburgh and has missed six games over the past two months because of injury. He has four goals among 11 points with a minus-11 rating in 56 games this season.

## **Sabres at Hurricanes: Five Things to Know**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. — 197 minutes, 40 seconds. That is where the Buffalo Sabres' scoring drought stands entering their game tonight against the Carolina Hurricanes in PNC Arena.

They have been shut out in three consecutive games, failing to score a goal since the third period of a 5-4 shootout loss in Chicago last Thursday. Jack Eichel will return to the lineup after serving his two-game suspension for a hit to the head of Colorado's Carl Soderberg and has been reunited with Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart on the top line.

However, the Sabres (30-31-9) have won just three of their last 22 road games and have lost eight consecutive games to the Hurricanes (38-25-7), who occupy the Eastern Conference's first wild-card playoff spot. Opening faceoff is 7:08 p.m.

"It's been tough," coach Phil Housley said following practice Friday. "We've had some awfully good looks and it's not going in. It's not like we're not creating anything. We've mostly out-chanced other teams. Again, it's simplifying our game. We looked at it today. We went over it. ... We're going to continue to work on it."

Here are Five Things to Know ahead of tonight's game:

1. Lineup: In addition to getting Eichel back, Zemgus Girgensons will play after being a healthy scratch for two games, while Scott Wilson and Vladimir Sobotka are out of the lineup. Defensemen Zach Bogosian (upper body) is also going to draw back into the lineup, while Marco Scandella remains day-to-day with an upper body injury he suffered during the 5-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Thursday.

Housley also told reporters Saturday afternoon that Linus Ullmark will start in goal.

In addition to reuniting the formidable top line, Housley made other changes to the lineup during practice Friday. Alex Nylander was on a line with Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues, while Tage Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt were with Jason Pominville.

There were also changes to the defensive pairings with Bogosian back:

2. Carolina's run: The Hurricanes' current streak against the Sabres is their longest against any team in the NHL, as they have not lost to Buffalo since March 2016. That includes a pair of wins over the Sabres this season, including 6-5 in a shootout in KeyBank Center last month.

The Hurricanes have gone 23-8-2 (48 points) over their last 33 games, the second-most wins and points by any team in the NHL since Dec. 31. They are tied for fourth in the NHL with 117 goals during that span. Carolina has allowed the fifth-fewest goals all season, while much of its roster has thrived against the Sabres, including Sebastian Aho, who has 10 points in eight career games against them.

Since Dec. 1, the Sabres have the second-fewest points and third-fewest goals.

3. Skinner's return: Skinner is returning to Raleigh for the second time this season and scored during the Sabres' 4-3 loss here on Jan. 11. He also had two goals during their 6-5 shootout loss to the Hurricanes in KeyBank Center last month.

Another revenge game would come at a perfect time. Skinner is amid a 13-game scoring drought -- tied for the second-longest of his career -- and should benefit from being united with Eichel. They have recorded a point on the same goal 31 times this season, making them the most productive Sabres duo since Pominville and Thomas Vanek combined on 39 goals in the 2011-12 season.

At least one of the two has recorded a point on 99 of the team's 190 goals this season, or 52.1 percent.

4. Eichel's return: The 22-year-old captain's return comes at an important time for the Sabres. He has 10 points (six goals, four assists) in 11 career games against the Hurricanes, including seven (three goals, four assists) in his last four.

He has 72 points this season, setting a new career-high mark, also tying his previous high with 25 goals. Eichel has joined Rick Martin and Thomas Vanek as the third player in franchise history to record at least 20 goals in each of his first four NHL

Though Eichel was held scoreless in his two games prior to suspension, he had six in six games prior to that and is one goal away from setting a new career high.

5. By the Numbers: Over their last 18 games, the Hurricanes have killed 41 of 45 opponents' power plays and their penalty kill ranks sixth in the NHL entering Saturday's games. ... Aho has recorded career highs in goals (30), assists (47) and points (77). He is just the sixth player in franchise history to post 70 points in a season prior to turning 22 years old, and he is only the second player in the team's last 25 seasons to accomplish the feat (Eric Staal, 2005-06). Aho is also the first Hurricanes player to register 77 points in a season since Ray Whitney in 2008-09. ... The Sabres have allowed five power-play goals over their last three games.

## Jack Eichel returns, hoping to prevent Sabres from making dubious offensive history

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2019

Jack is back. Now we see if that helps the Buffalo Sabres regain any semblance of an offense.

Captain Jack Eichel has served his two-game suspension for a check to the head and will return to the lineup Saturday night as the Sabres travel to meet the Carolina Hurricanes in PNC Arena.

At practice Friday in Harborcenter, Eichel was back to his normal spot between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart and in his role on the team's top power-play unit.

"Whenever you miss a game, hurt, suspended, whatever it is, it's tough to sit in the press box, for sure," Eichel said. "I want to be out there competing as much as you can. It stinks not playing, but it's good that it's over and you must move past it."

"He's a big part of our team. He's our leader. He drives the bus," said coach Phil Housley. "I'm sure he's excited to get back."

Eichel returns to find a Buffalo offense in the throes of a horrific slump, the victims of three consecutive shutout defeats that have extended a season-long losing streak to six games.

"Obviously, we've had some chances but haven't capitalized," Eichel said. "So we've just got to bear down on our opportunities. The goalies in this league are good. You've got to get to the net."

"Our goal every shift is to win the shift and to obviously score goals while trying to prevent them," said defenseman Zach Bogosian. "I don't know how mental it is. Guys have to continue to put pucks in. A lot of teams have similar droughts like that and they get a lucky bounce and all of a sudden it's back to normal."

Despite Bogosian's assertion, teams generally don't have similar droughts. This is no longer a normal slump. The Sabres are approaching plenty of historic ineptitude. Consider these ghoulish facts:

The Sabres have failed to score in a span of 197 minutes, 40 seconds since Kyle Okposo's third-period goal March 7 in Chicago.

Thursday's 5-0 loss to Pittsburgh made the Sabres the first team in the NHL's expansion era to endure three consecutive shutouts in back-to-back seasons. It had not been done in consecutive seasons since 1929, when the Pittsburgh Pirates (yes, the Pirates) and New York Rangers suffered similar fates.

If the Sabres do not score Saturday, they will become just the sixth team in NHL history to suffer four straight shutouts. It has not been done in the expansion era since the first-year 1967-68 Oakland Seals. For those wondering, the record is eight games in a row, set by the 1928-29 Chicago Blackhawks.

The Sabres were shut out three straight times last season during the week after Thanksgiving and came within 8 minutes, 42 seconds of a fourth goose egg before Jason Pominville scored their lone goal in a 5-1 loss at Pittsburgh on Dec. 2, 2017. So the only two times it's happened in franchise history has been the last two seasons.

The Sabres would need to get less than 15 minutes into the second period Saturday to break the club futility mark of 232 minutes, 9 seconds set during last year's drought.

