



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*September 20, 2019*

## **Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour out with hand injury**

Associated Press

September 19, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour will miss the remainder of training camp because of a hand injury and it's uncertain whether he'll be ready for the start of the season in two weeks.

The Sabres released no details of Montour's injury on Thursday.

The team said it will provide an update on his status at the end camp. It's unclear when Montour was hurt after he logged more than 17 minutes in a 4-1 preseason loss at Columbus on Tuesday.

Montour is a fourth-year NHL player and projected to play a top-four role on Buffalo's blue line. He was acquired in a trade with Anaheim in February.

Buffalo will start the season minus defensemen Zach Bogosian and Lawrence Pilut, who are recovering from offseason surgery.

The Sabres also announced forward Scott Wilson and defenseman Casey Fitzgerald are listed day to day with lower body injuries.

## **With Brandon Montour sidelined, pressure increases on Sabres' defensive depth**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 19, 2019

If you scratched out the Buffalo Sabres' defense corps on paper over the summer, you had quite a logjam. It's not that way now, as things are sorting themselves out in a way new coach Ralph Krueger said he hopes soon stops.

The Sabres announced Thursday they won't have a potential top-pair player for the start of the regular season as Brandon Montour will be out for an undetermined period after suffering a hand injury in Tuesday's preseason loss at Columbus.

Montour, acquired last year at the trade deadline from Anaheim, likely was looking at the No. 1 slot on right defense opposite Rasmus Dahlin. He had looked solid in camp after coming back from an MCL injury to his knee suffered playing for Team Canada at the World Championship in Slovakia in May.

The Sabres ruled out Montour for the final four preseason games, which open Friday night at Toronto, and Krueger said it's highly doubtful Montour will be on the ice for the season opener Oct. 3 in Pittsburgh.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop but pretty soon thereafter," Krueger said after practice in KeyBank Center. "At the moment, we're going through camp with this situation and we'll work on it. He can keep his lower body moving, which is important. He's worked so hard after the (knee) injury to get up to speed. So if there is a positive in this, it's that. At least he can keep his legs."

"He's a very big deal," Dahlin said. "He's been doing a lot for our team. It's not fun when that happens. But he will probably be back soon and everything is going to be all right."

Montour had three goals and seven assists in 20 games for the Sabres last season. He averaged 21 minutes, 46 seconds per game with Buffalo. The 25-year-old has been durable, missing just two games over the last three years with the Ducks and Sabres.

Montour's absence puts the Sabres down four defensemen, although this is the first surprise injury. Buffalo will start the season minus Zach Bogosian (hip) and Lawrence Pilut (shoulder), who are recovering from offseason surgeries. Matt Hunwick (neck) has been ruled out for this season as well, and likely will retire.

The Montour injury might also put the brakes on any discussions the Sabres are having about trading Rasmus Ristolainen, who was back in his role as the team's No. 1 right-shot defenseman Thursday by default.

"I'm quite pleased that we have the depth, I have to say honestly," Krueger said. "You wouldn't want the depth to creep in this quickly but it gives us opportunities, so we feel confident that we can start with a solid D-corps group. We weren't sure on the mix. There's a few players we all know would be in that top six, but generally, there were some question marks.

"This gives us an opportunity to get to know the six that will eventually be starting, with some excellent players pushing when they come back. So it is an opportunity, but we'd like to stop it here with the testing of our depth."

The Sabres shuffled their practice groups Thursday, leaving Dahlin with Ristolainen and Marco Scandella with newcomer Colin Miller. Henri Jokiharju, acquired in a summer trade with Chicago for Alex Nylander, was skating on the left side (his off side) with Casey Nelson.

Jake McCabe and newcomer John Gilmour, who scored a slick goal in Monday's exhibition opener against Pittsburgh, were the big names on defense in the second group.

"We've got other D that want to play a lot of minutes," Dahlin said. "We've got a really good D corp going on. You have to battle in practice and every single game. We only get better from that."

Jokiharju, 20, has been intriguing to the coaches and looked strong in Monday's game. He split last year between Chicago and Rockford of the AHL and is pushing to start this season in the NHL, although getting a boost from others' injuries is not how he'd prefer to stick.

"I don't really want to think about that kind of stuff," Jokiharju said. "It's tough to see a teammate get injured, hard to see that."

Jokiharju prefers the right side and Krueger said both Jokiharju and Miller could conceivably play either side. The off side might give Jokiharju a chance at more offense, setting him up for more one-timers facing the middle of the ice.

"If I have to play the left side, I'd be fine with it, too," Jokiharju said. "It's just hockey. I'm OK with that. You have to be strong in the neutral zone and defensive zone. In offensive zone, it's pretty fun to play the left side."

•••

Krueger said Ristolainen and newly acquired winger Marcus Johansson, who sat out the first two exhibition games, will get in the lineup this weekend, either in Friday's game or Saturday's return match against the Toronto Maple Leafs in KeyBank Center. The coach said it's a possible a few players may appear in both games.

The Sabres are likely to make many roster cuts on Sunday, as the Rochester Amerks open camp on Monday. The Sabres have 45 players skating on Thursday, as defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and winger Scott Wilson joined Montour on the sidelines. They are listed as day to day with lower-body injuries.

"It's just continuing here for the new coaching group to really see where the opportunities are for everybody," Krueger said. "Left sides, right sides. We're looking at other synergies. We'll see after the two Toronto games, we'll be making some decisions."

•••

The Sabres completed the last of their four camp practices with two groups of players on Thursday. They're taking Sunday off and will have just one practice group when they return to the ice Monday. The next practice open to the public is Sept. 26 in LECOM Harborcenter.

## **The Sabres' goalies strive to be better this season**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 19, 2019

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Last season the Sabres had no defensive structure. It was obvious in many games that players were just all over the place and had no idea where they were supposed to be. That goes hand and hand with the goaltending. Yes, the Sabres need a better save percentage from Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark, but they also can't be worried about 2-on-0 layups and uncovered backdoor players for easy goals.

Hutton finished 18-25-5 with a 3.00 goals against and .908 save percentage. Linus Ullmark was 15-14-5 with a 3.11 goals against and .905 save percentage. I think if Ralph Krueger and his staff come up with some structure, the team will cut down on the goals against.

I remember the days when Martin Brodeur would play 77 games per season. That's not done anymore and Hutton said, "You get into the flow of a season and sometimes games just fly by and then sometimes one game seems like a dogfight.

"I think the game with the way it is now, we train and practice so hard to maintain the speed and how hard it is on our bodies compared to the old days, so for me last year playing 50 and I think if we can just can into a good rhythm with Linus and I and truthfully, the better both of us play, the better it is for everybody."

Hutton said he always wants to play, but he doesn't put an exact number of games as a goal, "There's always a internal competition that in public gets created more by media, but internally you're almost just playing against yourself and as you push yourself, it creates a better feeling for the team, so I don't even know if I have an exact number."

Linus Ullmark thinks the mental part of the game takes more of a toll than the physical part Hutton said, "I think it can be a little bit of both. I think as you get older you do a good job of the physical side of it, but sometimes in the dog days of the season, there's not a lot of light in the schedule and you're going all the time, so that's when you have to manage the mental side of it."

Ullmark has a little bit of a different view, "It's always good to work on technique, but it's just a small part now a days. The game is so fast you just have to have the mentality to not let the puck through you and I think it comes down to more of a mental aspect of the game to be there every night.

"Coming into this season we have a lot of great personnel behind us like Katy Turner our mental coach who's terrific and whenever there's any doubts or questions, I talk to her."

Hutton and Ullmark have a good working relationship and are friends. Of course they both want the net, but Hutton said, "At the end of the day you come to work for the Buffalo Sabres, you come to play for the city of Buffalo and compete for the fans and the team and the organization, but it's human nature to want to play and want to be the guy, but undermining each other and not supporting each other isn't the way to do it. You need to have each other's back because there are going to be times when he's called upon and I'm struggling or we need to support each other and help each other through tough times and last year was a learning curve for both of us. He's a heck of a goalie and he keeps me honest and makes me want to work harder."

