



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Playoff-bound Bills force Sabres' scheduling change Saturday

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Bills and Sabres fans need not worry. They'll get a chance to see both of their teams play Saturday.

The Sabres announced their home game against the Florida Panthers has been moved to 1 p.m. to alleviate any conflict with the Bills playing at Houston in an AFC wild-card game at 4:35 p.m. The Sabres game was initially set to start at 7 p.m., which would have overlapped with the end of the Bills game.

The change was made Monday, a day after the NFL released its playoff schedule, and made easier because the Bills and Sabres are both owned by Terry and Kim Pegula.

Kim Pegula thanked the Panthers for agreeing to the time change.

Florida will be in the midst of a four-game road trip, and has a day off before playing at Buffalo. The Panthers then travel to play Pittsburgh on Sunday.

"Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other," Kim Pegula said. "And we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible."

The game against the Panthers is notable, because the Sabres are welcoming back more than 20 alumni from their 1990s teams as part of the franchise's year-long 50th anniversary celebration.

Buffalo takes on Tampa Bay, aims to stop 3-game skid

Associated Press

December 30, 2019

Tampa Bay Lightning (20-13-4, fourth in the Atlantic Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (17-16-7, sixth in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Tuesday, 7 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Buffalo comes into the matchup against Tampa Bay as losers of three in a row.

The Sabres are 6-8-1 against division opponents. Buffalo has allowed 31 power-play goals, killing 74.4% of opponent opportunities.

The Lightning are 16-8-2 in Eastern Conference play. Tampa Bay ranks seventh in the league shooting 10.6% and averaging 3.5 goals on 33.2 shots per game.

Tampa Bay took down Buffalo 5-2 in the last meeting between these teams on Nov. 25.

TOP PERFORMERS: Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 28 assists and has recorded 52 points this season. Victor Olofsson has scored four goals over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

Ondrej Palat leads the Lightning with a plus-11 in 37 games played this season. Victor Hedman has totaled eight assists over the last 10 games for Tampa Bay.

LAST 10 GAMES: Lightning: 6-3-1, averaging 2.9 goals, 4.7 assists, 2.9 penalties and 6.3 penalty minutes while allowing 2.7 goals per game with a .907 save percentage.

Sabres: 4-5-1, averaging 2.4 goals, 4.3 assists, 3.4 penalties and 7.6 penalty minutes while giving up 2.9 goals per game with a .899 save percentage.

INJURIES: Sabres: Jeff Skinner: out (upper-body).

Lightning: None listed.

It's time for Sabres to demand some respect from Lightning

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 30, 2019

The Tampa Bay Lightning are in town Tuesday night. It's time the Buffalo Sabres stood up to them for once.

Things have been bad on the scoreboard against the Lightning for a while. The Sabres have lost six straight (0-5-1) and 19 of their last 23 games to Tampa Bay (4-17-2).

The Bolts are going for a season sweep. The Sabres are certainly going for one win. But for one night at least, getting a little respect seems to be at least as important.

Signing Rochester tough guy Dalton Smith to a two-way contract Monday and likely thrusting him into the lineup to make his NHL debut on Tuesday was an eye-opening move to say the least. It's out of character for the Sabres, who generally play things close to the vest but are certainly telegraphing their intentions here.

Remember the recent history? The Sabres got beat by the Lightning on back-to-back days last month in Sweden and lost Vladimir Sobotka, perhaps for the season, on a cheap and late hit to the knee by Lightning star Nikita Kucherov.

The hit didn't even draw a penalty, let alone the suspension it should have from the NHL's Department of Player Safety.

Then the Sabres suffered a 5-2 loss Nov. 25 in Tampa in a game in which Lightning defenseman Erik Cernak took out Rasmus Dahlin with a vicious elbow to the chops. Again, no penalty but at least this one earned a two-game suspension.

Neither egregious action from a Tampa Bay player drew reaction from the Sabres. It was a bad look all around for the Blue and Gold and GM Jason Botterill must have been really miffed about it to bring up Smith.

Good for Botterill. Not a great look for the guys who have been in that dressing room all year. Or for multiple years. Yes, the GM better find somebody to put the puck in the net. But for one night, sometimes there's a game going on beyond the scoresheet and the Sabres would be wise to play it a little.

When Cernak had his hearing with NHL for his hit, the Bolts had the audacity to say Dahlin hit himself in the face with his own glove.

Tampa Bay, a wondrously talented and gritty team that is loads of fun to watch, doesn't respect the Sabres at all. And, frankly, given the franchises' current states, why should they? The Sabres have to do something to earn some respect and it would be a memorable way to end a horrendous decade.

Smith gave a coy "no comment" after practice Monday when asked about the recent history with the Lightning. But he darn well knows. And if he didn't, he was briefed: Cernak wears No. 81, Kucherov wears No. 86 and those are your targets to send messages.

"It's important to have toughness through your lineup," captain Jack Eichel said after practice Monday. "I don't think the toughness lacks here. I think it's obviously being able to do those things that sometimes need to be done. We don't necessarily have that type of guy and some other teams do."

Eichel definitely seemed down with having Smith around for a while.

"He's obviously a really tough guy and can hold other teams accountable. It's big against a lot of teams," the captain said. "It's obviously a physical game and teams are going to take runs and we have some skill players here that have been taking that. I don't know him too well but from what I hear, he's a pretty tough guy and maybe the other team will think twice about doing some of the things they're doing."

Now, there's not going to be some massive donnybrook like the one the Sabres had in 1991 with Calgary three weeks after Pat LaFontaine was stuck in the face by Jamie Macoun. The Flames came to Buffalo for the rematch and were infuriated to find Macoun's face on a target graphic in The Buffalo News.

In the aftermath of the brawl, Macoun flat-out blamed the Buffalo media for inciting the situation.

The sense here is Smith isn't going to stage some month-too-late battle like fake tough guy Paul Gaustad did against Milan Lucic eight years ago after Lucic drilled Ryan Miller and nobody did anything about it. This is about keeping the Lightning honest. Any more cheap shots – Kucherov specializes in them – and there can be an answer expected from Smith.

"It's unbelievable for him. I couldn't be happier for him," said Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe. "Someone who comes to work every day and, from all accounts, I hear is just an unbelievable teammate. He's a guy working his butt off his whole career, so to get a chance like this you've got to be happy for him."

Coach Ralph Krueger said all the right things when pressed on the Smith issue. About grit, and play away from the puck and giving his team an edge.

But we know what this is all about and it's fine that Krueger can't just come out and say it. The game can still be played that way from time to time. An overriding problem with the Buffalo season is that 0-6 record against Tampa Bay and Boston. It's killing the Sabres and Krueger knows it.