"We need a goal. We'd like to get a result with that too as well," Housley said. "I think we're still at times turning away opportunities to get pucks to the net. We've just really got to simplify our game, throw everything to the net. We've got to get people going there and getting dirty and hungry to score a goal."

### Firing Blanks

The most consecutive games an NHL team has been shut out

Team	Season	Games
Chicago Blackhawks	1928-29	8

Oakland Seals	1967-68	4
Pittsburgh Pirates	1928-29	4
Montreal Canadiens	1927-28	4
New York Rangers	1927-28	4

35 teams at 3, last by Buffalo Sabres in 2018-19

Teams shut out three consecutive games in back to back seasons

Team	Seasons
Buffalo Sabres	2017-18 and 2018-19
New York Rangers	1927-28 (4 games) and 1928-29
Pittsburgh Pirates	1926-27, 1927-28 and 1928-29 (4 games)

SOURCE: NHL.com

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The drought is made even more shocking when you consider the Sabres had been having defensive troubles and not problems putting the puck in the net. In the seven games preceding this run, Buffalo had scored 23 goals and averaged 3.29 per game. The Sabres have slipped to 24th in scoring but still average 2.7 per game.

"For some guys, if it's been a while, it's just human nature that it starts to creep into your mind a bit and you're gripping your stick a little tight and thinking about it," Eichel said. "Just keep it simple. Try to get pucks to the net, bodies to the net and it's bound to go in."

The goal drought has ratcheted up the heat on Housley and added pressure in the dressing room as players try to stay motivated with no playoff berth at stake.

"We're competitors. That's the biggest thing," Eichel said. "I think everyone has something to play for here. The season is not over. We've got a big game tomorrow night against a team trying to get in the playoffs. We can play spoiler, we can play whatever you want to call it. This is about pride, about playing for the logo, playing for the guy next to you. I think that's what most important."

"I believe guys want to win in here," added Bogosian. "When things aren't going the way you like them to, it's easy to point fingers, but we have to stay together as a group, go through it as a group and grow as a group. There's not going to be one or two guys packing it in."

#### Storm Warning

The Sabres have lost eight in a row to the Hurricanes, their longest current drought against any NHL team (0-5-3). They are 0-1-1 this season against the Canes, dropping a 4-3 decision Jan. 11 in Raleigh and a 6-5 overtime shootout Feb. 7 in Buffalo. The Hurricanes have scored 27 goals against Buffalo in the last six meetings.

#### Lineup news

Marco Scandella missed practice with an upper body injury, but Housley said he would make the trip to Carolina. Bogosian returned to practice and will also travel. Housley said he'll determine the lineup Saturday but practice the day before usually tells the tale, meaning Bogosian is likely in and Scandella likely out.

Vladimir Sobotka and Scott Wilson skated as extra forwards in practice Friday and are likely to be healthy scratches. Sobotka has missed six games this year due to injury, but this would be the first time he's been a healthy scratch.

## **Sabres score, but can't win**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 16, 2019

Raleigh, NC (WGR 550) - The first period in Carolina on Saturday is everything of what's wrong with the Buffalo Sabres. The blue and gold came out flying and got rewarded when Jeff Skinner got some puck-luck after some hard work by the Jack Eichel line and the Sabres shutout streak was broken at 199:58.

It was also Skinner's first goal in 14 games plus he tied a career high with 37 goals.

Eichel was coming off his two-game suspension and was flying. Curtis McElhinney just barely made a save on a 2-on-1 and Eichel made a great hustle play when he jumped up at the blue line to keep the puck in and found Sam Reinhart. Reinhart set up Skinner open in the slot. He paused, took his time and ripped it square off the post.

The Sabres then had a breakdown and they crumbled for the rest of the period. This is exactly what's wrong with a team that may be the most fragile in the NHL. Jordan Martinook's shot should've been easily stopped by Linus Ullmark, but he let it squeak through his pads and the puck laid in the crease. Most teams that aren't named the Buffalo Sabres have guys around the net and the Hurricanes are no different. Lucas Wallmark stepped in behind Ullmark as two Sabres stood and watched and the game was tied.

I wanted to see if the Sabres would respond and they didn't. From that point forward, it looked like the Colorado game all over again. They couldn't get the puck out of the zone, the passing was horrendous, there was no offensive zone time including a 2:00 power play and they gave up the final nine shots of the period.

One bad play and they went from dominating the game to a panicked team.

It took the Sabres almost half the second period to finally settle down and get back to their game. While they were waiting, Jack Eichel left his man off to the side of the net and Andrei Svechnikov got an easy layup.

The Sabres went over 15 minutes of clock time without a shot before finally finding their legs and the offensive zone again.

Once they did, Nylander was eye-to-eye on McElhinney, but instead of shooting, he passed it to a wide open Conor Sheary who fanned on an empty net. Nylander also seemed to have a lot of net on a rebound, but McElhinney got across to make the save on the backhand shot.

Less than a minute later, Evan Rodrigues was stopped on a breakaway.

Things were going well and then Ullmark lets in another horrible goal from the left wing wall. That just absolutely can't go in, especially when your team is struggling to score goals.

Buffalo really came on in the second half of the second period and wound up with 13 shots, but again, you're not going to win with that kind of goaltending. Ullmark was asked during the postgame show if there's any reason why he hasn't played as well in the second half of the season as the first and he said if he knew, he'd fix it.

The Sabres had a chance to cut the lead to 3-2 when Brandon Montour made a great move to cut into the zone. He set up an open Casey Mittelstadt down the slot, but was stopped by McElhinney.

This was a game where the Sabres produced more Grade-A scoring chances than they have in weeks, but it still only produced two goals.

Buffalo has now lost nine straight games to Carolina.

## **Hurricanes outlast Sabres 4-2**

WGR 550

March 16, 2019

The Sabres scored for the first time in nearly 200 minutes on Saturday, but it wasn't enough to prevent the team's seventh straight loss, a 4-2 defeat in Carolina.

Jeff Skinner snapped a team and personal scoring drought with an early goal. Skinner's 37th, tying a career high, marked the Sabres' first goal in 199:58 and his first in 14 games. The Buffalo forward collected the puck behind the net and fired an off-angle shot at McElhinney. The puck found its way into the net and the Sabres were on the board for the first time since March 7. Skinner nearly made it 2-0 moments later, but his wide open shot from the slot went off the post.

Later in the period, Lucas Wallmark found the net with his 9th goal of the season, tying the score 1-1. Wallmark's shot trickled through Linus Ullmark's pads on Carolina's fourth shot of the game. The Hurricanes took the lead at 1:07 of the 2nd period thanks to Andrei Svechnikov, left alone to Ullmark's left. Carolina got another late in the middle frame when Justin Williams squeezed one by Ullmark for his 21st at the 3-1 lead.

Jordan Staal's spin move with 4:14 to play in the 3rd period made it a 4-1 advantage in favor of the Hurricanes. A late goal by Zemgus Girgensons cut the deficit in half, but Carolina prevailed with two points in a tight wild card race.