Hutton knows he has to play better if the Sabres are going to be better, but he also knows the team has to be more consistent defensively because it's the teams that do that that win the Stanley Cup, "I don't want to sit here and say that I was not at fault. There's obviously times I could've been a lot better and I'm the first one to admit that, there's times you'd want one back or do things differently and certain games and there were times where I thought I played really well and it was just a product of too many chances, we just don't want to be that team where you don't know what you're going to get every night."

I'm a big believer in the best goalies are the ones that make the big save at the big time. Look at Grant Fuhr's numbers, he's in the Hall of Fame because when the Edmonton Oilers needed a big save, he was there for them. Hutton said, "Sometimes it's not how many you make, it's the timely ones and in an 82 game season, it's a grind and there's nights where you give up a goal at the wrong time and it can be a back breaker. So a big timely save

is what we need and I think for us it's something that we're going to thrive on this year and it's something that Ralph's talked a lot about here is being a little more consistent in our end and being more predictable."

Ullmark made 19 saves on 20 shots in just under 30 minutes of work in Columbus. It was his first game and he knew it would take a little time to get things back, "It takes a couple of minutes to get your groove on after summer. I had to get the speed of it and the movements, I mean you can practice all summer as much as you want, but when it comes to a game it's a whole different beast to tame."

Ullmark knows he has to play better for the Sabres with reach their goals. He said he gave it a lot of thought during the summer, "A lot, I'm looking forward to this season and I'm aiming to be able to play my game for the whole season and not have any dips. There are going to be one or two games that are going to be bad, but I'm just going to try to keep them as few as possible."

Ullmark was an AHL All-Star before making the NHL fulltime last season. He said there was a lot to the jump in leagues, "It's a long season and it's way different than being in the minors with all the travels and the different time zones and just being there every night, it was tough, so coming into this year it's going to be a lot easier mentally because you're prepared for everything a lot more."

The Sabres head to Toronto on Friday for preseason game number three against the Leafs. Krueger said Rasmus Ristolainen and Marcus Johansson will play this weekend.

The Sabres announced that Brandon Montour is out for the rest of the preseason with a hand injury. Scott Wilson and Casey Fitzgerald are day-to-day. Krueger would not confirm if Montour broke his hand. He said Montour won't be ready off the hop, but pretty soon after he will be.

Thursday's lines:

Vesey Eichel Reinhart

Skinner Cozens Rodrigues

Olofsson Asplund M.Johansson

Larsson Ruotsalainen Girgensons

Elie Sobotka Thompson

Smith Mittelstadt Okposo

Dea Porter Lazar

Sheary Malone Oglevie

Dahlin Ristolainen

Jokijarju Nelson

Scandella Miller

Stephens

Gilmour Borgen

McCabe Hickey

Bryson Redmond

## **Montour to miss the remainder of the preseason**

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

September 19, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres will be down another defenseman moving forward as Brandon Montour will miss the rest of the preseason with a hand injury.

Montour suffered the injury during the third period of Tuesday night's loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets. The 25-year-old registered two shots on goal, one hit and a blocked shot in 17:24 of ice-time before missing the final 12 minutes of the game.

The Sabres will provide an update on Montour's status once training camp has come to a close in about a week and a half.

Montour was acquired by the Sabres back on February 24 in a trade with the Anaheim Ducks that saw defenseman Brendan Guhle go back the other way along with a first round pick in 2019.

In 20 games with the Sabres last season, the right-handed defenseman scored three goals and picked up seven assists. He also registered 55 shots on goal while averaging 21:46 of total ice-time.

The Ohsweken, Ontario, Canada native is set to become a restricted free agent once the 2019-20 season is over.

The team also announced on Thursday that forward Scott Wilson and Casey Fitzgerald are both day-to-day with lower body injuries suffered during Tuesday's game in Columbus. Wilson did not finish contest after just 7:13 of ice-time, while Fitzgerald was able to skate in 19:23 of action.

## How Brandon Montour's hand injury could affect the Sabres' defensive pairings

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

September 19, 2019

One of the advantages the Sabres had going into training camp was the vast number of defensemen they had to compete for NHL jobs. Now, with Brandon Montour set to miss the remainder of the preseason and perhaps longer with a hand injury, the situation is about to get more interesting.

Montour's injury occurred in Tuesday's preseason loss to Columbus. The injury is even more frustrating to the defenseman given his recent recovery from a knee injury sustained during World Championships in May. For the Sabres, his absence takes out a player who is being counted on to provide big minutes in all situations.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop but pretty soon thereafter. At the moment, we're going through camp with his situation," coach Ralph Krueger said.

The Sabres opened camp knowing they weren't going to have Lawrence Pilut, Matt Hunwick and Zach Bogosian. All three of them could have been on the opening night roster. Montour definitely would be. Forging through the remainder of camp and beyond without them isn't something any coach wants to deal with, let alone one returning to the NHL after six seasons away.

"We feel confident that we can start with a solid 'D' corps group," Krueger said. "To tell you the truth, we weren't sure of the mix. There's a few players that we all know would be in that top six but generally there were some question marks. This gives us an opportunity to get to know the six that will be eventually starting, with some excellent players pushing when they come back. It is an opportunity, but we'd like to stop it here with the testing of our depth."

While Krueger changed his groups up on Thursday ahead of the weekend home-and-home set against the Toronto Maple Leafs, what we saw from the pairings at the day's two practices had a few reminders of last season.

### Team Gold

Rasmus Dahlin – Rasmus Ristolainen

Henri Jokiharju – Casey Nelson

Marco Scandella – Colin Miller

Devante Stephens

### Team Blue

Jake McCabe – Brandon Hickey

John Gilmour – William Borgen

Jacob Bryson – Zach Redmond

With Montour out — as well as Casey Fitzgerald, who is day to day with a lower body injury — Jason Botterill's idea to hoard blue liners is keeping this situation from being thoroughly dire.

A few things stand out here:

– If Dahlin and Ristolainen are reunited — something that didn't exactly work last season — it's worth seeing them together with Krueger in charge. Having new eyes, a new style, and new ideas should give the duo a look in a game, particularly since Krueger said Ristolainen (and forward Marcus Johansson) won't play many games in the preseason.



– Jokiharju practiced on the left side earlier in camp only to play on the right against Pittsburgh. Although he said he prefers to play on his strong side on the right, playing on the left means making adjustments in other areas on the ice.

Jokiharju stands the best chance to benefit from Montour and Bogosian's absence. Buffalo will need an able right-handed puck mover back there, which is Jokiharju's biggest strength.

"At the present situation, Joki will probably be starting on the right side, but we'll see how it evolves over the camp," Krueger said. "I've coached teams that had six left-handers and I'm not afraid of that. I think it's all about supporting them properly and setting up the breakouts accordingly. You can do things as a coach to help a guy playing his off side, for sure."

– The other interesting pair from Team Blue is Gilmour and Borgen. That could be the top pair in Rochester but it could also be a battle between those two to grab a final spot in Buffalo. Gilmour played well against the Penguins and Borgen offers a physical defensive element that Nelson, Jokiharju, and Gilmour don't have.

As for piecing together what an opening night defense group could be, swapping McCabe and Stephens from Team Gold essentially does that. Here's how the pairs could shake out:

Dahlin – Jokiharju

McCabe – Ristolainen

Scandella – Miller

Extra: Nelson

The other part of what Montour's injury does is show how it stresses Ristolainen's importance to the group now. Even though his place on the team still seems tenuous, Ristolainen very well could be in Buffalo a bit longer now.

The situation in Winnipeg, in which Dustin Byfuglien has taken a leave of absence from the team, could mean the Jets need to make a move to add a minutes-eating right-handed defenseman. As The Athletic's Pierre LeBrun points out, it's a buyer's market for defensemen, but Winnipeg's salary cap and restricted free agent situation could make pulling off a deal for Ristolainen difficult. With Montour out for the rest of the preseason and possibly into the start of the regular season, the team that needs Ristolainen the most could be the Sabres.