"That's a space we're aspiring to grow into," Krueger said. "Look at the average age of the key players (Sunday in Boston). They're in their 30s. There's an experience and bravado there that can frustrate you but also have to look at it and say, 'OK, what are they doing different and what do we still need to learn?'"

"Tampa is in that category. They have very experienced players. They've got a consistency in their game over the last few years you need to respect but we need to grab on to pieces of those organizations and make them our own."

From Larry Playfair and Lindy Ruff to Rob Ray, Brad May, Bob Boughner and Matthew Barnaby, the Sabres have lots of times in their history where you couldn't remotely push them around.

Among many reasons, that's another reason this fan base isn't too fond of the current group. Soft play down low, soft play in the corners, soft play when defending their own.

It's time to do something against Tampa. If it takes an unknown like Dalton Smith to do it, so be it.

"You have to match up well against their skill," Eichel said of the Bolts. "And obviously there's a lot of will with some good role players who play a big part on their team and its success. We need to find a way to match their intensity."

They sure do. It's long overdue.

Sabres' Jack Eichel named to third straight All-Star Game

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 30, 2019

For the third straight year, Jack Eichel will head to the NHL All-Star Game. The Buffalo Sabres' captain was named Monday as the club's lone representative to the Atlantic Division team for the game Jan. 25 in St. Louis.

Eichel has 24 goals, 28 assists and 52 points in 39 games this season. He starts the week tied for third in the NHL in goals with Washington's Alex Ovechkin, tied for 11th in assists with Tampa Bay's Victor Hedman and seventh in points.

Eichel also played in the 2017 game at Tampa Bay and last year's contest in San Jose, where he finished second in the Fastest Skater competition to Edmonton's Connor McDavid.

He is the seventh player in Sabres history to be named to at least three All-Star games, joining Rick Martin (7), Gilbert Perreault (6), Dominik Hasek (5), Mike Ramsey (4), Phil Housley (3) and Alexander Mogilny (3).

Eichel's season to date is most notable for his 18-game personal point streak, which tied the franchise record set by Gilbert Perreault in 1971-72. The streak is recognized as a 17-gamer by the NHL because Eichel missed the Dec. 19 game in Philadelphia due to an upper-body injury. Eichel had 32 points during the streak (16-16).

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin is one of the Atlantic's Last Men In candidates. The highest vote-getters by division will be added to the game; Sabres forward Jeff Skinner won the Atlantic vote last year. Voting opens at noon Wednesday and closes at 11:59 p.m. Jan. 10.

Eichel will be joined on the Atlantic team by Toronto center Auston Matthews and goaltender Frederik Andersen, Boston's David Pastrnak and goalie Tuukka Rask, Tampa Bay's Hedman, Montreal defenseman Shea Weber, Florida center Jonathan Huberdeau, Ottawa winger Anthony Duclair and Detroit winger Tyler Bertuzzi.

Dahlin's competition in the Last Men In vote is steep, led by Boston's Patrice Bergeron, Toronto's Mitch Marner and Tampa Bay's Steven Stamkos. Also on the vote are Detroit's Dylan Larkin, Florida's Aleksander Barkov, Montreal's Max Domi and Ottawa's Jean-Gabriel Pageau.

Former Sabre Ryan O'Reilly of St. Louis and South Buffalo native Patrick Kane of Chicago were named to the Central Division team.

ALL-STAR ROSTERS

Atlantic Division (All-Star Appearance)

F *David Pastrnak, Bos (2nd)

G Tuukka Rask, Bos (2nd)

F Jack Eichel, Buf (3rd)

F Tyler Bertuzzi, Det (1st)

F Jonathan Huberdeau, Fla (1st)

D Shea Weber, Mtl (7th)

F Anthony Duclair, Ott (1st)

D Victor Hedman, TB (2nd)

G Frederik Andersen, Tor (1st)

F Auston Matthews, Tor (4th)

Central Division (All-Star Appearance)

F Patrick Kane, Chi (9th)

F *Nathan MacKinnon, Col (3rd)

F Tyler Seguin, Dal (6th)

F Eric Staal, Min (6th)

D Roman Josi, Nsh (3rd)

F Ryan O'Reilly, StL (3rd)

G Jordan Binnington, StL (1st)

D Alex Pietrangelo, StL (2nd)
G Connor Hellebuyck, Wpg (2nd)
F Mark Scheifele, Wpg (2nd)

Metropolitan Division (All-Star Appearance)

D Dougie Hamilton, Car (1st)
D Seth Jones, Clb (3rd)
G Joonas Korpisalo, Clb (1st)
F Kyle Palmieri, NJ (2nd)
F Mathew Barzal, NYI (2nd)
F Artemi Panarin, NYR (1st)
F Travis Konecny, Phi (1st)
F Jake Guentzel, Pit (1st)
D John Carlson, Wsh (2nd)
G Braden Holtby, Wsh (5th)

Pacific Division (All-Star Appearance)

F Jakob Silfverberg, Ana (1st)
G Darcy Kuemper, Ari (1st)
F Matthew Tkachuk, Cgy (1st)
D Mark Giordano, Cgy (3rd)
F *Connor McDavid, Edm (4th)
F Leon Draisaitl, Edm (2nd)
F Anze Kopitar, LA (5th)
F Logan Couture, SJ (2nd)
F Elias Pettersson, Van (2nd)
G Marc-Andre Fleury, Veg (5th)

*Fan-elected captain

Sabres move Saturday's game against Florida to 1 p.m.

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 30, 2019

With the Buffalo Bills slated for a 4:30 p.m. kickoff in Houston for their wild-card playoff game, the Buffalo Sabres have changed the start time for Saturday's game against the Florida Panthers in KeyBank Center to 1 p.m.

The game was originally slated to start at 7 p.m. and will now be a matinee. It will be televised as scheduled on MSG and radio coverage will move to WBEN (930 AM) so that flagship station WGR 550 can do Bills programming all day leading to kickoff.

The Sabres' '90s Night promotion will be held as part of the game, with more than 20 alumni from the decade scheduled to appear.

"We are happy to announce this start time change so that all of our fans can enjoy the Buffalo Bills playoff game on Jan. 4 after our Sabres game," Sabres and Bills president/co-owner Kim Pegula said in a statement. "Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other, and we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible. We would like to thank the Florida Panthers organization for their understanding and willingness to change the start time."

The Panthers are coming to Buffalo from Ottawa and have a game Sunday in Pittsburgh at 5 p.m., so the switch will actually benefit them on the second day of back-to-back games.

Sabres sign Amerks tough guy Dalton Smith to two-way contract

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres added some edge to their lineup Monday with the signing of Rochester Amerks forward Dalton Smith to a two-way, \$700,000 contract for the remainder of the season. Smith, 27, was on an AHL contract with Rochester.