### GAME SUMMARY

#### Goal Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: 2:18 - Jeff Skinner (37) (Matt Hunwick, Sam Reinhart)

CAR: 13:52 - Lucas Wallmark (9) (Jordan Martinook, Brett Pesce)

##### Second Period:

BUF: NONE

CAR: 1:07 - Andrei Svechnikov (18) (Teuvo Teravainen); 17:09 - Justin Williams (21) (Justin Faulk, Nino Niederreiter)

##### Third Period:

BUF: 18:59 - Zemgus Girgensons (4) (Brandon Montour)

CAR: 15:46 - Jordan Staal (7) (Micheal Ferland, Dougie Hamilton)

#### Penalty Summary:

##### First Period:

BUF: NONE

CAR: 16:54 - Jordan Martinook (Tripping - 2 min.)

##### Second Period:

BUF: 1:54 - Casey Nelson (Fighting - 5 min.)

CAR: 1:54 - Micheal Ferland (Fighting - 5 min.)

##### Third Period:

BUF: 3:07 - Zach Bogosian (Holding - 2 min.)

CAR: 8:39 - Trevor van Riemsdyk (Holding - 2 min.)

Shots on Goal:

BUF: 37 (7, 13, 17)

CAR: 29 (11, 12, 6)

Goalies:

BUF: Linus Ullmark - 25 saves

CAR: Curtis McElhinney - 35 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 2

CAR: 0 for 1

Three Stars:

1. Jordan Staal - CAR

2. Curtis McElhinney - CAR

3. Lucas Wallmark - CAR

What's Next:

A quick turnaroud for the Sabres, who look to avoid an eighth straight loss when they host the St. Louis Blues on Sunday at 5 p.m. The game marks Ryan O'Reilly's return to Buffalo. The Blues are currently in a playoff spot, sitting in 3rd place in the Central Division, and are coming off a 5-1 win at Pittsburgh on Saturday.

## **The Sabres just need to score a goal as they travel to Carolina**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 16, 2019

Raleigh, NC (WGR 550) - The Sabres get Jack Eichel back from his two-game suspension as they play in Carolina on Saturday. Buffalo has gone 197:40 without scoring a goal, so they need their captain desperately. The Hurricanes have been involved in two straight shutouts as they beat Colorado 3-0 and lost in Columbus on Friday 3-0.

Buffalo needs a puck to cross the goal line for them in the worst way and Phil Housley knows it, "Yes, we need a goal and we'd like to get a result with that as well, but I think at times we're still turning away at opportunities to get pucks to the net. I think we've just got to really simplify our game and throw everything at the net and then get people going there and getting dirty and then we'll score a goal."

Carolina has beaten Buffalo eight straight times and in their last 33 overall games have gone 23-8-2. Recently the Hurricanes have been all over the place losing to Boston 4-3 in overtime, getting pasted by Winnipeg 8-1, beating Nashville 5-3 and then the win over the Avalanche and the loss to the Blue Jackets.

Carolina and Columbus hold down the two Eastern Conference Wild Card spots with 83 points. That's four in back of Pittsburgh for third place in the Metropolitan Division. Montreal is two points behind both the Hurricanes and Blue Jackets.

In the two losses to Carolina this season, the Sabres have had absolutely no answer for Sebastian Aho and Teuvo Teravainen. Teravainen has two goals and five points while Aho has two goals and four points.

Buffalo has been able to score on Curtis McElhinney as his goals against in those games is 3.90, but the Sabres have had two of their sloppier games against the Canes. McElhinney hasn't played in three games because he's given up 12 goals in his last two starts

Jeff Skinner hasn't scored in 13 games, but he does have three against his former team.

The Sabres had scored a power play goal in 5-of-6 games, but since then they been held off the board in four straight games. The penalty kill has all of a sudden hit a speed bump going just 1-for-4 against Pittsburgh and giving up a power play goal in three consecutive games.

Buffalo has given up five goals in five of its last nine games.

There was no morning skate on Saturday, but on Friday Jack Eichel was back between Jeff Skinner and Sam Reinhart. If you go by Friday's practice, Vladimir Sobotka, Scott Wilson and Marco Scandella (inj) will be out.

Carter Hutton had five goals scored on him by Pittsburgh, so my guess is Linus Ullmark will be back in.

The frustration boiled over in the locker-room following the Penguins loss. Players were saying that there needs to be more pride to do the things that are necessary to score goals and keep goals out of their net. This is a time where players should be trying to make things hard on Jason Botterill as he decides who stays and who goes. Lately, many of them have been making it very easy on him.

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Phil Housley, Jack Eichel, Jason Pominville and Zach Bogosian.

## **Sabres' Eichel is done with his two-game suspension**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - It certainly wasn't easy for Jack Eichel to sit out two games after being suspended by the NHL. Eichel will be back in the lineup Saturday in Carolina and he said, "Whenever you miss a game hurt or suspended I think it's tough to sit in the press box for sure.

"I want to be out there competing as much as you can, so it stinks not playing, but it's good that it's over."

The Sabres have been shut out for three straight games, covering 197 minutes. Eichel has only played in one of those games, "We've had some chances and haven't capitalized, so we just need to bear down on our opportunities."

Sports can be mind games, especially when things aren't going well. Eichel said when it comes to goal scoring, that can happen, "For some guys if it's been awhile it's just human nature that it starts creeping into your mind a bit and you start gripping your stick a little tight thinking about it, but I think just keep it simple and try to get pucks to the net and get bodies there it's bound to go in."

Jeff Skinner hasn't scored a goal in 13 games. Eichel said he's confident that he can help his left winger, "He's had a lot of opportunities he hits a couple of crossbars the other night, he's been around the net, he's had his chances and when you're not having chances is when you start to worry, so bear down and when you get opportunities, you've got to capitalize."

The Sabres are not mathematically eliminated from the playoffs, but the players are realistic to know where they stand. Eichel said they still need to go out and play the best they can until the season is over, "We just compete every game because we're competitors. I think everyone has something to play for here and the season's not over and this is about pride, this is about playing for the logo, playing for the guy next to you, I think that's what's most important."

Zach Bogosian also believes that nobody in that room is packing it in, "We're professional athletes, this is what we do and this is the passion that you have. Everyone plays for different reasons, but we have to stay motivated in here and I believe that guys want to win in here and when things aren't going the way you'd like them to, it's easy to point fingers, but we have to stay together as a group and go through it as a group."

Jason Pominville has played in Buffalo and Minnesota. He said it's pretty simple what needs to be done, "We have to have more pride to get to that area and get our nose dirty and you've got to pay a price to get to the net.

"To me it comes down to compete, pride and battle and right now it's not there."

There have been a lot of questions if Phil Housley's game plan is good enough. Pominville said it absolutely is, "Oh yes, it has nothing to do with the game plan, I mean X's and O's will get you ideas of how you want to play, but it comes down to who wants it more and battling, to me that's all it comes down to."

Marco Scandella is still day-to-day and missed practice while Bogosian returned to practice. Scandella is on the trip to Raleigh.