## **LeBrun: Why it's a good time to be shopping for a D-man and why Thomas Chabot extension will be a steal for**

By Pierre LeBrun

The Athletic

September 19, 2019

For a league where one of the main complaints over the years has been the lack of available defensemen on the trade market, it's actually a decent time to go shopping.

It's widely known that Justin Faulk is available in Carolina — a potential trade with Anaheim falling through recently — and that the Sabres are listening to offers on Rasmus Ristolainen, a player seemingly open to a change of scenery.

But don't forget the Columbus Blue Jackets in all this. They're 10-11 deep in NHL blueliners and outside of Seth Jones and Zach Werenski, who aren't going anywhere, it's anyone's guess on the remaining lot. There's Ryan Murray, David Savard, Markus Nutivaara, Scott Harrington, Dean Kukan, Adam Clendening, Vladislav Gavrikov, Gabriel Carlsson and the sense is Andrew Peeke isn't that far off from making the jump. One of those D could certainly move within the next few weeks. Of that lot, I would think the veterans Murray and Savard would interest most depending on a team's need on the left (Murray) or right (Savard) side.

One source suggested Thursday that the Florida Panthers covet a shutdown, left-side D. It doesn't sound like something that has any urgency to it but it is an organizational wish list item for this season. The Panthers have the smooth-skating Keith Yandle and Mike Matheson on the left side but would like to also add a more stay-at-home, shutdown type on the left.

The Winnipeg Jets are a team to watch, already dramatically depleted on the blueline by the offseason losses of Jacob Trouba, Tyler Myers and Ben Chiarot and now the news, first reported by my TSN colleague Bob McKenzie, that Dustin Byfuglien is taking time to reflect on his playing future (wish that guy all the best, one of my favorite players to watch and deal with over the years).

As I tweeted in the aftermath of that, it would make sense that the Jets would be monitoring the Faulk and Ristolainen situations as a fallback in case Byfuglien retires, but there's also Columbus' blueline depth that the Jets could reach into if they saw fit.

The Ducks, meanwhile, have also checked in on Ristolainen, according to sources. But the price from the Sabres was high. And it probably should be, given that Ristolainen has three more years at a very good cap hit, \$5.4 million. The Sabres aren't going to give the guy away. I would think within two to three weeks of the regular season getting underway, we should have a good idea of how the Ristolainen situation plays out.

Speaking of the Jackets ...

Colleague Aaron Portzline reminded us earlier this week that Jackets GM Jarmo Kekalainen has lots of cap space and is believed to be closely monitoring the RFA situation.

Some wonder if Kekalainen would be tempted to offer sheet his countryman Mikko Rantanen but I highly doubt he would. Hey, I've been wrong many times, but I think the Jackets GM would look at the massive cap space in Colorado and see that as a losing proposition, the Avs would match in a heartbeat.

Colorado made a long-term offer to Rantanen's camp earlier this month but since then, not a whole lot of movement. The Avs aren't going to pay Mitch Marner money even if agent Mike Liut can make a decent argument that his client Rantanen deserves to be in that conversation.

But offer sheeting Colorado makes zero sense. There's a reason the Avs kept their cap space open this offseason. This was it.

If you're going to prey on a cap-challenged team, it's Tampa Bay, Calgary or Winnipeg.

The Jets still haven't re-signed wingers Patrick Laine or Kyle Connor and certainly, they're in a more precarious cap situation than Colorado. I think Connor is the first to sign and then we'll see what happens with Laine, who

has always seemed destined for a bridge deal but so far finding the right AAV for that shorter deal has been elusive.

While in Tampa, in his first true test as Lightning GM, Julien BriseBois seems to be holding pretty firm with unsigned RFA center Brayden Point. A source told me on Thursday morning that the two sides remain far apart. Ditto on the Matthew Tkachuk front, which was status quo as of Wednesday.

Chabot deal will be a steal

No doubt there will be some GMs complaining that yet another player hits it big coming of entry-level, but my humble opinion is that the Ottawa Senators will look really good when all is said and done on the \$64-million, eight-year contract extension with Thomas Chabot.

Look no further than what the likes of Matt Duchene and Mathew Barzal told our Athletic crew at the Player Tour in Chicago a few weeks ago when asked about Chabot, both saying they believe he would be in Norris Trophy consideration one day.

If that's the case, an \$8-million AAV will be a bargain when Norris Trophy types are worth well north of that.

Of course, long-term deals signed at this stage of a player's career are always a gamble. That's a lot of money for a 22-year-old. But I think it's a smart gamble nonetheless. Good job here by GM Pierre Dorion.

And furthermore, for a franchise that parted ways with Erik Karlsson and Mark Stone while they were still in their prime — the Stone divorce still really stings the franchise — being able to get this done with Chabot almost a year before his entry-level deal expires, and avoid the kind of RFA standoffs we are seeing around the NHL, that also carries weight for a franchise that has taken its share of hits.

## **Line analysis: Zack Kassian, Victor Olofsson and 12 more players who get value boosts playing alongside stars**

By Scott Cullen

The Athletic

September 19, 2019

When seeking value in the fantasy hockey universe there can be many different angles to explore.

As much as I tend toward statistical probabilities, there is another tried and true method when looking for a player who might be able to offer production: find a player who has a chance to play with superior playmaking linemates.

There is inherent risk involved because line combinations are at the whim of the head coach and all it takes is for the coach to come to the rink one day and decide that Ty Rattie's services are no longer required on Connor McDavid's wing... and there goes the fantasy value. But, in later rounds, there's nothing wrong with trying to catch proverbial lightning in a bottle.

Tom Wilson was a fringe fantasy performer, then found a spot playing with Alex Ovechkin and that's the goal — to find a player who might be able to thrive with more skilled or established linemates.

Here are some players who may have the opportunity to ride the coattails of top playmakers:

**Zack Kassian, RW, Edmonton**

The 28-year-old power forward has struggled to maintain consistency throughout his career, so it's hard to imagine that he would remain on Connor McDavid's wing all season, but the right wing job on Edmonton's top line does appear to be within Kassian's reach. He did finish last season with some positive vibes after scoring 10 goals and 17 points, while averaging more than 17 minutes of ice time per game, in his last 32 games. If he could stick with McDavid all season, Kassian would be a decent bet to score 20 goals.

**Tyson Jost, LW, Colorado**

The 10th pick in the 2016 Draft, Jost has yet to hit his stride, producing a career-high 26 points last season. The Avalanche are looking for improved secondary scoring and Jost could get a shot alongside Nazem Kadri on Colorado's second line to open the season. If he falls down the depth chart, though, a wait-and-see approach would probably be the way to go.

**Ondrej Palat, LW, Tampa Bay**

Although he had a career-low eight goals and 34 points last season, the veteran Lightning winger remains the most logical option to skate on the top line alongside Steven Stamkos. Palat has trouble staying healthy, missing at least 18 games in three of the past four seasons, but skating on Tampa Bay's top line is still a pretty good spot.

**Micheal Ferland, LW, Vancouver**

In previous stops with Calgary and Carolina, the gritty winger has shown that he can fill a complementary role alongside more skilled linemates and, lo and behold, the Vancouver Canucks may need him to ride shotgun with Elias Pettersson and Brock Boeser. Ferland has back-to-back seasons with at least 40 points and 170 hits so there is a reasonable baseline for his production, but if he sticks in this spot, maybe even more is possible.

**Victor Olofsson, RW, Buffalo**

After scoring 30 goals in the American Hockey League last season, the 24-year-old winger added four points and 21 shots on goal in six games for the Sabres at the end of the campaign. The best-case scenario for Olofsson is that he secures a spot with Buffalo's top line. When he was auditioning last season, Olofsson's most common linemates were Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, a great situation for a young goal-scorer.