The 6-foot-2, 217-pound Smith has one goal and three assists in 21 games for the Amerks this year. In 114 games at Rochester the last three seasons, Smith has four goals, 10 assists and 240 penalty minutes.

"I love the physical game, getting under guys' skin and finishing my checks and sticking up for teammates when it's needed," Smith said. "It's something I've always kind of done being the oldest of five, the big brother mentality."

Smith was on the ice for practice playing on a line with Curtis Lazar and Evan Rodrigues and ostensibly will make his NHL debut when the Sabres host Tampa Bay on Tuesday night.

The Sabres and Lightning have had some issues this season, as a hit by Nikita Kucherov in Sweden injured the knee of Buffalo forward Vladimir Sobotka and an elbow to the face of Rasmus Dahlin by Erik Cernak earned the Lightning defenseman a two-game suspension.

"I don't really have a comment on that," Smith said. "If I get the opportunity, I'm going to play my style and finish checks and be a presence out there, be hard to play against."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger downplayed any hijinks surrounding the call-up, saying the organization has been impressed with Smith's development but admitted that he provides extra grit in the Buffalo lineup.

"We're not just looking at players in Rochester with numbers that are evident for everybody to see," Krueger said. "I speak a lot here about working on the statistics that aren't measurable."

"You can make your judgment on the timing of it. I just feel with the Skinner injury, we have a need for a call-up and we've made a call-up now. We needed to decide on somebody to have a mix of 13 forwards here and Dalton was the one that just felt right for us, not only for tomorrow but for the stretch coming up here."

Smith was a second-round pick of Columbus in 2010. Rochester is his fifth AHL team and Smith has played 400 minor-league games in his career.

"Yeah, it's been crazy. I've been pinching myself every once in a while," Smith said. "But, yeah, it's been unbelievable, something I've been waiting for for a long time. I'm just very grateful for the opportunity and excited to work as hard as I can and see what happens."

"They expressed a little bit of interest. But, yeah, it's definitely a big shock. I'm just so happy and so grateful for the opportunity. It's a dream come true."

Smith's father, Derrick, played in the Stanley Cup Final for the Philadelphia Flyers in 1985 and 1987 and played more than 500 NHL games with the Flyers, Minnesota and Dallas. Smith's cousins are the Primeau family. Wayne Primeau is a former Sabres No. 1 pick who played for the team during the 1990s. Cayden Primeau is a backup goaltender to Carey Price in Montreal.

"Oh, he was so pumped," Smith said of his father. "I actually FaceTimed him so I could see his facial expression and all that. He was so happy. It's something he's worked on with me since I could walk basically. So he was very proud."

Eichel named to the 2020 All-Star Game

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 30, 2019

For a third consecutive year, Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel has been named as an NHL All-Star.

The league announced its rosters for the 2020 All-Star Weekend on Monday, and Eichel will be Buffalo's lone representative heading to St. Louis for the weekend of Jan. 24.

So far this season, Eichel leads the Sabres with 24 goals, 28 assists and 52 points in 39 games. The 23-year-old is on pace for a career-year in the NHL, and has been talked about as an early favorite to win the Hart Trophy as the NHL's Most Valuable Player. He's currently seventh in league scoring, while his 24 goals is tied for third in the NHL with Washington Capitals forward Alex Ovechkin.

Eichel just recently had an 18-game personal point streak end, where he ended up scoring 16 goals and registering 16 assists for 32 points.

As of right now, Eichel is projected to reach the 50-goal mark for the first time in his career, and the first time in Sabres franchise history since Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny both scored 50 in the 1992-93 season. Eichel would also become the fifth player in franchise history to score 50 goals in a season.

For a second consecutive year, the NHL will have it's "Last Men In" where fans can vote in one more player for each division. Last year, Jeff Skinner was the player voted as the "Last Man In" for the Atlantic Division.

This year, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin is available for the fans to vote in as the last player on the Atlantic Division roster.

So far this season in 32 games, Dahlin has two goals and registered 19 assists for 21 points.

This year's All-Star festivities get underway on Friday, Jan. 24 with the All-Star Skills Competition, followed by the All-Star Game on Saturday, Jan. 25 at Enterprise Center in St. Louis.

Sabres sign Dalton Smith to NHL contract

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced on Monday that the team has signed forward Dalton Smith to a contract for the remainder of the 2019-20 season worth the league-minimum of \$700,000.

Smith has spent the last three seasons with the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League, playing primarily as a bottom-six depth winger. In 114 games with the Amerks, the 27-year-old has scored four goals and amassed 10 assists for 14 points, as well as 240 minutes in penalties.

So far this season in Rochester, Smith has a goal and three assists in 21 games to go along with a plus-5 rating and 27 penalty minutes.

Smith has yet to play in a National Hockey League game in his eight-year career after being drafted by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the second round (34th overall) in the 2010 NHL Draft. In 400 professional hockey games between the AHL and the East Coast Hockey League, Smith has 36 goals, 41 assists, and 799 penalty minutes.

He will wear No. 67 with the Sabres.

At practice on Monday, Smith was skating on the left wing on a line with Curtis Lazar and Evan Rodrigues. Here is how the lines looked at practice:

Olofsson - Eichel - Reinhart
Girgensons - Larsson - Okposo
Johansson - Asplund - Sheary
Smith - Lazar - Rodrigues

McCabe - Ristolainen
Dahlin - Montour
Scandella - Jokiharju
Bogosian - Miller

Jimmy Vesey was rotating in as an extra skater, which is a likely indication that he will be a healthy scratch on Tuesday night against the Tampa Bay Lightning at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres will have a team meeting before Tuesday night's matchup with the Lightning. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. on WGR with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show set for 6 p.m. with Schopp and the Bulldog at (716) Food and Sport.

Sabres announce time change for Saturday's game against Florida

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced on Monday that the start time for this Saturday's game against the Florida Panthers at KeyBank Center has been changed from 7 p.m. to 1 p.m.

This decision was made after it was announced on Sunday that the Buffalo Bills will face the Houston Texans this Saturday in the AFC Wild Card Round at 4:35 p.m. at NRG Stadium in Houston.

"We are happy to announce this start time change so that all of our fans can enjoy the Buffalo Bills playoff game on Jan. 4 after our Sabres game," Sabres owner and President Kim Pegula said in a team statement. "Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other, and we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible. We would like to thank the Florida Panthers organization for their understanding and willingness to change the start time."

Saturday's game against Florida is also '90s Night at the arena, where they will celebrate the teams of the 1990s, while welcoming back more than 20 Sabres alumni from the decade. Some of the alumni that will be in attendance includes Matthew Barnaby, Stu Barnes, Jay McKee, Michael Peca, Derek Plante, Rob Ray, Richard Smehlik, Pierre Turgeon, and Rhett Warrener.