Friday's lines:

Skinner - Eichel - Reinhart

Sheary - Rodrigues - Nylander

Thompson - Mittelstadt - Pominville

Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo

Wilson - Sobotka

Hunwick - Ristolainen

Bogosian - Montour

Dahlin - Nelson

PP1: Skinner - Eichel - Reinhart / Mittelstadt - Dahlin

PP2: Sheary - Rodrigues - Okposo / Ristolainen - Montour

## **Tage Thompson knows what he needs in order to unlock his vast potential**

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

March 16, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Tage Thompson just wants to be consistent. Every day, game in and game out, he wants to be a steady player who can be relied upon in the big moments, but the trick is he's freshly turned 21 and in his second pro season.

Consistency doesn't just happen overnight, and that's something the Buffalo Sabres have realized with their bevy of youthful players. That's part of the reason Thompson has been developed at the NHL level all season. Learning what it takes to be a pro on and off the ice is a full-time job.

Still, while the Sabres have struggled, Thompson wants more, but he has to be patient.

"It's been a learning year. I'm just trying to round out my game, play a full 200-foot game, just trying to get better at the defensive zone and, honestly, just being able to play in any role the team or the coaching staff need me in and doing that to the best of my abilities," Thompson said. "I think from there I'm just trying to help the team win any way you can. Whether you're putting up points or not, there are other assets to the game, so you've got to be doing those well because you're not going to be able to score every night, and when the pucks aren't going in for you, you've got to be able to contribute in some other way."

Thompson's former team, the St. Louis Blues, head into Buffalo on Sunday with Ryan O'Reilly, whom Thompson was traded for in a major offseason deal and has been the picture of consistency throughout his career. For Thompson, seeing the team that drafted him back in 2016 move him so quickly gives him motivation.

"There's a chip on your shoulder when you play against your old team," Thompson said. "You want to have a good game, obviously. It means a lot more to you than probably playing against someone else."

While O'Reilly is having a career year, Thompson is acclimating himself as an NHL player. He's already played more games than he did last season but has just three more points. He'll have, at most, 12 more games in Buffalo to up those totals, but he headed into the weekend on an 18-game goal drought. It's not for a lack of scoring chances.

"It's catch-22 because obviously, you want to score, right," Thompson said. "If you're getting the chances, you're doing something right, and if they're not going in for you, it's frustrating because you know you're getting those chances on a nightly basis and they're not going in for you. That happens sometimes and it's hard, you've just got to stay positive. It's when you're not getting those chances, that's when you should be worried. You know you want the puck to bounce your way a couple times here or there, whatever gets the monkey off your back, you maybe get keyed up and get things rolling."

The consistency has been harder to find in part because he's been getting more defensive assignments than he did in St. Louis. According to NaturalStatTrick.com, at 5-on-5, Thompson has had more defensive-zone faceoffs than last season although his offensive-zone starts are at 50 percent, but his CorsiFor, scoring chance and high-danger scoring chance numbers are all down.

We've seen the flashes in Thompson's game that suggest he'll be a dangerous player in the league. At 6-foot-6, his tremendous reach and ability to take away the puck away from opponents is a rare quality. His puck-handling ability makes you stop and marvel that a player of his size can get into and out of trouble the way he can. His shot gets on goalies fast, he can pick corners if he has the time, and a slap shot from a player his size is immediately dangerous. When a player has tools like that, he'll be coveted, but when he's young and still raw, he needs the right tutelage to help him make the leap for good.

"We're trying to find a consistency in his game, and you see it when he's on his game he's moving his feet, he's using his speed and he's got a terrific shot and he's getting in on the forecheck," coach Phil Housley said. "We're going to continue to hammer those messages."

For Thompson, part of that hammering has meant having to sit out occasionally. Ten times this season he's been a healthy scratch, most recently in Denver during the Sabres' 3-0 loss to Colorado on March 9. The scratching isn't personal but rather a sign that there's still work to be done.

"I think being in and out of the lineup can mess with your head a little bit and just staying positive throughout that time period," Thompson said. "Obviously, you always want to be helping your team, and sometimes you have to take a step back and watch from a different point of view and reassess how you've been playing. It's tough, like I said, you want to be in the lineup all the time helping the team win and being the guy everyone turns to, to carry the weight. But I'm young and I'm a second-year pro, so there's going to be learning curves along the way. You can't let that get you down."

Although Thompson hasn't played at all in the American Hockey League this season, the Sabres made sure at the trade deadline that he'd be eligible to play in the AHL playoffs. Some fans want him to be sent to Rochester if he's not going to play or get enough ice time in Buffalo, but now he'll have the opportunity to help the Americans in the Calder Cup playoffs. Even though his mind is set on finishing the season strong with the Sabres, getting a chance to play in playoff games and get a taste of that rush is all part of helping him grow.

"They're a great team, and they're doing really well right now," Thompson said. "I played with a lot of those guys at the beginning of the season in main camp and the rookie showcase, so I know a lot of the guys there from being here in the summer a little bit and training and skating with them. It won't be like I'm going into an unfamiliar environment there. ... I'll hopefully be able to help them continue the success down there."

## **Sabres' lack of offense in Eichel's absence makes his importance even more evident**

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

March 15, 2019

BUFFALO — The best laid plans don't always pan out and, boy, do the Buffalo Sabres know all about that this season. When Jack Eichel goes out of the lineup, it creates a sense of dread one way or another. On a team with a lack of both scoring and center depth, the difference in play without the star center is evident.

Eichel's absence due to injury has been an unfortunate occurrence the previous two seasons, so when he missed three games in January with an upper-body injury, it wasn't an unfamiliar situation. In those three games, the Sabres went 2-1-0 with wins over Florida and New Jersey and a loss at Boston in between. At that point, the Sabres were still in a wild card spot. Those days seem forever ago compared to where the team is now.

Being without Eichel in their past two games came with the team mired in a losing streak and on its way to an eighth straight missed postseason. The home games this week versus Dallas and Pittsburgh saw their goalless streak extended to 197:40 in respective 2-0 and 5-0 losses and raised many uncomfortable questions with the Sabres tied for 12th in the Eastern Conference at 69 points with the New York Rangers.

"Anytime that you put on an NHL sweater, put on a Sabres sweater, you better play with some pride otherwise you shouldn't fucking be here," winger Kyle Okposo said Thursday after the loss to the Penguins. "I don't believe that we've lost that, and if guys have, then they shouldn't be here."

In January it was Jeff Skinner, Sam Reinhart, and Tage Thompson who picked up the offense and scoring chances with Eichel out. In the past two games, the team hasn't been able to do that. Do the players change how they approach the game when they know he's not in the lineup?

"You know you're going to go through stretches and stuff where you don't feel as good, so I feel like I've got that again," Reinhart said. "But no, I don't think I try and change too much because (Jack)'s out of the lineup. Mentally maybe a little bit; you're trying to be the go-to guy for the lineup for our team. You try and hold that with the preparation and how you go, but I try to do that regardless if he's in the lineup or not or if I'm on his line or not."

