



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Jonas Johansson to make first NHL start after 'hiccups, road blocks'

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 5, 2020

Jonas Johansson could not have envisioned that he would realize his dream under such difficult circumstances. After two-plus seasons in the minors, the 24-year-old goalie replaced Carter Hutton with the Buffalo Sabres facing a four-goal deficit in the second period Tuesday night.

Two minutes later, Nathan MacKinnon and Mikko Rantanen, two top forwards in the National Hockey League, skated down the ice for an odd-man rush against Johansson. Rantanen, a 31-goal scorer last season, snapped the puck off the near post and over Johansson' shoulder.

First shot faced in the NHL, first goal against.

"Not the way you want the game to go ... " Johansson said with a smile. He didn't fold in the face of adversity, though. Johansson stopped each of the next 13 shots he faced, including a highlight-reel save in which he extended his left leg pad to stifle a backhanded attempt by Gabriel Landeskog.

Johansson's performance in the third period of a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche ensured he will start either Thursday against Detroit or Friday at Madison Square Garden against the Rangers. It will be the next chapter in a journey that has included injuries and doubt.

"It's been like a roller coaster for me, ever since I got drafted," Johansson, a third-round draft choice in 2014, said following practice Wednesday. "This has always been the goal. It's nice to get rewarded and to be here. I'm just taking it in and enjoying every moment."

Johansson's career arch could explain why he was not shaken by his welcome-to-the-NHL moment. An infection and illness kept him off the ice at the start of the 2014-15 season, and the presence of another talented goalie prospect caused his Swedish junior team, Brynas, to loan Johansson to Almtuna, which competes among the country's second-tier programs.

Johansson never competed in a IIHF World Junior Championship game, and he played only eight games in the Swedish Hockey League before signing an entry-level contract with Buffalo in 2017.

Johansson was assigned to the ECHL's Cincinnati Cyclones at the start of 2017-18, only to have his season shortened by a broken finger. He had a .909 save percentage and 3.13 goals-against average in 27 games with the Cyclones, and struggled in his seven games with the Amerks that season.

"One of the things we know and believe about Jonas is that he's going to reach his potential, whatever that is – NHL starting goalie, NHL backup, American League starter," Sabres assistant general manager Randy Sexton said. "We don't know what that is, but we believe he's going to become as good as he's capable of becoming for a few reasons. He's incredibly committed in every way. He eats right, he looks after his body, he gets proper nutrition, he rests, he hydrates, he works out the right way. Every second of every day of Jonas' life he is focused on learning to do the right things to improve."

Missing time didn't affect Johansson's psyche, either. He responded with a strong training camp in 2018, highlighted by his 13-save performance in a 4-1 preseason win at Columbus. Johansson proceeded to post a .908 save percentage in 27 games for Cincinnati and, more important, he had four wins with a .926 save percentage in five starts for the Amerks.

Last February, Johansson arrived in Buffalo for a routine scope of his right knee and expected to miss only a few weeks, providing him with ample time to return for Cincinnati's postseason. He discovered his meniscus needed to be repaired.

His season was over.

"The surgery is something that's not really spoken about, nor should it be the focal point of the accomplishments he's had, but I think what it does is it brings you back to the drive and determination that JJ's had throughout his career," Seamus Kotyk, the Sabres' goaltending development coach, said. "There's been a lot of hiccups, road blocks, from an injury standpoint. ... I'm just happy for him because I see what he puts into it. I see what he gives. When someone is rewarded for hard, honest work, you have to feel good for that person."

Johansson spent several weeks in Buffalo while recovering from the procedure and returned to Sweden to complete his physical therapy. Most of his summer workouts were spent on a stationary bike or rowing machine.

The first on-ice workout came in June during the Sabres' prospect development camp in LECOM Harborcenter. However, Johansson was not cleared to drop into a butterfly. Competing in those practices reminded him he was on track to return to full strength.

Training camp didn't go as planned, though. Johansson allowed three goals on 15 shots in a 5-4 preseason win over Pittsburgh at Penn State University. Johansson denied that his status as a pending restricted free agent caused him to place more pressure on himself in camp.

Kotyk, though, noticed a significant change in Johansson's performance once he was able to earn consistent playing time in Rochester.

"I think it was him just trying to figure out, the last year of his contract, I'm sure there was pressure he was putting on himself early," Kotyk said of Johansson's training camp. "Wanting to perform. It's a new coaching staff at the NHL level. ... I knew he could show more."