**Jesper Bratt, RW, New Jersey**

A busy summer adding talent to the Devils roster could present a quality opportunity for the 21-year-old winger, who has shown some flashes in his first two pro seasons. With Taylor Hall, Kyle Palmieri and Nikita Gusev already set to fill wing roles on the top two lines, there is one more spot to fill and Bratt looks like a leading candidate to snag that opening.

Kasper Kapanen, LW, Toronto

The plan in Toronto appears to be for Kapanen to get a chance to take his blinding speed to the left wing with John Tavares and Mitch Marner, two of the most productive linemates in the league. Zach Hyman, who filled that spot last season, is expected to miss the first couple months while he recovers from ACL surgery and Andreas Johnsson looks like he'll get a shot with Auston Matthews and William Nylander. The trick will be figuring out which one of Kapanen, Hyman, or Johnsson will remain in the top six when Hyman is healthy.

Kevin Fiala, RW, Minnesota

Although he didn't produce much upon arriving in Minnesota (in a deadline deal for Mikael Granlund), Fiala was a victim of low on-ice shooting percentage (3.0%) with the Wild. Nevertheless, he's going to play in a scoring role and — if it means a top line spot alongside Jason Zucker and Eric Staal — that could be the catalyst for a breakout campaign.

Travis Konecny, RW, Philadelphia

The 2015 first-round pick has been a solid contributor for the past couple of seasons, scoring 43 even-strength goals — the same number as Sidney Crosby, Jonathan Toews, and David Pastrnak — and there's a lot to like about getting the opportunity to play with Claude Giroux and Sean Couturier. To take the next step, Konecny probably needs to secure a spot on the first power play unit, but he's in a good place to produce at evens.

Derek Stepan, C, Arizona

Prior to last season, the veteran center had established a consistency in his point production, scoring between 51 and 57 points in six of his previous seven seasons. The one season that didn't fall in that range was when he scored 44 points in 48 games during the 2012-2013 lockout season. Then, Stepan stumbled to a career-low 35 points last season, so his value is at a relative low point but hope remains alive because Stepan could have newcomer Phil Kessel on his right wing, a quality opportunity to recapture his scoring ways.

Bryan Little, C, Winnipeg

While the Jets have cycled through other options (including Paul Stastny and Kevin Hayes) for their second line center role in recent years, they keep coming back to Little and, provided that the Jets get restricted free agents Kyle Connor and Patrik Laine signed, the Jets would be able to offer high quality linemates for Little.

Casey Mittelstadt, C, Buffalo

Overmatched for much of his rookie season, the 20-year-old is looking for redemption and that's a possibility if he can get regular playing time with Jeff Skinner or Sam Reinhart, or both, skating on his wings. Mittelstadt is an interesting prospect because the scouting reports rave about his skills, but his production, both at the University of Minnesota and so far in Buffalo, has not been up to expectations.

Alexandre Texier, LW, Columbus

There seems little doubt that the Blue Jackets will have room for the speedy rookie in their lineup. He impressed in the playoffs last season and there is a possibility that he finds his way to the left wing spot alongside Pierre-Luc Dubois and Cam Atkinson. If Texier does land in a first-line role, he becomes fantasy relevant but, like most on this list, if he's not skating with the team's top offensive performers, Texier may not have much fantasy appeal.

Dominik Kahun, LW, Pittsburgh

A quietly effective rookie season in Chicago got Kahun traded to the Penguins for Olli Maatta and there are a wide range of options available for wingers when they show up in Pittsburgh. Kahun can play both wings and there are four openings to play with either Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin. If Kahun can secure one of those spots, he could be productive enough to warrant fantasy interest.

## **Sabres believe they possess depth to handle Brandon Montour's injury**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 19, 2019

BUFFALO – The good news for the Sabres is defenseman Brandon Montour's hand injury probably won't sideline him too long.

While Montour will miss the rest of the preseason, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said he should be ready "pretty soon" after the season opener Oct. 3.

The Sabres, who began training camp down three defensemen, could ill afford to lose another one, especially a point-producer capable of eating up minutes.

Then Montour, 25, left Tuesday's 4-1 road loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets almost halfway through the third period.

"He's a very big deal," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said after the Sabres prepared for Friday's road game against the Toronto Maple Leafs, the start of a home-and-home series. "He's done a lot for our team."

Krueger, who wouldn't say if Montour's hand is broken, usually finds a silver lining in any difficult situation, and he was no different Thursday.

The Sabres possess much more defense depth than in recent seasons, and Krueger wants to see it in action.

"We're deep," Sabres defenseman Casey Nelson said inside KeyBank Center. "We got a lot of guys ... that can step in and play a role."

So over the final four exhibition games, expect some defensemen competing for roster spots – Nelson, Will Borgen, John Gilmour, Henri Jokiharju and others – to earn more minutes.

"You wouldn't want it to creep in this quickly, but it gives us opportunities, so we feel confident that we can start with a solid D corps group," Krueger said of the depth. "But to tell you the truth, we weren't too sure on the mix.

"There's a few players that we all know would be in that top six, but there was some question marks. This gives us an opportunity to get to know the six that will be eventually starting. ...

"It is an opportunity, but we'd like to stop it here with the testing of our depth."

Even Krueger can only handle so much.

The Sabres began camp last week with defensemen Zach Bogosian (hip), Matt Hunwick (neck) and Lawrence Pilut (shoulder) sidelined.

Hunwick is out for the season. Bogosian and Pilut, meanwhile, are expected to miss at least the early portion of the campaign after undergoing surgery during the offseason.

The Sabres believe Montour can be a major contributor. They paid a hefty price – defense prospect Brendan Guhle and a first-round pick – to acquire him from the Anaheim Ducks on Feb. 24.

In 20 games with the Sabres last season, Montour compiled three goals and 10 points and averaged nearly 22 minutes an outing.

Following the season, Montour hurt his knee playing for the Team Canada at the World Championship.

"He can keep his lower body moving, which is important," Krueger said. "He's worked so hard off the knee injury to get up to speed, so if there is a positive in this, it's that."

Jokiharju, 20, might have a spot to lose now. The Sabres dealt winger Alexander Nylander to the Chicago Blackhawks for the Finn on July 8, a swap of former first-round picks.

So far, Jokiharju, who scored in Monday's 5-4 shootout win over the Pittsburgh Penguins, has impressed Krueger.

"He's definitely a player who's got a presence," Krueger said. "I think with the puck he's quite confident but without the puck, we like his presence and his ability to be able to see his job and get it done and try to finish it.

"So there's an aggressive side to him that we can definitely work with. There's quite a complete player there."

Jokiharju, a right-handed shot, has been playing on the left side. Playing on their off side can be difficult for defensemen.

"I prefer the right side better, but if I have to play the left side, I'm fine with that," Jokiharju said.

Krueger said Jokiharju will likely be moved back to the right. Still, a surfeit of righty defenders – the Sabres have seven in camp on NHL contracts – could force some to play on the left.

–

Dahlin practiced Thursday beside Rasmus Ristolainen, an intriguing defense combo.

"He's a pretty big D (6-foot-4) and he's played in the league for a lot of years, so I got a lot to learn from him," Dahlin said. "We know each other pretty well off the ice, too. On the ice, we're comparing to each other very well, actually."

–

The Sabres also announced Thursday defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and winger Scott Wilson are day-to-day with lower-body injuries.

## **Sabres' Brandon Montour out with hand injury**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 19, 2019

BUFFALO – A hand injury will sideline Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour the rest of the preseason, the team announced this morning.

Montour, 25, was injured in the third period of Tuesday's 4-1 preseason road loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Sabres expect Montour, an acquisition from the Anaheim Ducks last season, to be a one of their top defensemen this year.

In 20 games with the Sabres last season, he compiled three goals and 10 points and averaged nearly 10 minutes an outing.

Update: Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said this afternoon Montour will likely miss some regular-season action.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop (in the regular season), but pretty soon thereafter," Krueger said.

Krueger wouldn't say if Montour's hand is broken.