Finding the players that have stepped up in his most recent absence is a bit tougher.

Skinner put a pair of shots off the post in the 2-0 loss to Dallas. Connor Sheary, working with Reinhart and Evan Rodrigues, had a set of opportunities to get on the board and Stars goalie Ben Bishop was in the middle of a run of what ended up being three straight games with a shutout. The effort in that game wasn't at fault, but sometimes luck isn't there.

"It's just the breaks," Thompson said. "Certain ones you feel there's something you could've done different and sometimes that's just the way the puck bounces; sometimes the goalie makes a great save and that's just the way the game goes sometimes. But that's where you've got to dig in deeper and find a way."

The players that did their damndest to find a way were goalies Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton. Unfortunately, goalies don't score goals very regularly and the Sabres' winless streak moved to six games (0-5-1) after the loss to Pittsburgh. Hutton, who was under fire the entire way against Colorado, sped off the ice into the locker room after the final horn on Thursday against Pittsburgh. Whether he was mad at himself, mad about yet another loss, mad at what transpired in front of him, or a combination of all three, he can't really be faulted for wanting to get away from it as fast as possible.

"We've got to do a lot of things," Sheary said after the game Thursday. "It starts with getting to the net front and maybe getting a dirty one. I think we're maybe a little bit too perimeter in trying to make plays, especially off the rush. I think we've just got to try and get inside more and bang home a rebound or something dirty in front."

Eichel isn't always around the front of the net, but his linemates can usually be found there when he's taking shots from the slot or the circles. For other centers, trying to be like Jack will only take them away from their own games and likely frustrate them more because they're not as gifted as he is either in handling the puck or taking shots. That said, when it's a mix of veterans who know their roles and stick to what works and young players still figuring out the NHL game, having them keep things simple is in their best interests.

"Obviously it's a big loss, he's a superstar. That's tough but I think you've just got to go keep playing," Casey Mittelstadt said. "There's a lot of things I've built up over the year that I've got to keep getting better at. I've got to keep focusing on those and keep developing in that area. I mean, it's tough not having him for sure, but I think you've just got to go out and play, you can't try to be Jack or try to do everything he does. You've just got to go out, keep playing your game, and hope everything works out."

Right now, nothing seems to be working out, but Eichel returns Saturday to try and show them the way out. In a season filled with ups and downs he's been the constant, consistent performer and team MVP. They're going to need him to help bring some stability and calm to a room that desperately needs it.

## **Trading Ryan O'Reilly looks like brutal deal for Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 16, 2019

BUFFALO – The trade could go down as one of the worst in Sabres history.

For NHL All-Star Ryan O'Reilly, the Sabres received two overpaid veteran forwards, a prospect who has been in and out of the lineup and first- and second-round picks from the St. Louis Blues, Saturday afternoon's opponent at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres' struggles this season can be sliced and diced a thousand ways. But getting rid of O'Reilly on July 1 has kept them among the NHL's bottom-feeders.

The Sabres dished one of the NHL's most versatile centers without having any sort of viable replacement. The deal has left a gaping hole in their lineup.

In addition to producing offense – the Sabres have been historically bad scoring goals this month – O'Reilly plays critical minutes and takes more faceoffs than any NHL player.

With captain Jack Eichel suspended for Thursday's 3-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, Sabres coach Phil Housley had to use Vladimir Sobotka, 31, as his "No. 1" pivot.

Sobotka, one of the players acquired for O'Reilly, recently ended his 41-game goal drought. He has registered zero assists in his last 18 contests. Overall, he has compiled five goals, 12 points and minus-16 rating in 64 games.

On Saturday in Carolina, Sobotka, who has a \$3.5 million salary cap hit, was a healthy scratch against the Hurricanes.

On Sunday afternoon, O'Reilly, 28, will return to Buffalo for the first time in the midst of a career season.

O'Reilly has scored 26 goals and 68 points, new highs, and compiled a gaudy plus-22 rating through 71 outings. He was an NHL All-Star again. He has averaged 20 minutes, 55 seconds an outing, one of the highest totals among NHL forwards.

Following a terrible start, the Blues have surged into a playoff spot, going 30-18-4 since firing coach Mike Yeo and elevating Craig Berube. They throttled the scorching Penguins 5-1 on Saturday afternoon.

O'Reilly looks rejuvenated.

The Sabres, meanwhile, have been downright awful for months, falling from first overall to sixth in the Atlantic Division since their 10-game winning streak ended.

The constant losing O'Reilly endured throughout his three years in Buffalo beat him down. After the Sabres finished dead last a year ago, he explained how the rough season sapped some of his love for hockey.

To O'Reilly, the Sabres had become "stuck in this mindset of just being OK with losing."

"I feel too it's really crept into myself," O'Reilly said April 9. "Over the course of the year I lost myself a lot, where it was just kind of get through, being OK with just not making a mistake, and that's not winning hockey at all and it's crept into all of our games. It's disappointing, it's sad.

"I feel throughout the year I've lost the love of the game multiple times and just need to get back to it because it's eating myself up and eats the other guys up, too."

Those comments, of course, were shocking. O'Reilly displayed more passion than any Sabre in recent memory. He never seemed satisfied and always shouldered responsibility.

Perhaps he wanted to force his way out of Buffalo. Maybe he was just venting.

Whatever the case, his words irked the Sabres fan base.

General manager Jason Botterill said after trading O'Reilly he did not need a change of scenery. He had mentioned months earlier the Sabres needed a significant move to shake them up.

Still, why O'Reilly?

Did the Sabres panic? Did they think O'Reilly's presence would be bad for business or a distraction? Did O'Reilly not get along with someone?

The deal, which was completed hours before O'Reilly was due a \$7.5 million bonus, has paid virtually no dividends for the Sabres.

After compiling two goals and four points in 23 games, center Patrik Berglund, 30, quit the Sabres in December, leaving \$12,579,032 on the table. It's a miracle they don't have his \$3.85 million cap hit for another three seasons.

Berglund and Sobotka seemed like solid veterans who, despite big contracts, could be contributors and improve the Sabres' depth.

Sobotka could be a buyout candidate following the season.

Tage Thompson, 21, is a former first-round pick who occasionally showcases the talents of an elite power forward. But the raw youngster began Saturday with seven goals, 12 points and a minus-17 rating in 60 games.

Thompson has more healthy scratches (10) than goals. The 6-foot-5 winger might turn out to be a fine player. But he probably should've spent this season in the minors.

Would Thompson have stayed in the NHL all season if he wasn't part of the O'Reilly trade? Probably not.

The deal could eventually look smart. Thompson might develop into a 25- or 30-goal scorer. Perhaps the Sabres nab a terrific player with one of their picks.

But right now, the O'Reilly trade looks brutal for the Sabres.

## **Ending goal drought would be moral victory for reeling Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 16, 2019

BUFFALO – Having completed his two-game suspension, leading scorer Jack Eichel will return for tonight's road contest against the Carolina Hurricanes. So maybe, just maybe, the hapless Sabres can end their embarrassing goal drought.