The game will be televised on MSG and can be heard on our sister station, WBEN News Radio 930 AM. We will have Bills pregame coverage on WGR leading up to the 4:35 p.m. kickoff in Houston.

Sabres midseason trending report: Assessing the direction of each player on the team

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

December 31, 2019

If the first half of this Sabres season felt a lot like the first half of last season to you, that's not a glitch in the matrix. There was the monthlong winning streak and the immediate cooldown that followed. There was the incredible play from Jack Eichel with help from a winger shooting the lights out. Add the ultimate resolution that there's something missing on the roster and the feeling of *déjà vu* is strong.

At the midpoint last season, the Sabres' rapid fall from grace after their 10-game win streak hadn't yet begun and they were 22-13-6 (50 points; .610 percentage). At 17-16-7 (41 points; .513 percentage), the Sabres are behind where they were at this point last season, but if there's a lesson learned it's that things can change quickly for better or worse.

In Ralph Krueger's first season with the Sabres, worse is not what they're aiming for, of course, but how the players are trending will dictate that course of events. Even though Krueger's philosophy is to not let the past dictate the future, let's take a look at what the Sabres have done and which direction they're headed.

Trending Up

Jack Eichel

It's impossible not to like what Eichel has done this season. He's been their top player, top goal scorer, and top setup man. He's put the team on his back in games when they've needed that extra jolt and he's been relied upon to do more in the defensive zone than in years past. He's playing at an MVP level this season and if the Sabres manage to get to the postseason, he'll deserve strong consideration for it. The kind of season he's projected to have would be the best statistical season in Buffalo since Pat LaFontaine and Alexander Mogilny in 1992-1993. That we're talking about him making a run at 100 points in the current NHL highlights how good he's been.

Victor Olofsson

Seeing Olofsson second on the team in goals scored and in points is impressive for the rookie. With 16 goals, he's on pace to score 30. If he breaks that barrier, he'll be the first Sabres rookie to do so since Donald Audette in 1991-1992. After starting the season scoring only on the power play, he's found his way at 5-on-5 now. Still, his seven goals at even strength and nine on the power play highlight where he's the Sabres' strongest weapon. When we looked ahead to what would constitute a good first season for him, 20 goals and 40 points seemed like it would be a good start to his NHL career. He's almost already matched those numbers. Goals come in bunches for him so riding the streakiness is something the team will have to weather.

Sam Reinhart

If there's a player who might be the most level on the team, it's Reinhart. He's third in points and in goals. Eleven of his 12 goals are at even strength so he's steady there. You'd ideally like to see more production on the power play, but that applies to everyone else on the power play too. He doesn't do the all-universe stuff Eichel does nor does he have a sick shot like Olofsson, but he just does his work. There's not a lot of flash to his game, which sometimes gets viewed poorly, but he's on pace for 60 points. It's a contract year and he's a traditionally strong second-half player so there's an expectation he'll hit another level soon.

Henri Jokiharju

Remember when there were questions about how Jokiharju would fit into the mix? He's been an ideal third-pair defenseman and his steady play has lifted up the other defenders he's played with. Check out the 5-on-5 CF% with him and away from him on NaturalStatTrick. The only defensemen who haven't seen an improvement playing with him are Dahlin and Ristolainen and those minutes together haven't been many. The Sabres defense has been in desperate need of a solid player like Jokiharju for a long time.

Marco Scandella

If there's one player who's benefited most from Krueger's "live for today" philosophy, it's Scandella. Everything bad that happened last year seems like a distant memory and he's settled into a strong role as a third pair

defenseman. Part of his renaissance is thanks to Jokiharju, but he's taken care of things himself as well. His 52.9 CF% at 5-on-5 is the best of his career. His plus-7 rating is his best in a Sabres uniform and best since 2014-2015 with Minnesota. It is a contract season so there's that motivation. He's a candidate to be traded before or at the deadline, but considering how poor last season went, it's been a revelation to see him play like this now.

Rasmus Ristolainen

It's felt like a long, strange trip for Ristolainen through his career, but this season he's settled into a spot where he's playing smarter, getting more opportunities to contribute offensively and is finding his physical game serving him well. He's also playing fewer minutes. His 22:59 average ice time per game hasn't been that low since he averaged 20:37 in his second season. There are still some of the old problems, but they're happening less often. Still, he's a plus-5 in plus/minus and he's never been a plus player for a season in his career. His shot metrics could use improvement (48.7 CF% at 5-on-5) but if he finishes the season with that it'll be the best mark of his career.

Trending Even

Rasmus Dahlin

After the first two months of the season, it would've been hard to be overwhelmingly positive about Dahlin's play. He struggled defensively, his even-strength game wasn't steady, and he piled on points via the power play. But since returning from a concussion Dec. 12, he's at 52.3 CF%. In the past three losses, one at Ottawa and two to Boston, he's been on ice for 55 shot attempts for and 26 against (67.9 CF%). The confidence he's playing with is noticeable and he's been less shy about being physical when needed. The points will continue but his play appears to have turned a corner.

Kyle Okposo

Okposo's been a puck possession monster this season, leading the Sabres in 5-on-5 play with a 53.7 CorsiFor percentage (via NaturalStatTrick.com) and is second on unblocked shot attempts at 52.9 percent. He's been asked to be an energy line guy and part of a line that can help reset the flow of the game when possession gets away from the Sabres. You want to see more offense given his contract, but after what he's been through healthwise, it's good to see he's still helping the team in other ways.

Johan Larsson

It's been a bit of a redemptive season for Larsson. He isn't being buried in defensive zone starts and he's tapped into his offensive abilities a bit more. He and his line have proven to be steady shot suppressors and pace-changers and that's been a needed element. He and Eichel have been forced to take the bulk of faceoffs and the Sabres are at the bottom of the NHL in faceoff percentage. With 12 points, he's on pace for a career-high in scoring (he's finished with 17 twice). This is an ideal recap of a guy who's trending up, but steady is the name of the game for Larsson. He does what he's asked to do and takes care of business.

Jeff Skinner

The guess is most would believe he's having a down season. Having an upper-body injury that knocked him out for up to a month doesn't help matters, but the weird part is this is more in line with the kind of season he usually has. The goals come in bunches, as John Vogl wrote recently, and judging him against what he did last season is difficult because he shot nearly 20 percent for the first three and half months of the season. Optics are a powerful thing and having chances snuffed out more often than not right after signing a lucrative long-term deal doesn't do anything to calm anxious fans. Reuniting him with Eichel would certainly boost his stats, but then the question of whether or not it would lead to more secondary offense would still exist. If upon his return he picks up in the direction he was headed, the goals will come.