The Sabres are already missing three defensemen: Zack Bogosian (hip), Matt Hunwick (neck) and Lawrence Pilut (shoulder). Hunwick is out for the season. Bogosian and Pilut will miss at least the opening weeks.

In other news, the Sabres announced defenseman Casey Fitzgerald and winger Scott Wilson are day-to-day with lower-body injuries.



## **Montour could miss start of regular season with hand injury**

By Nick Filipowski

WIVB

September 19, 2019

The blue line, especially on the right side, continues to be banged up for the Sabres.

Brandon Montour exited in the third period of Tuesday's loss against Columbus and will now miss the remainder of the preseason with a hand injury.

Head Coach Ralph Krueger wouldn't specify the severity of the injury, but indicated the defenseman could miss the start of the regular season.

"I wouldn't expect him rip off the hop, but would pretty soon thereafter," Krueger said following practice. "With the moment, we're going through camp with this situation and as you all know it's upper body and we'll work on it. Again, he can keep his lower body moving which is important, he's worked so hard off the knee injury to get up to speed so, if there is a positive, it's that he can keep his legs."

"I mean, he's a very big deal, he's doing a lot for our team so of course it's not fun when it happens," said defenseman Rasmus Dahlin of Montour's injury. "He will probably be back soon and everything is going to be all right."

"It's unfortunate. It's always frustrating especially in the preseason when you lose a key component of our team and a key player who plays big minutes for us, so, it's unfortunate," added Jake McCabe.

"I guess on the bright side, the season doesn't start for another couple of weeks so it's better to happen now if it's going to happen than four weeks from now. I guess that's one way to spin it, another way to look at it, is there is a spot for a younger guy to come up and snag and make a good first impression with this coaching staff."

As McCabe mentioned, with Montour and Zach Bogosian, who had hip surgery in April still on the mend, it's an opportunity for players to step up.

However, Henri Jokiharju's focus was on his teammate's health.

"I don't want to think about that kind of stuff," Jokiharju said when asked about the pressure and the opportunity to potentially earn a roster spot. "It's tough to see a teammate get injured. It's hard to see that."

As for what's next, the Sabres are on the road for a preseason tilt Friday night in Toronto and return home Saturday night to battle the Leafs at KeyBank Center.

## **Buffalo Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour will miss rest of preseason with hand injury**

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

September 19, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour's status for the season opener in two weeks is now up in the air as he is out for the rest of the preseason with a hand injury.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop but pretty soon there after," head coach Ralph Krueger said.

It's unclear when he got hurt but he missed the last 12 minutes of Tuesday's preseason game in Columbus.

"He can keep his lower body moving which is important. He's worked so hard off the knee injury to get up to speed so if there's a positive in this it's that, that he can keep his legs," Krueger explained.

Krueger also would not say if Montour broke his hand or not. The team said they will provide an update on his status after training camp ends.

Montour was expected to be their top right-handed defenseman this season paired with Rasmus Dahlin for their top pair. Rasmus Ristolainen skated alongside Dahlin at practice on Thursday.

"He's a very big deal, he's doing a lot for our team so of course it's not fun when it happens," Rasmus Dahlin said.

The Sabres acquired Montour in a trade with Anaheim in February.

"It's tough. Obviously he's a really good player, he's a big piece back there for us," forward Jeff Skinner said. "This time of year it's an opportunity for some guys to step up and try to fill that spot."

With Montour out, the Sabres are now down four defensemen with Zach Bogosian and Lawrence Pilut plus Matt Hunwick who was ruled out for the entire season with a neck injury. Bogosian had hip surgery while Pilut had shoulder surgery.

Up next, the Sabres take on the Maple Leafs in Toronto for another preseason game and open the regular season on October 3 in Pittsburgh.

## **Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger: 'It's starting to feel like home here'**

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

September 19, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres GM Jason Botterill is putting his faith in Ralph Krueger, the former European soccer executive to turn this team around and eventually break their playoff drought.

As Krueger returned back to the NHL and is now one week into his first training camp as the Sabres new head coach, it seems like players are embracing his system and style.

"He has a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and energy and passion that he brings to the team," forward Jeff Skinner said.

When players reported to training camp last week, a big theme when talking about Krueger was he has made an effort to get to know them on a personal level and preaches open communication which seems to continue so far in camp.

"It's been really natural, it feels good and I just loved today. It feels like we're communicating very openly here. There's a good, honest vibe in the room and it's starting to feel like home here which is what you look for before the season starts," Ralph Krueger said.

"We have a very good system going, he likes to play with the puck," Rasmus Dahlin said.

The Sabres are in Toronto Friday night for another preseason game and open the season two weeks from today on October 3rd in Pittsburgh.

## **Training Camp Buzz: Montour likely to miss start of season for Sabres**

NHL.com

September 19, 2019

Welcome to the 2019 preseason! Camps are open and it's a busy time, with rookies looking to make a name for themselves and veterans looking to lock down roster spots. Each day, we will have all the updates of note right here.

Here is the training camp news for Thursday:

**Montour expected to miss opening of season for Sabres**

Brandon Montour likely will miss the start of the regular season for the Buffalo Sabres because of an upper-body injury.

The defenseman was injured in a 4-1 loss to the Columbus Blue Jackets at Nationwide Arena on Tuesday. He did not play in the last 11 minutes of the game.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop but pretty soon thereafter," coach Ralph Krueger said. "At the moment, we're going through camp with his situation. ... But he can keep his lower body moving, which is important."

Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin, who had been skating with Henri Jokiharju, was paired with Rasmus Ristolainen during practice. Jokiharju skated on the left side of a pair with Casey Nelson.

"He plays big minutes for us so it's really unfortunate," defenseman Jake McCabe said of Montour. "On the bright side of things, the season doesn't start for another couple of weeks so it's better to happen now if it's going to happen rather than four weeks from now. That's one way to spin it. Another way to look at it is it's another spot for a young guy to come up and snag and make a good first impression with this coaching staff."

There was one significant change up front. Dylan Cozens, the No. 7 pick of the 2019 NHL Draft, was center on a line with Jeff Skinner and Evan Rodrigues.

Heather Engel

**Theodore returns to ice for Golden Knights**

Shea Theodore skated for the first time since the Vegas Golden Knights defenseman was treated for testicular cancer during the offseason.

The 24-year-old was on the ice with extra players in Las Vegas, with the Golden Knights on the road to play the Los Angeles Kings (10:30 p.m. ET; NHLN, KTNV). There is no timetable for when Theodore will return to game action.

Theodore revealed he was treated for cancer in an article published in The Players' Tribune on Sept. 12.

Danny Webster

**Galchenyuk-Malkin-Tanev line on display for Penguins**

Alex Galchenyuk will make his preseason debut when the Pittsburgh Penguins host the Blue Jackets at PPG Paints Arena (7 p.m. ET; ATTSN-PT).

He is expected to play left wing with center Evgeni Malkin and right wing Brandon Tanev, who will also play his first game for the Penguins after signing a six-year contract July 1. Galchenyuk was acquired in a trade June 29 that sent forward Phil Kessel to the Arizona Coyotes.

"It's time to really go out there and enjoy the game," Galchenyuk said. "There are a lot of practices. When you first get here, you meet the guys and you meet the players. Now it's time to work on details."

Wes Crosby

Sundqvist sidelined for Blues with upper-body injury

Oskar Sundqvist is day to day for the St. Louis Blues because of an upper-body injury.

The center did not practice after Blues coach Craig Berube said he "tweaked something" toward the end of practice Wednesday. The injury is not considered serious.

"We're just monitoring it, give him another day and see how he feels tomorrow," Berube said.

Goalie Jordan Binnington, who played the first two periods of a 3-2 loss to the Washington Capitals on Wednesday, missed practice for what Berube called a maintenance day.

Louie Korac

## Wheeler & Jets giving Byfuglien his privacy

By Elliotte Friedman

Sportsnet

September 19, 2019

Dustin Byfuglien followed the normal path as training camp approached. He moved back to his NHL city, brought his family with him, enrolled his children in school. He participated in informal skates with teammates, readying for the real thing in the second week of September.