Forget about the Sabres' six-game losing streak. At this point, simply scoring a goal – they've been shut out three straight games – would be a huge moral victory.

Incredibly, the Sabres haven't scored in 197:40, a shocking stretch of futility that ranks among the lowest points in franchise history.

"We need a goal," Sabres coach Phil Housley said Friday inside KeyBank Center. "We'd like to get a result with that, too."

The Sabres haven't scored since March 7, when winger Kyle Okposo's goal 7:20 into the third period briefly put them up in their 5-4 shootout loss to the Chicago Blackhawks.

"A lot of teams have similar droughts like that," Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian said. "They get a lucky bounce, then all of a sudden it's you go back to normal."

If the Sabres don't score tonight, they'll make some dubious history, becoming the first club since the 1967-68 Oakland Seals – an expansion team three months into its existence – to be shut out in four straight games.

The Seals played four road games and even managed a scoreless tie during their drought. The Sabres have been blanked twice at home this week.

The Sabres endured a similar streak last season, getting shut out in three straight games before their goalless stretch mercifully ended at 232:09.

That marked the first time in franchise history they had gone three consecutive contests games without scoring. Now it has happened twice in 16 months.

This year's drought seemingly came out of nowhere. The Sabres have showcased their most potent offense in seven years, scoring 190 goals. They seemed like a lock to crack the 200-goal barrier for the first time since 2011-12, when they scored 211 times.

In the seven games prior to the drought, the Sabres scored 23 goals and pumped 252 shots on net, an average of 3.3 and 36 a contest.

Eichel's presence could ignite the Sabres. The slick center, 22, has been their offensive catalyst all season, compiling 26 goals and 72 points in 65 games.

"He's our leader and he drives the bus," Housley said.

Still, in the captain's last outing a week ago, the Sabres mustered only nine shots in the opening 50 minutes or so. The brutal 3-0 loss to the Colorado Avalanche ranks as one of their worst offensive performances in recent memory.

Eichel earned his two-game ban that afternoon for his illegal check to Carl Soderberg's head.

Goals aren't exactly hard to come by this season. Entering Friday, games had averaged 6.06 goals, the highest number since 2005-06.

"We're still, at times, turning away opportunities to get pucks to the net," Housley said. "I think we just to really simplify our game and throw everything to net. We got to get people going there and getting dirty and hungry to score a goal."

Housley, of course, was essentially repeating what he and his players said following Thursday's awful 5-0 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Sabres constantly talk about paying a price to score, yet when the game starts, they don't get to the net enough.

"They're not going in right now, so when that happens, you just got to kind of dumb it down, get to the net and hope for some bounces off legs or skates," Sabres center Evan Rodrigues said. "Just create havoc."

After going more than a week without scoring a goal, part of the struggle has become mental.

"For some guys, it's been a while," Eichel said. "I think it's just human nature that it starts to creep into your mind a bit and maybe you're gripping your stick a little tight and you're thinking about it. Just keep it simple, try to get pucks to the net, try to get bodies there. It's bound to go in."

—

Bogosian practiced Friday inside HarborCenter after an upper-body injury sidelined him against Pittsburgh.

Housley said the Sabres would know more on Bogosian's status later and he would accompany the team to Carolina.

"I feel ready to go," Bogosian said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Marco Scandella missed Friday's session and is day-to-day with an upper-body injury. Housley said he would travel with the team.

Sabres forwards Vladimir Sobotka and Scott Wilson skated an extras, meaning they could be scratched Saturday. Zemgus Girgensons would move in after sitting out two games as a healthy scratch.

Sobotka hasn't been a healthy scratch this season.

—

The Sabres have lost eight straight games to the Hurricanes (0-5-3). They haven't beaten them since March 22, 2016.

## **Jack Eichel set to return from suspension with Sabres reeling**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 15, 2019

BUFFALO – After serving his two-game suspension, captain and leading scorer Jack Eichel will return for Saturday's road game against the Carolina Hurricanes. So maybe, just maybe, the Sabres can end their dubious drought and score a goal.

Of course, Eichel's last outing, Saturday afternoon's miserable 3-0 loss to the Colorado Avalanche, was one of the Sabres' worst offensive efforts in recent memory.

So forget about the Sabres' six-game losing streak. At this point, simply scoring a goal – they've been shut out three straight games – would be a huge moral victory.

The Sabres haven't scored in 197:40, a stunning stretch of futility.

"We need a goal," Sabres coach Phil Housley said this afternoon. "We'd like to get a result with that, too. I think we're still, at times, turning away opportunities to get pucks to the net. I think we just to really simplify our game and throw everything to net. We got to get people going there and getting dirty and hungry to score a goal."

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After going more than a week without scoring a goal, part of the struggle has become mental.

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Check back later for more on the Sabres' scoring woes.

In other news, Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian practiced today inside HarborCenter after an upper-body injury sidelined him Thursday.

Housley said the Sabres would know more on Bogosian's status later and he would accompany the team to Carolina.

"I feel ready to go," Bogosian said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Marco Scandella missed today's session and is day-to-day with an upper-body injury. Housley said he would travel with the team.

Sabres forwards Vladimir Sobotka and Scott Wilson skated an extras today, meaning they could be scratched Saturday. Zemgus Girgensons would move in after sitting out two games as a healthy scratch.

Sobotka hasn't been a healthy scratch this season.

## **5 Observations: Sabres drop seventh straight, fall to Hurricanes 4-2**

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 16, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Good news -- the Buffalo Sabres scored two goals. Bad news -- they lost their seventh consecutive game, falling to the Carolina Hurricanes 4-2 on Saturday evening. Jeff Skinner and Zemgus Girgensons scored the Sabres goals, snapping a three-game stretch for the Sabres without scoring a goal. With the loss, the Sabres are now 30-32-9 on the season.

5 Observations from Saturday's loss:

Downward Spiral

The 2018-2019 season has been defined by streaks.

In November it was a 10-game win streak.

Oh, how things have changed.

Three months later the Sabres have dropped their seventh consecutive game and aren't showing any signs of life. What once seemed like a promising season has turned into an embarrassing effort for a team with plenty of things that need fixing.

Offensive explosion

Excuse my sarcasm but at least the Sabres scored two goals on Saturday. Jeff Skinner got the Sabres on the board with a goal just 2:18 into the first period to give his team their first goal in their last 10 periods of hockey. Unfortunately for Skinner and the rest of his teammates, they wouldn't score again until it was already too late as Zemgus Girgensons scored with one minute to play.

Missed opportunities

Give credit to Hurricanes goaltender Curtis McElhinney for his timely saves but the Sabres missed a ton of great scoring chances to make Saturday a much closer game. In the first period, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart had a 2-on-1 but Eichel's shot trickled wide of the net. In the second period, Alex Nylander fed a perfect pass to Connor Sheary, who whiffed on a one-timer that would've tied the game. Seconds later, Evan Rodrigues had a partial breakaway but was denied by McElhinney.