Marcus Johansson

A lot has been asked of Johansson. He's been asked to be the No. 2 center after not being a center for around seven years. He's been asked to be a veteran leader and mentor as well as to be a key offensive contributor. He's handled everything with aplomb but the offense has been slow to arrive. He dealt with an injury he sustained in Sweden and his return from that came with an admission he felt slow getting back into the flow of things. His 16 points this season include five goals and a prime example of how tough it's been to get secondary scoring behind Eichel's line. Johansson has been a good soldier in going back to center, but the addition of another middle-six center would go a long way to solving offensive issues.

Zemgus Girgensons

It's been four seasons since Girgensons has had this much offensive production. It's been five since he had 15 goals and 30 points during his All-Star season. With six goals and 10 points already, he's having a fine season for a guy no one expects to do much offensively. As a defensive player, he's held his own working with Larsson and Okposo. He's part of a beleaguered penalty kill unit that's been bad all season long, although it appears to be the set up and not the players responsible for that.

Brandon Montour

Montour's season has been a fascinating study because he's become a sort of utility defenseman. He's been paired up with a few different players. He's mostly worked with Dahlin and they've been a pretty solid pair, but he's also worked 50-plus minutes of 5-on-5 time with Ristolainen, Jokiharju, and McCabe to varying levels of success. While he's done OK with Ristolainen, both Jokiharju and McCabe have been better off with other defense partners. Finding his best fit is a work in progress and he's one player in which missing out on training camp may have stymied the start of his season. He's been average but is capable of doing more, it's just a matter of finding the best roles and partners for him.

Jake McCabe

Viewing McCabe's season to this point means doing so through Ristolainen's lens as well. The two have been paired up almost exclusively this season and getting top pair minutes. They're getting the majority of their starts in the defensive zone but not egregiously so. They're being used a lot on the penalty kill and, yeah, that's been tough all year for anyone on the PK. Any of McCabe's mistakes get noticed instantly and that can distract from anything good that he does. But he's being tasked with the hardest matchups and hanging on. There's no doubt his numbers would benefit from playing in second or third pair situations, but sharing the responsibilities with the current defense corps would help everyone out. Then again, maybe throwing him together with Jokiharju down the road would prove to be a huge boon to everyone.

Linus Ullmark

There's a lot to like about what Ullmark has done this season. He's played a lot quieter in net in part due to his new philosophy to "breathe and enjoy the moment." He's an unflappable player that doesn't let anything faze him. His .913 save percentage puts him solidly in the lower-middle part of the pack in the NHL, tied with Joonas Korpisalo and Marc-Andre Fleury. A goalie with his mindset is great to have, but you'd like the results to be a little bit better. But for the time being, he's solidly Buffalo's No. 1 goalie.

Rasmus Asplund

Asplund has earned his spot in Buffalo as an effective forechecker and speedy option lower in the lineup. Adjusting to the NHL speed and skill took him a few games, but lately he's vacillated between center and wing and he's been a bit more proven up the middle. Krueger said from the start his ideal lineup has six centers in it, but Asplund appears to do his best work at that position.

Curtis Lazar

Lazar has been an ideal veteran call-up for the Sabres. Like Asplund, he gets in on the forecheck and he's been a physical player. That he's punched in a couple goals is a bonus. With more being asked of Larsson, he's done well to provide more help lower in the lineup.

Trending Down

Zach Bogosian

It's been a hard season for Bogosian. After dealing with setbacks from offseason hip surgery, he jumped into action without training camp or rehab games. After starting off well enough the first couple games, the Western Canada trip showed some wear and led to eventually being a healthy scratch, which led to a reported trade demand. He's frustrated and is an unrestricted free agent this summer. His story this season likely ends somewhere other than Buffalo. That's a shame, but it feels like it's time for both sides to move on.

Conor Sheary

Going into a contract season, it felt like Sheary was due for a big showing. When Krueger moved him to the right side, the side in which he's been more productive and by Sheary's admission a better fit, the results haven't come. The chances were there for a bit, but apart from a two-goal game against New Jersey recently, there hasn't been much to note. His 12:53 average time on-ice is his lowest mark since his rookie season and for the

second straight season his shooting percentage is under 10 percent (he shot 13.8 percent in three seasons in Pittsburgh). He's been a healthy scratch a few times this season, which has been Krueger's obvious hint he needs to see more.

Evan Rodrigues

This has been a very difficult season for Rodrigues. Out of all skaters who have suited up for the Sabres this season, he's played the most games without a goal. He's taken 38 shots in 24 games and had at least two highlight saves made against him. He should have a goal, but he doesn't. His average ice time is below 11 minutes per game and it feels like he might be better off with another team if the opportunity for a deal is there. The problem there is it's harder to move a player when his perceived value is low. If there's one area he can make headway, it's on faceoffs, where he's won 51.4 percent of his draws. That's best on the team among active players.

Colin Miller

Speaking of odd seasons, it's been fascinating how Miller's has played out. When he was acquired from Vegas, it was believed he would have an everyday role. Then Jokiharju emerged and changed the picture on the right side of the defense. With a goal and five assists and a minus-5 rating, it hasn't been a remarkable start to his Sabres career. His 47.5 CF% is second-lowest among defensemen (Bogosian 44.7) and three of his five assists have come on the power play as part of the second unit. With there being so many defensemen on the roster, playing better would go a long way to solving issues but a trade to loosen things up wouldn't be so bad either. Miller will get more games but it's a matter of time.

Carter Hutton

To say it's been a rough stretch of late for Hutton would be downplaying things. After he started the season 6-0-0, he's gone 0-6-4. His save percentage is down to .894 and his goals-against average is 3.23. Even though that stat is as much indicative of team play as it is the goalie's performance, it's still bad. His goal support hasn't been very good, but whether he's done himself in or not gotten the breaks, it's been a shock to his system. He's a good teammate and is beneficial to supporting Ullmark, but eventually this slide has to end.

Jimmy Vesey

Seems there's more than a couple impending unrestricted free agents trending down and Vesey is no different. For all the help he's provided on the penalty kill, he's still been on the ice for 10 power play goals against. He's another streaky scorer and the streaks have been few and far between. His four goals and 11 points have him on pace to have the worst season of his career. There are 40 more games to play for him to make a run at his usual 16 or 17 goals and 30 points, but right now times are tough.

Vladimir Sobotka

Sobotka's knee injury in Sweden at the hands (hips?) of Nikita Kucherov put him out of action for a while. When he was in, he was seeing second-line duty with Skinner and Johansson. Even though he wasn't a threat to score (41.6 percent expected goals for at 5-on-5) he's viewed as a valuable veteran presence in the room. He can also win faceoffs at a better than 50 percent rate. His shot generation rates are still below average, but he did a lot of the little things Skinner and Johansson weren't good at and somehow that helped that line work for a bit. His loss cleared the way to get a look at Asplund and that's been helpful.