Physically, Byfuglien was in Winnipeg. Mentally, he was somewhere else.

Byfuglien's 42 games in 2018–19 were his fewest since he became an NHL regular more than a decade ago. The biggest issue was an ankle injury that cost him 30 games and never fully healed. Even though he had eight points in six games during the first-round loss to St. Louis, Byfuglien never fully seemed like the dynamic wrecking ball who could singlehandedly change a series — one of the most fun players the league has to offer.

Now, as you've read, he's away from the team, and what happens next is anyone's guess.

"Privacy is paramount," Jets coach Paul Maurice said Wednesday, "so I won't comment on any speculation."

He's not the only one who feels that way. But here's what can be pieced together:

Byfuglien's actions were not those of someone who didn't plan on playing in 2019–20. Jacob Trouba would have been traded anyway, but, if the Jets realized earlier in the summer there was any reason to doubt Byfuglien's availability, they would have planned for it. However, it's believed the ankle didn't heal as hoped, continuing to give him problems. Understandably, that cooled his enthusiasm.

He's got to play a certain way, and things didn't look promising. You have to go back to 2009–10 to find the last season he wasn't among the top 50 in time-on-ice per game. Tough to feel excited about that when you start the year hurting.

Twelve years ago, after Anaheim won the Stanley Cup, playoff MVP Scott Niedermayer sat the first two months of the season, contemplating his own future. The Ducks suspended him, but happily welcomed a return when their captain was ready. Niedermayer was 34 then, the same age Byfuglien is now.

He and Winnipeg GM Kevin Cheveldayoff are close. The latter will give the former the time he needs.

It's hard to know if Byfuglien simply needs a rest, or if he's leaning towards retiring, and the Jets have advised him to make sure that's what he wants before he makes a decision. As a fan, I'd love to see him continue, because every shift promises something exciting. Ultimately, his health is the most important thing. Even if he walks away from the \$14 million remaining on his contract, he's earned approximately \$60 million in his career. That's more than enough for someone happiest when there's a fishing rod in his hands.

You're going to hear plenty of trade rumours around Justin Faulk and Rasmus Ristolainen, and few teams have watched more of the Sabres defender than the Jets — Winnipeg's director of pro scouting, Peter Ratchuk, is based in Buffalo, after all. But this makes the Jets cap situation even trickier. If you believe Byfuglien's coming back, you still have to account for his hit. It doesn't necessarily mean you can throw more cash at Kyle Conner and/or Patrik Laine, even if you wanted to. (Although, as one executive pointed out, Byfuglien retiring makes them less susceptible to an offer sheet.)

As I see it, the Central Division has five teams that can win the Stanley Cup: Colorado, Dallas, Nashville, defending champion St. Louis, and Winnipeg. The reaction to the Byfuglien news ranged from "Wow" to "Holy \$%#&" — it's that big of a story. For now, the Jets are less of a certainty than we thought, with the Western Conference race depending on his final decision.

### 31 THOUGHTS

1. Winnipeg had interest in Ben Hutton, but had to wait until things settled before formalizing anything. Hutton had to get started, and the Kings were ready.

2. The dynamic between the Jets and Laine is something. Agent Mike Liut went on Sportsnet 650 in Vancouver on Wednesday, indicating negotiations are not close. When Chris Johnston interviewed Laine last month in Finland, the winger said there had been almost no contract talk at all. Curious about that, I tried to find out as much as I could, and it appears the Jets used much of their dialogue making sure Laine was comfortable in the organization, understanding that he was valued there. They are fulfilling that promise. Captain Blake Wheeler has bent over backwards to make it very clear there will be changes, and they didn't overreact after Laine's overseas comments about not playing on the first line.

People who know Laine say he's not mean-spirited, but is blunt and, if asked a question, will give you an answer. (I'm sure the Jets would prefer he stop giving interviews.) In the aftermath of the Byfuglien news, there was plenty of debate about trading him for a defenceman, but that's a hard deal to win. He's going to figure it out at some point.

As for the contract, Laine's going to want to push the envelope for two or three years. In 2016, Nikita Kucherov signed for three years and \$4.77-million AAV. This week, Brock Boeser got \$5.875-million for the same term. What's Laine thinking? Nothing under \$6 million, for sure.

3. NHL teams always talk about being strong "down the middle, and on the blue line." Assuming Connor and Laine get done, the Jets could easily have 40 per cent of their cap tied up in wingers. That seems counter-intuitive, but, interestingly enough, they wouldn't be the only contender in that situation. Vegas is just under 44 per cent, Dallas slightly above 41. Tampa Bay is at 39, but that's not including the unsigned Brayden Point. It's hard to find centres, so these very good teams are loading up with wingers. (Thank you to Cap Friendly for the assistance.)

4. In the radio interview, Liut brought up Mitch Marner's extension — specifically in reference to another client, Mikko Rantanen of Colorado. That signing has played out as expected, with players/agents using it to increase/justify their asks and teams replying with, "That's Toronto's situation, and it does not affect what we will do."

The Avalanche and Tampa Bay, in particular, have a way of doing business they are determined not to deviate from. That said, Brayden Point's negotiation has lasted longer than anyone suspected. Will those teams, who historically do not budge, be willing to move?

5. One of Marner's offer-sheet dalliances was with Columbus. Initially, he was not willing to give the Blue Jackets term, and it would have been insane for them to risk four first-rounders for, say, four years. There are a couple of executives who suspected GM Jarmo Kekalainen was going to ask Marner if his feelings had changed had the stalemate lasted to the start of the season. They wonder if he will consider another player. Not surprisingly, he declined comment. We'll see, don't know what to make of it, but he's got big brass ones.

6. I do think Minnesota wanted to pursue a trade for Marner (when Paul Fenton was still GM), but never got far on a contract.

7. Instant reaction to Thomas Chabot's new deal: I believe this is the highest second contract ever given to a defenceman. Aaron Ekblad's second contract had a \$7.5-million AAV. Drew Doughty's was at \$7 million and Erik Karlsson's was at \$6.5. I always say if you can get term on a cornerstone player, get term. This is going to save the Senators money down the road.

I'd also be curious to know how many players have signed for this high a number in just 134 games. Connor McDavid would be there, and that's pretty good company.

8. The last group of players to really smash through the second-contract ceiling were the defencemen. Zach Werenski got three years at a \$5 million AAV; Charlie McAvoy got three at \$4.9; Ivan Provorov got six at \$6.75. There really wasn't a comparable to push these players to a higher level. Now there is.

9. Justin Faulk politely declined an interview request last weekend, but agent Brian Bartlett made it clear his client "has not demanded a trade and does not want to be traded. He's like any other player in the league right now,

focusing on his team. Ninety-nine per cent of the time, these don't get out into the public. Unfortunately, this one did."

Bartlett hesitated to call the Anaheim trade completely dead — "you never know what can happen" — but it sure looks that way. He would not comment on negotiations with either the Ducks or Hurricanes. But there haven't been extension talks in Carolina for some time, and it is believed the ask from the Ducks was in the \$6.75-million range.

10. Jared Spurgeon's extension helps Faulk's case for that number. According to industry gossip, Fenton's intention was to put Spurgeon at Ryan Ellis's number: eight years, \$50 million — an AAV of \$6.25 million. The change to Bill Guerin — and the Wild's determination to lock down their defender — moved him up to \$7.575 million. Great for Spurgeon, who clawed up the ladder the hard way. As several executives pointed out, that will raise the bar for Faulk, Tyson Barrie, Roman Josi, Torey Krug, Jake Muzzin and Alex Pietrangelo.

**11.** Rasmus Ristolainen declined to answer if he has requested a trade, but other NHL clubs are operating under the assumption that he has. Both Zach Bogosian and Brandon Montour are hurt, and this is a big year for Buffalo. That may affect their decision-making.