Looking on the bright side

To avoid being completely negative let's focus on one line that I thought played pretty well on Saturday evening. Despite the aforementioned missed opportunities, it was nice to see the chemistry displayed by the trio of Sheary, Rodrigues, and Nylander. For a newly formed line, the Sabres 'second' line created several chances and looked relatively responsible at their own end of the ice. With only 11 games left in the season, Nylander will need to build off his performance Saturday and start producing. If he doesn't there's a very real chance the former eighth overall pick once again starts next season in Rochester. As for Rodrigues and Sheary, they are both playing for new contracts this summer.

Need more from their goaltender

Let's not kid ourselves, the Sabres have had a lot of problems this season. However, on Saturday they once again had an underwhelming performance from their goaltender. Despite some nice saves early on, Ullmark was uninspiring on two of the four goals he allowed, letting the puck sneak behind him and past the goal line. Does he deserve the blame on Saturday? Absolutely not. That said, he could've made a few more saves to give his team a better chance to snap their losing streak.

## **Sabres Lose 7th Straight**

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

March 16, 2019

BUFFALOLO, N.Y. (WIVB) - The Buffalo Sabres finally broke their three game scoring drought, but it wouldn't be enough as they fell to Carolina 4-2.

Buffalo got on the board first when Jeff Skinner snapped his scoreless streak, against his former team.

However, midway through the first period, Carolina would even the score when Lucas Wallmark beat Linus Ullmark.

The Hurricanes would add two goals in the second period, and the Sabres weren't able to claw their way back. Zemgus Girgensons gave Buffalo a bit of a spark late to pull within two, but it would be too little too late. Ullmark recorded 25 saves in the loss.

The Sabres haven't won since their 4-3 OT win over Pittsburgh on March 1st. Buffalo hosts St. Louis Sunday at 5pm.

## **Unbelievable scoring drought highlights Sabres' shortcomings in yet another lost season**

By Jared Clinton  
The Hockey News  
March 15, 2019

Remember the movie Titanic? You know the one. Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslett, the boat, the iceberg, that whole thing? Sure you do. Well, if you're of a certain age, what you might also remember is that when Titanic was released on VHS – yes, VHS – the movie was split onto two cassettes. You had to physically switch from one cassette to the next somewhere in the middle. It was an unintended home-viewing consequence of the Academy Award-winning film's runtime, which exceeded three hours.

Also exceeding three hours? The Buffalo Sabres' scoreless streak. Not since March 7, when the Sabres were dropped 5-4 in a shootout by the Chicago Blackhawks, has Buffalo celebrated a goal. Not a one. In the game following their loss to the Blackhawks, the Sabres were blanked by the Colorado Avalanche. Again Buffalo failed to find twine in this week's meeting with the Dallas Stars. And squaring off against the Pittsburgh Penguins Thursday with an opportunity to play thorn-in-the-side to a wild-card contending club, the Sabres were held scoreless once again, dropping the contest 5-0 while watching their winless streak stretch to six.

Altogether, the goal drought has now reached 192 minutes and 40 seconds. For those wondering, that's about 80 seconds shy of Titanic's runtime.

At the risk of stretching the analogy thin, too, Titanic might be the perfect metaphor for the Sabres' season, and that goes beyond the current scoreless streak. Here was a team that entered the campaign with plenty of hope, and just when everything looked like it was smooth sailing, Buffalo began taking on water and in the time since late-November, the Sabres have done nothing but sink. On Nov. 27, after Buffalo put the capper on a 10-game winning streak with an overtime victory over the San Jose Sharks, the Sabres sat atop the Atlantic Division, atop the Eastern Conference and atop the entire NHL. Their 17-6-2 record was the league's best. Their 36 points more than any other club.

But in the immediate aftermath of their double-digit win streak, the Sabres dropped five in a row and only once in the past 45 games has Buffalo won back-to-back contests – the Sabres downed the Los Angeles Kings and Arizona Coyotes one after the other in mid-December. Since Nov. 28, the Sabres' 13 wins are the fewest in the NHL, Buffalo's 13-25-7 record and 33 points make for the second-worst record over that span and there's been little in the way of positives on which this team can hang its hat. The Sabres have surrendered 155 goals against since the culmination of the aforementioned 10-game winning streak, the fourth-most in the NHL over that span, and their 114 goals for are the sixth-fewest. Buffalo's minus-41 goal differential since Nov. 28 ranks second to last. Only the minus-42 of the Anaheim Ducks has been worse. The Sabres have been dragged down by some of the worst goaltending in the league over that time, and Buffalo has the league's worst shooting percentage.

Suffice it to say that the past few months have been a disaster for the Sabres, and there's simply no saving the season at this point. With a dozen games remaining, Buffalo finds itself 12 points out of the final wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference. This season is over. It's done. And all that's left is to look ahead and wonder how the Sabres ensure this doesn't happen again.

Some will suggest that the move should be to axe coach Phil Housley, that changing the voice behind the bench could make the difference. And, hey, maybe that's the route the Sabres take. Maybe a Joel Quenneville or Alain Vigneault or another veteran bench boss with a track record of success is the answer, the necessary piece to propel this team forward. But the reality is that Housley, for whatever faults he may have, has done some good this season. The Sabres are a middle of the road team when it comes to most possession metrics. Buffalo has shown continued improvement in those areas under Housley, and that's one of the few positives the Sabres have seen this season. So, while he may not be the answer, it would seem he's not exactly the problem, either.

Righting this ship has to start with a makeover of the roster. And lest one think that's a suggestion for a full-scale rebuild, it's not. With Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart in place, the Sabres have necessary building blocks up front. Though he's had a tough time adjusting as a rookie, add Casey Mittelstadt to that group, too. Rasmus Dahlin has all the makings of a franchise cornerstone on the blueline. And while it would be easy to lay a lot of this season's

failings at the feet of Carter Hutton, the Sabres' starting netminder has outplayed a number of other top goaltenders. He's been fine and he'll be fine, if only for the time being.

But after those few pieces, it becomes decision time. Pending free agent Jeff Skinner is the major cap consideration for Buffalo and a player the Sabres must retain, particularly after making the decision not to ship the goal-scoring winger to the highest bidder at the trade deadline. A free agent decision will also need to be made on veteran Jason Pominville, and one wonders if he wouldn't be worth keeping around so long as he's willing to do so at a cut rate from his current \$5.6-million cap hit given his age, his role and his level of production. After that, though, Buffalo GM Jason Botterill has to consider hacking and slashing to makeover this group.

What would likely be more beneficial is the addition of more offensive weapons, ones with which Eichel and Reinhart and hopefully Skinner can find success. It's evident now if it wasn't already that the Kyle Okposo signing hasn't worked out for either party, be it due to injuries or otherwise, but there's little hope Buffalo can escape that deal. What the Sabres can do, however, is rid themselves of restricted free agents-to-be Zemgus Girgensons and Johan Larsson, maybe move along veteran Vladimir Sobotka and attempt to find a suitor for Conor Sheary, and use what money is free to pursue another high-skill free agent or two. There will be options available, and every free penny should be used to add some finish to a roster that's sorely lacking in that regard. Surely the Sabres can do better than supplementing their top talents with replacement-level talents.