Casey Mittelstadt

Mittelstadt's season has been nothing short of disappointing and he's in Rochester to get his game in order. He struggled again in Buffalo after 31 games. He was a healthy scratch for the first time in his career and his nine points showed he was struggling again at adapting to facing NHL talent. He's 21 years old and he likely needed AHL time last year to get better adjusted. He'll get it now and he'll be there until he's 100 percent ready to graduate.

With Lightning up next, Sabres ready to utilize tough guy Dalton Smith

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 31, 2019

BUFFALO – Long before the Sabres signed him to a two-way contract Monday, Dalton Smith seemed destined to reach the NHL.

In 2010, the Columbus Blue Jackets drafted the 6-foot-2, 210-pound winger 34th overall. Second-round picks, of course, are expected to make the big leagues.

But Smith's road to the NHL would be long and arduous.

His stint as a bonafide prospect was short. After spending two seasons with Columbus' AHL affiliate, he started bouncing around the minors as a tough guy.

Six years ago, Smith fought a whopping 20 times. Three years ago, he spent the entire season in the ECHL.

When Smith, 27, joined the Rochester Americans for the 2017-18 campaign, he was on his sixth team in five seasons.

So Monday, Smith's first day in NHL after playing exactly 400 minor league games over eight seasons, was a little surreal.

"It's been crazy," said Smith, who signed a one-year, two-way contract worth \$700,000 in the NHL. "I've been pinching myself every once in a while. But, yeah, it's been unbelievable, something I've been waiting for for a long time. I'm just very grateful for the opportunity."

That opportunity will likely materialize tonight against the Tampa Bay Lightning, a team that has pushed around the Sabres this season.

Not only has Tampa Bay beaten the Sabres all three meetings this season (and 19 of the last 23), their Atlantic Division rival has knocked two regulars – forward Vladimir Sobotka and defenseman Rasmus Dahlin – out of the lineup with dirty hits.

In the aftermath of both, the Sabres had no physical response, leading to cries they're soft and need more toughness.

Lightning star Nikita Kucherov got away with hitting Sobotka late and low Nov. 8. Sobotka is out indefinitely with a lower-body injury and could miss the rest of the season.

The Sabres never sought payback from defenseman Erik Cernak after he elbowed Dahlin in the face and concussed him Nov. 25, sidelining the youngster eight games.

Enter Smith, who has fought 69 times in his career, according to hockeyfights.com.

"You can make a judgment on the timing of it," coach Ralph Krueger said of the Sabres signing Smith.

Krueger can say otherwise, but it certainly appears the Sabres summoned Smith to provide some muscle. Perhaps they want some retribution tonight.

The first-year coach attributed Smith's arrival to trying to find "the mix you need to be successful."

"I value the game away from the puck as much as the game with the puck because I believe that's where our game with the puck begins," Krueger said. "We've spoken a lot about the need for a certain amount of grit in different forms and what kind of personality do we need through the 11 or 12 forwards that are playing."

The Sabres, having lost winger Jeff Skinner for three to four weeks with a lower-body injury, needed to add someone up front. Of all the forwards in Rochester, Smith might've been the unlikeliest candidate.

For starters, Smith had an AHL contract, meaning he didn't attend training camp with the Sabres.

But Krueger said he and Amerks coach Chris Taylor, who subbed in Buffalo earlier this season, discussed Smith and the growth he has showcased.

"We did speak about him early in the season and just the way he has grown," said Krueger, who wouldn't commit to using Smith against the Lightning. "The coaching staff there is really excited about how he's worked on his skill set and his defensive ability."

He added: "He came on the radar really pretty quick, actually, when Chris went back, that there was a huge improvement over (the) last year in him. So we kind of had him earmarked as an option."

On Sunday, Taylor called Smith to tell him he was needed in Buffalo. To bring him up, the Sabres had to give him an NHL contract.

"It's definitely a big shock," Smith told a crowd of reporters following Monday's practice inside KeyBank Center. "I'm just so happy and so grateful for the opportunity. It's a dream come true."

After Smith learned he had earned a new contract and his first trip to the NHL, he called his father, Derrick, who played 527 NHL games, mostly with the Philadelphia Flyers in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Smith said when he told him, he FaceTimed so he could see his reaction.

"He was so happy," Smith said. "It's something he's worked on with me since I could walk basically. So he was very proud."

Smith has fought 20 times in 114 games with the Amerks, becoming a fan favorite. His penalty minute totals annually soar over 100.

"I love the physical game, getting under guys' skin and finishing my checks and sticking up for teammates when it's needed," he said. "That's stuff I've always kind of done being the oldest of five, the big brother mentality."

But Smith, who has scored 36 goals as a pro, including one this season, said he also tried to adapt as the game changed, working on his speed and defense.

On Monday, Smith practiced at left wing beside center Curtis Lazar and Evan Rodrigues. Smith's could push Jimmy Vesey out of the lineup.

"We just think there's an interesting development," Krueger said of the progression that helped Smith reach the NHL. "So we're not just looking at players in Rochester with numbers that are evident for everybody to see."

MVP-type season earns Sabres captain Jack Eichel spot in NHL All-Star Game

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO – A stellar season in which he has scored 24 goals and 52 points in 39 games and generated MVP talk has helped Sabres captain Jack Eichel earn a spot in the NHL All-Star Game for the third straight season, the league announced today.

Eichel, who will play for the Atlantic Division, was one of 37 players selected by the NHL's Hockey Operations Department. The league previously announced the captains of the four divisions.

The American will be the seventh player to represent the Sabres in at least three NHL All-Star Games, joining Rick Martin (seven), Gilbert Perreault (six), Dominik Hasek (five), Mike Ramsey (four), Phil Housley (three) and Alexander Mogilny (three).

Eichel recently enjoyed a 17-game point streak, the second-longest in franchise history. His 24 goals are tied for third in the league. His 52 points rank seventh.

In other all-star news, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin can still receive a spot in the game as part of the "Last Men In" vote at NHL.com. Fans voted Sabres winger Jeff Skinner into last year's game as the final member of the Atlantic Division.

Sabres sign tough guy Dalton Smith to one-year, two-way contract

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres have signed forward Dalton Smith to a one-year, two-way contract worth \$700,000, the team announced this morning.

Smith, 27, has been playing on an AHL deal with the Rochester Americans.