12. As reported previously, both Carolina and Montreal are among teams looking closely at Dallas's Julius Honka. I'd heard Calgary was, too, but that does not appear recent. Expect the Flames to be very careful with Juuso Valimaki. They will not rush him back. Long career ahead of him.

13. Teams trying to move bodies include Carolina and Vancouver. Both are tight to the cap and roster limits. The Canucks have made four or five players available, but I'm not sure Jake Virtanen is one of them. Head coach Travis Green was frustrated with Nikolay Goldobin last season, but GM Jim Benning opted for a longer view. Could be the same here. Calgary may have to manoeuvre something once Matthew Tkachuk is signed.

14. It's pleasantly weird to hear the NHL and NHLPA singing "Kumbaya" during labour negotiations. Two weeks ago, I thought the players were going to vote to re-open, purely as a negotiating tactic. That would have created an earlier deadline for an agreement, and deadlines spur action. A week's worth of negotiations clearly put a majority of them at ease. You're never going to get 700 guys to agree on everything, but according to one agent, "Players are comfortable where things are."

But will there be urgency to continue on the same path? We're human — we relax when things don't need to get done immediately. That's why there's a full sink of dirty dishes my wife asked me to do. The players who weren't crazy about the final vote worried about this. The majority, however, felt it unnecessary to toss any kind of firecracker into what appears to be a much smoother labour journey.

15. Earlier this week, the NBA informed its teams that the salary cap is projected to be \$116 million in 2020–21 and \$125 million in 2021–22. I think you're going to see the NHL do a similar forecast. This season's ceiling was announced just days before July 1, and it was lower than previously expected. That was a disaster for most teams, and many of the middle-class players. If, for argument's sake, we go to \$83.5 next year and \$85.5 the season after, the NHLPA should be able to inform its constituency in advance about what escrow is expected to be, given the average growth everyone is used to. That might be the best way to handle the players' biggest concern. Apparently, the possibility of an \$84.5–\$86 million cap for next season was raised at the Board of Governors' meeting, but I can see a more modest figure being put in place.

16. Another idea that was thrown around during negotiations was a kind of "fake cap" on escrow. The league would create a pool, and if escrow crept over a certain figure (7.5 per cent?) money from that pool would go to reimburse the players. (That's similar to the transfer payments the league included in the 2013 settlement.) If the money doesn't get used, it would go to the Emergency Assistance Fund, or something like that. Don't know if that's the eventual solution, but it was on the table.

17. Did Tyson Barrie think — on draft night — that he was getting traded to Vancouver?

"I did," he said on a podcast taping. "I think everyone thought it was close to happening, and I'd heard that it was. It didn't happen, so I thought maybe I was sticking around in Colorado.... Clearly not."



He was laughing as he said the last part.

18. Barrie, who wore No. 4 in Denver, chose 94 in Toronto. What's the significance?

"Feels like a Russian number," he smiled. "Four is retired here. I was thinking of what number I'd like to take, and 22 was a bit boring for me. I'd worn it at the World Juniors, but it didn't really feel like my number. I was honestly thinking for a week.... My dad used to wear No. 9 and he's been the biggest influence in my career. I thought, 'Why don't I put 9 and 4 together?' I could have [gone with] 49, I guess, but I didn't like the looks of it. I said 94, and ... that kind of [felt] like my number. I'm just going to go with it."

Barrie's father, Len Barrie, played 184 NHL games from 1989-90 to 2000-01, and later was part of the Tampa Bay Lightning's ownership group.

Tyson Barrie already fitting in well with Maple Leafs' teammates

19. One scout who watched the Flyers' prospects a couple of times: "My goodness, Philadelphia is loaded."

20. The most important of those prospects is Carter Hart, who solidified Philadelphia's net during an unbelievable season of injury and misfortune. At the NHL/NHLPA media event in Chicago, Sean Couturier talked about how much of a difference a full-season of Hart can make.

"It was tough never knowing who was going to be the next goalie," he said. "Guys were falling down like flies, but we found a way to stay focussed and make a push towards the end."

21. One NHL executive reached out to clarify some reporting I'd been doing on the various RFA bridge deals. Werenski's third season is \$7 million, McAvoy's is \$7.3 million and Boeser's is \$7.5 million. Teams will have to qualify those players at those numbers to keep their rights before unrestricted free agency, so I was simply adding that total to their current contracts for one year (Werenski/McAvoy) or two (Boeser). Basically, we're saying Werenski signed for four years at \$22 million instead of three at \$15 million. He reminded me about "cram-down" arbitration, where, if the player hasn't lived up to expectations, he might only get 85 per cent of that third-season number. So, for example, Werenski is guaranteed \$5.95 million — not \$7 million. No one expects any of these players to be anything less than stellar, but I appreciated the executive reaching out.

22. Annual reminder: Pay attention to the second week of pre-season games more so than the first. It's a better indicator of where a team truly sees itself.

23. Quietly, one impressive professional career recently came to end, as Corey Locke retired after 15 years of professional hockey. Locke won two Calder Cups (2007 Hamilton, 2011 Binghamton), a German League title in 2013 with the Berlin Polar Bears and was an AHL MVP. He spent the last three seasons in Austria, which he loved, but it became apparent things weren't going to work in the Czech Republic — for family reasons.

"There was no international school, so my daughter and wife weren't going to be with me," Locke said this week. "I was not fully engaged without them. And when you're not all in, that's when something bad happens. I knew it was time. I messaged my dad (Don) at 6:00 a.m., asking if he was up. He called me 10 minutes later. I told him I was done. It was emotional, but it felt good."

What did your wife (Chantal) say?

"She wasn't surprised. She knew."

24. Locke was a dynamite junior with OHL Ottawa. He had 164 goals and 373 points in 229 regular-season and playoff games. Listed at five-foot-eight, there were questions about his skating. But I remember interviewing him when he was selected by Montreal in the fourth round — 113th overall — in 2003. You never forget the smile of a drafted player — the look of pride they've made it that far.

"I remember that day so well. The [1985] birthdays were a good class of players. Back then, they did three rounds that first day. I really wanted to go on that day, to be honest. But the scouts had it right. I was ranked in the 60s among North American skaters, and I cannot fault where I was got drafted. It was my childhood dream to be a hockey player."

Locke continued to score in the AHL and overseas. When Hamilton won its championship, he had 22 points in 22 games, but was robbed of the playoff MVP award by some guy named Carey Price.

"Oh God, please don't write that," he laughed. "When he got there, we wondered how he [had] ever lost a game in the WHL. I remember one playoff game at Hershey, he got a shutout with something like 40 saves. And these weren't routine outside-the-dot shots. They were Grade-A backdoor chances. They couldn't beat him."

25. Locke played his 1,000th professional game last season in Linz, Austria, where he'd become tight with then-head coach Troy Ward. The team did a small celebration for him.

"It was kind of funny. My wife told his wife it was coming up, and the GM asked me if I could find my career statistics online."

Locke went to Hockey DB to look them up, and the team presented him with a jersey and a plaque. He wants to stay in the game. He took classes online to get a Bachelor of Science Management while playing and is looking at the Hockey Canada certification process while being a dad to daughter Kendersyn.

There were two pieces of advice he followed throughout his career that I thought would be good to share for young players. First: "No matter what league you are in, wherever you are, be the best player you can be. No matter where I was, I challenged myself to be the best I could be. And I kept that through my whole career."

Second, from junior coach Brain Kilrea: "Could I be consistent? Could I be the same player Friday night in Ottawa and then Sunday afternoon in Kingston? I always fought for that consistency. I was not a regular NHLer, but I loved challenging myself to start again every year to be my best again and again and again."

26. Finally, Locke said he was "proud of [his] career" and he should be. He played nine NHL games, and picked up one point — an assist for Ottawa against the Islanders.

Does he remember it?

"It's not that impressive," he said, laughing. "It was a chip off the glass in the defensive zone. Nick Foligno picked it up, skated down the ice, cut in on the defence and scored. I was going to the bench."

Did you get a plus?