The need for improvement doesn't end up front. Matter of fact, it's possibly greater on the blueline. Rasmus Ristolainen's departure has long been speculated, and it could be time to finally pull the trigger on such a move. Zach Bogosian has had his run in Buffalo, but maybe (read: probably) there's a better veteran fit to play alongside Dahlin. And then there are tweaks that can be made to the bottom pairing, where Matt Hunwick's presence has been troublesome and the Sabres' have had difficulties matching depth against depth.

No matter what the moves, though, it's been evident for some time now that the Sabres aren't yet ready to make a post-season push, aren't yet ready to take the next step from rebuild to perennial wild-card contender. The drop out of the playoff race indicated as much, and the goal drought and losing streak at such a pivotal point in the campaign has only served to shine a high-powered spotlight on Buffalo's shortcomings. And if there's going to be a light at the end of the tunnel for the Sabres, it is up to Botterill to do the work this summer to ensure Buffalo can see it.

## **Skinner ends scoring skid, but Sabres fall to Hurricanes**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. - Jeff Skinner found the back of the net early to put an end to both to his own and his team's scoring droughts, but the Sabres were unable to capitalize on their chances from that point on in a 4-2 loss to the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Saturday.

Skinner had gone 13 games without a goal entering the night, while the Sabres hadn't scored in their last three contests.

"I think sometimes when you're fighting it, sort of having trouble putting one in, you need to get a bounce or a lucky one," he said. "Fortunately, we got one there. I think we had some pretty good looks after that, we just couldn't seem to get that second one."

Buffalo didn't score its second goal until Zengus Girgensons buried a shot from the slot through traffic with 1:11 remaining in the contest. Curtis McElhinney turned in a 35-save performance for the Hurricanes.

The Hurricanes tied the game on a first-period goal from Lucas Wallmark, then built their lead on goals from Andre Svechnikov and Justin Williams in the second. Jordan Stall delivered the dagger with a spinning backhand shot with 4:14 left in the third.

"That's just where we're at right now," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "We're not finding a way. But I liked that we went to the net harder, we drove to the net. We created a lot more this game."

Despite the result, Housley felt his team's offensive output marked an improvement over their shutout loss to Pittsburgh on Thursday. McElhinney robbed a backhand attempt from Alexander Nylander and stopped Evan Rodrigues on a breakaway in the second period. Conor Sheary shot wide on an open cage.

"Just off the rush, we were driving hard to the net, we got some second and third opportunities," Housley said. "It's just not falling for us right now. We've just got to continue to grind it out."

Linus Ullmark was critical of his own game following a 25-save performance. Wallmark's goal to open the scoring came after a shot by Jordan Martinook leaked between the goalie's pads, leaving the puck in the crease for Wallmark to push over the goal line. Williams' marker was off a bad-angle shot that squeezed its way in low off the post and over Ullmark's skate.

"It's just a bad goal," Ullmark said. "That's it. It's a bad goal."

Sabres captain Jack Eichel, back from a two-game suspension, defended his goaltender when speaking with the media afterward.

"Yeah, he's going to be hard on himself, he's a competitor," Eichel said. "But how many times this year has Linus stepped up and been the best player on the ice for us? You guys know the answer to that one."

The Sabres are now winless in seven straight games, as well as in their last nine contests with the Hurricanes.

"I think you have to keep working," Skinner said. "Keep working at it, keep creating chances, and over the course of a game and over the course of a season those bounces usually even out. For us, that's just the way it's going right now."

"Even after that one, I think we had some pretty good looks. Their goalie made some big saves, made some good saves. We just have to keep working. Keep working to get there, keep working to get chances and they'll start going in for us."

Skinner gets on the board

Skinner's drought occurred despite a wealth of opportunities, having earned a team-leading 38 scoring chances in his 13 games without a goal according to Natural Stat Trick.

He finally caught a break 2:40 into the contest when he gathered the puck behind the net, skated to the side of the goal and banked his shot in off McElhinney's stick. The goal was his 37th of the season, tying his career high, and his fourth in three games against his former team.

The Sabres' scoreless streak, meanwhile, ended at 199:58.

"It was important for our team, just to get that off our back," Housley said. "I really liked the way we started the game. We came out, established our forecheck, got a lot of good looks and it was a very solid first period where we could have maybe cashed in on a little bit more of our opportunities."

Up next

The Sabres return home to host the St. Louis Blues at 5 p.m. on Sunday. It will be Luck of the Irish Night at KeyBank Center, with St. Patrick's Day themed autographed pucks on sale to benefit the Sabres Foundation and commemorative warmup jerseys to be auctioned off after the game.

Can't make it downtown? Coverage on MSG-B begins at 4:30 with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550.

## **Eichel, Girgensons return to lineup in Carolina**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 16, 2019

RALEIGH, N.C. - Jack Eichel and Zemgus Girgensons will step back into the lineup for the Sabres' game against the Carolina Hurricanes tonight at PNC Arena.

Eichel and Girgensons have both missed the past two games. Eichel's absence came due to a two-game suspension for an illegal check to the head against Colorado Avalanche forward Carl Soderberg last Saturday; Girgensons sat as a healthy scratch.

Scott Wilson and Vladimir Sobotka will be healthy scratches to make room in the lineup. Zach Bogosian will return on defense in place of Marco Scandella, who is day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

"Right now, where we're at as a group, we haven't gotten any results so we're going to have to make some decisions," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "With Jack coming back in that leaves one less spot and Z's got to get back in, get him another opportunity."

Girgensons is expected to rejoin a line with Johan Larsson and Kyle Okposo. Housley said he'd like to see the winger establish himself as a physical presence on the forecheck.

"We'd like to see him play more physical," Housley said. "He does finish his checks, and that's one area of the game, in his role, that's very important for us. When he does that well, we're on the forecheck, we're creating some space."

The Sabres are looking to end a three-game scoreless drought and an eight-game winless streak against Carolina. They lost 4-3 in Carolina on Jan. 11 and dropped a 6-5 contest in overtime at home on Feb. 7.

"We've played these guys really good, especially back in Buffalo where it was a tight game," Housley said. "Obviously, we gave up way too much in overtime and Teravainen scores that goal. We've just got to get back to our game and we're focused on what we need to do tonight."

Linus Ullmark will start in net, opposite Curtis McElhinney.

Coverage on MSG-B begins at 6:30 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.

### Projected lineup

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart

43 Conor Sheary - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 92 Alexander Nylander

72 Tage Thompson - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 29 Jason Pominville

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

48 Matt Hunwick - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 8 Casey Nelson

4 Zach Bogosian - 62 Brandon Montour

35 Linus Ullmark

40 Carter Hutton