Update: Smith is on the ice with Sabres for this afternoon's practice. The Sabres host the Tampa Bay Lightning, a team that has pushed them around this season, Tuesday.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound Smith possesses an agitating style and regularly fights. In seven AHL seasons, he has compiled 26 goals, 54 points and 646 penalty minutes in 340 games.

Smith has surpassed 100 penalty minutes four times as a pro, including in each of his first two seasons with the Amerks.

The Amerks are 71-31-12 with Smith in the lineup.

This year, he has compiled one goal, three points and 27 penalty minutes in 21 appearances.

The Columbus Blue Jackets drafted Smith in the second round in 2010, 34th overall. His father, Derrick, played 537 NHL games.

In other news, the Sabres announced today Saturday's home game against the Florida Panthers will start at 1 p.m. instead of 7 p.m. The Bills, of course, play a wild card playoff game against the Houston Texans at 4:30 p.m.

Sabres forward Jack Eichel to represent team at NHL All-Star game

WKBW

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Buffalo Sabres forward Jack Eichel will represent the team at this year's NHL's All-Star Weekend.

It's the third year in a row Eichel will be taking part in the NHL All-Star Weekend festivities.

The captain leads the Sabres with 24 goals and 28 assists. The festivities will take place in St. Louis on January 24 and January 25.

Buffalo Sabres game moved up to 1:00 p.m. because of Bills playoff game

By David Vogan

WKBW

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres have announced the team will play the Florida Panthers at 1:00 p.m. instead of 7:00 p.m. Saturday (January 4).

The move comes as the Buffalo Bills gear up for their playoff match-up against the Houston Texans that same day.

"We are happy to announce this start time change so that all of our fans can enjoy the Buffalo Bills playoff game on Jan. 4 after our Sabres game," Buffalo Sabres Co-Owner and President Kim Pegula said. "Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other, and we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible."

The Sabres will celebrate '90s Night' at the KeyBank Center Saturday afternoon.

You can watch the Bills take on the Texans right here on 7ABC. Pre-game coverage begins with the 7 Eyewitness News sports team's Countdown to Kickoff at 1:30 p.m. Saturday, followed by ABC coverage of Wild Card Weekend.. Kickoff is at 4:35 p.m. followed by a special 7 Eyewitness News broadcast.

Saturday's Sabres game changed to 1 p.m. due to Bills game

WIVB

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – This Saturday's Buffalo Sabres game against the Florida Panthers at KeyBank Center will start at 1 p.m. rather than 7 p.m. as originally scheduled.

The start time change is due to the Buffalo Bills' Wild Card Weekend game against the Houston Texans at 4:30 p.m. on Saturday.

The Sabres will celebrate 90s Night on Saturday afternoon, welcoming back over 20 Sabres alumni from the 1990s.

Buffalo Sabres' Jack Eichel named to All Star team

By Stu Boyar

WGRZ

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel will represent the Sabres at the NHL's All Star festivities the weekend of January 24 and 25 in St. Louis.

It's the third straight season Eichel has been named an All Star.

In his second year as Sabres captain Eichel is having the best year of his career. Eichel leads the Sabres with 24 goals, 28 assists and 52 points.

Eichel's career high in goals is 28. He had a personal point streak that last 18 games. That tied the franchise record set by Gilbert Perreault during the 1971-72 season.

There's a chance second year defenseman Rasmus Dahlin could join Eichel for the All Star weekend. Dahlin is on NHL All-Star Last Men In fan vote ballot.

Voting for the Last Men In opens Wednesday at noon and closes Friday, Jan. 10, at 11:59 p.m.

Buffalo Sabres change start time for January 4 game against Florida

WGRZ

December 30, 2019

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres announced Monday that the start time for the January 4 game against the Florida Panthers will be moved to 1 p.m.

They're moving it so fans can cheer on the Buffalo Bills when they take on the Houston Texans in the NFL wild card game, which is scheduled to start at 4:35 p.m.

"We are happy to announce this start time change so that all of our fans can enjoy the Buffalo Bills playoff game on Jan. 4 after our Sabres game," Buffalo Sabres Co-Owner and President Kim Pegula said. "Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other, and we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible. We would like to thank the Florida Panthers organization for their understanding and willingness to change the start time."

The game will be televised on MSG, but radio listeners will have to tune into WBEN 930 AM instead of WGR 550 AM due to Bills programming.

'A dream come true': Smith's long journey brings him to Buffalo

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 30, 2019

For most, the journey from Oshawa, Ontario to Buffalo takes a bit under three hours. It's a 135-mile wrap around Lake Ontario on the QEW, about an hour past Toronto.

Dalton Smith's path has been less conventional. The Oshawa native played his junior career in Ottawa, where his combination of offense and physicality made him a second-round draft pick by the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2010.

Smith's pro career began in Springfield, Massachusetts in 2012. He played parts of two seasons there for Columbus' AHL affiliate, followed by stops in Syracuse, Providence, and Lehigh Valley. He spent the 2016-17 season with the ECHL Florida Everblades and has played with Rochester on AHL deals since.

The mileage showed in his smile following his first NHL practice with the Sabres on Monday. Not only did it exude gratitude for his first NHL deal, the missing teeth were indicative of the price he paid to get here.

"It's been crazy," Smith said. "I've been pinching myself every once in a while. But, yeah, it's been unbelievable, something I've been waiting for a long time. I'm just very grateful for the opportunity and excited to work as hard as I can as see what happens."

Smith got the call from Amerks coach Chris Taylor on Sunday night. He Facetimed his dad, longtime Flyers forward Derrick Smith, then packed his bags and readied for Monday's practice. Though he was aware of "some interest" from the Sabres, the deal came as no less of a shock.

In truth, the team's interest has its roots in Taylor's time filling in as an assistant on Ralph Krueger's staff in Buffalo. Taylor's relationship with Krueger strengthened during that time and, shortly after his return to Rochester, he reported a dramatic improvement in Smith's game.

Smith's had a penchant for racking up penalty minutes since his junior career. His page on Hockeyfights.com lists 79 professional fights between the regular season and postseason, plus a few more if you count exhibition games and rookie tournaments.

Krueger said that physicality will be a welcomed addition to the Sabres' mix, though it's not the only trait that brought Smith to Buffalo.

"Everybody here knows that I value the game away from the puck as much as the game with the puck because I believe that's where our game with the puck begins," Krueger said. "We've spoken a lot about the need for a certain amount of grit in different forms and what kind of personality do we need through the 11 or 12 forwards that are playing.

"... We're not just looking at players in Rochester with numbers that are evident for everybody to see. I speak a lot here about working on the statistics that aren't measurable. Like, are we the best tracking team in the National Hockey League? Are we a team that, in the D-zone, helps out our defensemen on retrievals to get puck possession better than everybody else? All those kinds of stats have no numbers, really, that are measurable. That's where a player like Dalton, which his character and his personality and what he's done with the group in Rochester, it's impressed us. So, let's take a look at him."