"Ha, I don't even know."

(The answer is yes. I looked it up.)

Hopefully, Locke finds a way to stay in hockey. He's got a lot to offer.

## Tape II Tape

Senior Writer Ryan Dixon and NHL Editor Rory Boylen always give it 110%, but never rely on clichés when it comes to podcasting. Instead, they use a mix of facts, fun and a varied group of hockey voices to cover Canada's most beloved game.

Listen and Subscribe for free | Boylen on Twitter | Dixon on Twitter

27. Excellent trip to Saint John, N.B., where we did a special podcast with the Sea Dogs and some of their fans at Rocky's — right next to the arena. We'll be posting that one soon, featuring President/GM Trevor Georgie and defenceman Jeremie Poirier, a projected first-round pick. Small touch that I really liked: Above one of the doors leaving the coaches' office was a sign saying "Praise Your Puppies." Good reminder about dealing with teenagers.

28. The Sea Dogs are trying something interesting with their arena, newly christened as TD Station. Behind one of the nets, they took out a section of seats, creating a standing-room "lounge area" for people to mingle and watch the game. This is a growing phenomenon at all levels in North America. Don't be surprised to see new arenas/stadia across North America built with this kind of setup, or if current ones rip out seating to try this, too. The theory is that younger fans would rather watch games this way than sit in one place the entire night. In Saint John, fans can get into that section free with a ticket to the game. Food/drinks are extra.

29. Most meaningful new tattoo of the summer: on his wrist, Toronto's Michael Hutchison has a hand-print of newborn daughter Lilah, at 12 days old.

30. When you're in the business, you come across plenty of young people who want to break into hockey. One of them was Jack Han. On Twitter, Han became known for his "1MinuteTactics" videos. They were good little snippets of things teams and players could try to make themselves successful. He worked for McGill University's women's team until the Maple Leafs hired him in 2017. His feed went dark, but his future remains bright. Scrolling through the AHL Marlies' website, I noticed he'd been promoted to a position as one of the team's assistant coaches. Proof you can make an impact from different entry points.

31. Theo Epstein back to the Red Sox. Calling it right here.

## **Sabres express confidence in defense depth following injury to Montour**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 19, 2019

The Sabres will see their defensive depth tested with the announcement that Brandon Montour will miss the remainder of the preseason due to a hand injury.

Montour sustained the injury during the team's preseason game in Columbus on Tuesday. Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said he is not expected to be ready for opening night, though the initial hope is that his return will come early in the regular season.

The defenseman spent the summer rehabbing from a sprained knee he sustained while representing Team Canada at the IIHF World Championship in May.

"I wouldn't expect him right off the hop but pretty soon thereafter," Krueger said when asked if Montour might be ready for opening night. "At the moment, we're going through camp with his situation. As you well know, it's upper-body and we'll work on it.

"But he can keep his lower body moving, which is important. He's worked so hard off the knee injury to get up to speed, so if there is a positive in this it's that."

If there is another silver lining, it's the amount of depth the Sabres have added on defense since acquiring Montour from Anaheim at last season's trade deadline.

Colin Miller and Henri Jokiharju were added to a group of right shots that already featured Montour, Rasmus Ristolainen, Zach Bogosian, and Casey Nelson, along with an up-and-coming prospect in William Borgen. John Gilmour joined a left-shot group comprised of Rasmus Dahlin, Jake McCabe, Lawrence Pilut, and Marco Scandella.

So, even with Montour now sidelined and Bogosian still recovering from offseason hip surgery, Krueger said he'll be confident in the group of six the Sabres will ice in Pittsburgh on Oct. 3.

"I'm quite pleased that we have the depth," Krueger said. "I have to say honestly that the depth, you wouldn't want it to just creep in this quickly but it gives us opportunities so we feel confident that we can start with a solid D corps."

Krueger said that even prior to the injuries, the group of six for opening night had not yet been set in stone. Competition should only intensify now with a clear opening for players like Borgen, Jokiharju, and Nelson to slot their way into the opening-night lineup.

The experience is there. Borgen proved to himself that he could hold his own during a short stint in the NHL last season. Jokiharju played 38 games with Chicago as a 19-year-old and scored in his preseason debut on Monday. Nelson has 93 NHL games on his resume and made the opening-night lineup last season.

It could also pose an opportunity for the left-handed Gilmour, who put his speed on display during a two-point outing at Penn State. Krueger said he's willing to play defensemen on their off sides and can support them in doing so.

"I've coached teams that had six left handers and I'm not afraid of that," he said. "I think it's all about supporting them properly and setting up the breakouts accordingly. You can do things as a coach to help a guy playing his off side, for sure."

Players, meanwhile, echoed their coach in complementing the depth of the defense corps after practice. Jokiharju and Nelson both recognized the internal competition as a positive. Even Miller, a veteran among the group, said he sees himself as competing for ice time.

"I think there's a lot of competition on the back end for ice time," he said. "That's never a bad thing for a team. It always just makes your team better and the whole of the group better, so we'll see."

## Commence Phase 2

Krueger said his camp is divided into three phases, the second of which began with today's practice. While players took a day off Wednesday, the coaching staff prepared video from the team's two preseason games to use during meetings before they take on Toronto for a pair of contests this weekend.

Nelson offered a bit of insight into how the video portion of camp changed with a couple of games under their belt.

"Before we were just looking more at Team Europe from the World Cup, a lot of those clips, getting the groove on some of the more system-type things," Nelson said. "Now that we have a couple games we can look at some of the things we did well and anything we can change."

Krueger coached Team Europe - a collection of players from eight European nations - all the way to the championship game during the World Cup of Hockey in 2016 using an aggressive style that, in principle, he's now looking to replicate in Buffalo.

Nelson echoed several of his teammates in saying that Krueger's coaching philosophy will be conducive towards allowing players to operate instinctually.

"It's not straightforward systems that we're doing here," he said. "It's more of an outline, a lot of principles to go by, and then really he gives us a lot of the credit to just go out there and rely on our instincts. It's a lot of just playing, reading each other, staying connected."

"The more that we play with each other, against each other - even in practice - we feel more connected. We feel better and better each day."

### Thursday's practice

As promised, the Sabres shuffled their lines drastically following their first set of preseason games. Notable adjustments included Sam Reinhart joining a line with Jimmy Vesey and Jack Eichel; Dylan Cozens centering a line with Jeff Skinner and Evan Rodrigues; and Dahlin pairing with Ristolainen on defense.

Krueger said the lineup for Friday's game in Toronto will include a mix of both practice sessions, with some players expected to play in both games against the Maple Leafs this weekend.

"I think it's just continuing here these next couple of games for the coaching staff, the new coaching group, to really see where the opportunities are with everybody - left side, right side," Krueger said.

"We're looking at some different synergies and we'll see after the two Toronto games we'll be making some decisions."

Here's how the two practice groups lined up:

### Team Gold

13 Jimmy Vesey - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart  
53 Jeff Skinner - 42 Dylan Cozens - 71 Evan Rodrigues  
74 Rasmus Asplund - 90 Marcus Johansson - 68 Victor Olofsson  
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 25 Arttu Ruotsalainen / 46 Eric Cornell

26 Rasmus Dahlin - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
10 Henri Jokiharju - 8 Casey Nelson  
6 Marco Scandella - 33 Colin Miller / 61 Devante Stephens

40 Carter Hutton  
34 Jonas Johansson  
50 Michael Houser

## Team Blue

81 Remi Elie - 17 Vladimir Sobotka - 72 Tage Thompson  
49 C.J. Smith - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 21 Kyle Okposo  
27 Curtis Lazar - 12 Kevin Porter - 15 Jean-Sebastien Dea  
52 Andrew Oglevie - 47 Sean Malone - 43 Conor Sheary

58 John Gilmour - 3 William Borgen  
19 Jake McCabe - 44 Brandon Hickey  
78 Jacob Bryson - 38 Zach Redmond

35 Linus Ullmark  
36 Andrew Hammond