Smith credits Taylor and his staff with helping improve the details of his defensive game since he arrived in Rochester in 2017. By all accounts, his physical play has made him a fan favorite in Rochester among fans and teammates alike.

Victor Olofsson and Rasmus Asplund both said that on nights when the Amerks felt flat last season, Smith was an igniter.

"If you're having a tough night, he's the type of player who can turn a game around by just being out there and hitting guys and bringing the energy," Olofsson said. "He's a great player to have on the team and an even better person."

"He's one of those guys who never gets the headlines in the newspapers or gets all the attention in the media, but he's so important to have in the team," added Asplund. "He was really important for us last year in Rochester. He's bringing it every night, every day, and he's pushing all the guys to get better every day. I'm really happy for him so I hope he gets a couple minutes to enjoy it as well."

Krueger has not confirmed whether Smith will be in the lineup for the Sabres' home game against Tampa Bay on Tuesday. If he does play, don't expect him to shy away from what got him here.

"I love the physical game, getting under guys' skin and finishing my checks and sticking up for teammates when it's needed," he said. "That's stuff I've always kind of done being the oldest of five, the big brother mentality."

Lines at Monday's practice

68 Victor Olofsson - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
71 Evan Rodrigues - 27 Curtis Lazar - 13 Jimmy Vesey / 67 Dalton Smith
43 Conor Sheary - 90 Marcus Johansson - 74 Rasmus Asplund

6 Marco Scandella - 10 Henri Jokiharju
19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 62 Brandon Montour
33 Colin Miller - 4 Zach Bogosian

35 Linus Ullmark
40 Carter Hutton

Eichel named to 2020 Atlantic Division All-Star team

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 30, 2019

For the third year in a row, Jack Eichel will represent the Buffalo Sabres at the NHL's All-Star Weekend.

This year's festivities will take place on Jan. 24 and 25 in St. Louis. The Skills Challenge will take place Friday night and the All-Star Game will be played on Saturday. The NHL announced the rosters for the Atlantic, Metropolitan, Central and Pacific division teams this afternoon.

The Atlantic Division roster consists of Eichel, captain David Pastrnak (BOS), forwards Tyler Bertuzzi (DET), Anthony Duclair (OTT), Jonathan Huberdeau (FLA) and Auston Matthews (TOR), defensemen Shea Weber (MTL) and Victor Hedman (TBL), and goaltenders Tuukka Rask (BOS) and Frederik Andersen (TOR).

Eichel, in his second season as Sabres captain, leads Buffalo with 24 goals, 28 assists and 52 points.

His season has been highlighted by an 18-game personal point streak, which tied the franchise record set by Gilbert Perreault in 1971-72. Eichel recorded 32 points (16+16) in that stretch.

The streak was the NHL's fifth-longest personal point streak in the last decade, trailing only Taylor Hall (26 in 2017-18), Patrick Kane (26 in 2015-16 and 20 in 2018-19) and Sidney Crosby (25 in 2010-11).

With 24 goals in 39 games so far this season, Eichel is only four goals away from matching his previous best goal total of 28, set last season. Eichel's output through 40 team games currently has him on pace to finish the season with 50 goals and 108 points, which would be the highest goal and point totals by a Sabre since Pat LaFontaine (53+95) and Alexander Mogilny (76+51) in 1992-93.

He could become just the fifth player in franchise history to score 50 goals. LaFontaine, Mogilny, Rick Martin (2x) and Danny Gare (2x) are the others.

Eichel also has recorded 15 multi-point games this season, tying for ninth-most in the NHL. He's second in the NHL with six multi-goal games and his eight multi-assist games are tied for fifth-most. And he's already recorded at least three points seven times this season, topping his previous career-high total (6) set in 2016-17.

With his 50th point of the season on Dec. 17 at Toronto, Eichel became the first Sabre to reach 50 points in 35 or fewer games since 1992-93 (LaFontaine and Mogilny). He joins Martin as the only other player in franchise history to record at least 20 goals and 50 points in each of his first five NHL seasons.

Meanwhile, defenseman Rasmus Dahlin is on the 2020 NHL All-Star Last Men In fan vote ballot. For the second straight season, the NHL is allowing fans to select four players from a list of 31 players - one from each NHL team as determined by the League's Hockey Operations Department. The highest vote-getters by division then will be added to their respective All-Star rosters.

Voting for the Last Men In opens Wednesday at noon and closes Friday, Jan. 10, at 11:59 p.m. ET.

Dahlin is fourth in team scoring with 21 points (2+19).

Start time for Saturday's game vs. Florida moved to 1 p.m.

Sabres.com

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres today announced that the start time for the team's game against the Florida Panthers this Saturday, Jan. 4 at KeyBank Center has been changed from 7 p.m. to 1 p.m. The game will be televised on MSG and can be heard on WBEN 930 AM instead of WGR 550 AM due to Bills programming. The team will celebrate '90s Night presented by Roswell Park Comprehensive Care Center on Saturday afternoon, welcoming back more than 20 Sabres alumni from the decade.

"We are happy to announce this start time change so that all of our fans can enjoy the Buffalo Bills playoff game on Jan. 4 after our Sabres game," Buffalo Sabres Co-Owner and President Kim Pegula said. "Buffalo has a great tradition of all of our teams and fans supporting each other, and we want to make sure we can accommodate everyone the best way possible. We would like to thank the Florida Panthers organization for their understanding and willingness to change the start time."

The following alumni are scheduled to attend the game and will welcome fans in the concourse beforehand:

Donald Audette
Matthew Barnaby
Stu Barnes
Doug Bodger
Dave Hannan
Grant Ledyard
Clint Malarchuk
Brad May
Jay McKee
Scott Metcalfe
Randy Moller
Craig Muni
Michael Peca
Derek Plante
Wayne Primeau
Rob Ray
Darryl Shannon
Richard Smehlik
Pierre Turgeon
Rick Vaive
Dixon Ward
Rhett Warrener

Sabres sign Smith to one-year, two-way contract

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

December 30, 2019

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has signed forward Dalton Smith to a one-year, two-way contract with an average annual value of \$700,000.

Smith, 27, has one goal, three assists and 27 penalty minutes in 21 games with the Rochester Americans this season.

The 6-foot-2, 210-pound forward signed a one-year AHL contract with Rochester on July 1.

Last season, he recorded eight points (2+6) and a team-high 111 penalty minutes in 48 games with the Amerks.

A native of Oshawa, Ontario, Smith was drafted by the Columbus Blue Jackets in the second round (34th overall) of the 2010 NHL Draft.