"I think it's just when he was assigned to Rochester it took time to find some starts and when he did I really believed he just put the pressures and expectations that he puts upon himself aside, and it looked like he just decided to play some hockey. I think the consistency was there that he needed in his game. I think the story is starting to write itself right now."

Johansson won 13 of his 16 starts in Rochester, posting a .925 save percentage and 2.19 goals against average. He was selected to represent the Amerks and Sabres in the AHL All-Star Classic, and established himself as the organization's No. 3 goalie.

Johansson was recalled by the Sabres on Jan. 29, one day after Linus Ullmark suffered a lower-body injury that is expected to keep him out of the lineup three-to-four weeks. It's uncertain how long Johansson will be in Buffalo, but he's on track to accomplish another feat that once seemed in doubt.

"There were times for sure when I was down in Cincinnati where you're really wondering if it's ever going to happen," Johansson said. "You have to keep on going."

Upper Deck hockey card mistakes Sabres' Henri Jokiharju for Evan Rodrigues

The Buffalo News

February 5, 2020

Things haven't gone that well for Evan Rodrigues this season. The Sabres' winger has requested a trade and has seen his playing time significantly reduced.

He now has been mistaken for teammate Henri Jokiharju on a recently released Upper Deck hockey trading card.

The card was found by Luke Buckley, who co-hosts the Charging Buffalo podcast and also does play-by-play for Medaille College basketball. He posted the image on Twitter.

"I got it from Tim Horton's," Buckley said. "I'm an avid collector so when I saw Tim's was doing a hockey card promotion with the Sabres I was stoked. They do it frequently in Canada so I'd have to make trades with collectors from Canada previously to get those cards.

"The set it's in is just the Tim's Sabres set. If I recall correctly it is a 30-card set with 10 insert cards. I was really just getting a coffee and was delighted to find out they were offering packs to rip. That's a joy for any collector." In reply to the initial tweet, Upper Deck cited an error by its photo vendor. "When we realized the error, it was too late to reprint and get it to the event on time."

This was a labeling error by our photo vendor and when we realized the error, it was too late to reprint and get it to the event on time. This will be an uncorrected error card. — Upper Deck Hockey (@UpperDeckHockey)
February 5, 2020

The error is likely to increase the value of the card.

Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin suffers 'setback,' questionable to face Red Wings

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 5, 2020

Good news finally arrived for the Buffalo Sabres when Rasmus Dahlin stepped on to the LECOM Harborcenter ice for practice Wednesday afternoon.

Dahlin's return lasted only a few minutes. The 19-year-old defenseman left the ice before practice drills began and remains day to day with the upper-body injury that prevented him from playing in the Sabres' 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday night.

Though coach Ralph Krueger told the media Dahlin's injury is not thought to be "long term," the former first overall draft pick suffered a setback that makes him "questionable" to be in the lineup Thursday night against the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center.

"You can see he remains day to day for sure with this upper-body setback," Krueger said. "We'll keep monitoring it. He's questionable for tomorrow against Detroit, but it's definitely not a long-term injury."

In other injury news, center Johan Larsson (lower body) is on track to play Thursday night, while center Curtis Lazar (illness) missed practice Tuesday.

Krueger declined to reveal how Dahlin suffered the injury, though the latter was on the wrong end of a big hit last Saturday against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Dahlin had one assist with a plus-1 rating in 17:10 of the 2-1 overtime win, only to miss practice Monday for what Krueger called "maintenance."

Dahlin then skated Tuesday morning, only to be scratched against the Avalanche. He has three goals with 27 assists and a minus-2 rating in 44 games, and his .681 points per game are on pace for the best single-season mark by a Sabres defenseman since Brian Campbell (.683) in 2007-08. Dahlin is also on pace for the first 50-point season by a Sabres defenseman since Garry Galley in 1995-96.

With his assist Jan. 30 against Montreal, Dahlin passed Bobby Orr for the fourth-most points (74) recorded by a teenage NHL defenseman. He trails Phil Housley (132), Ray Bourque (79) and Rick Hampton (76).

Dahlin missed eight games after sustaining a concussion against Tampa Bay on Nov. 25.

Larsson had zero shots on goal in 14:07 on Saturday against Columbus. He has four goals and 12 assists with a plus-5 rating in 46 games this season. With Larsson and Lazar unavailable Tuesday, the Sabres recalled Rasmus Asplund, who had two shots on goal in 9:35 against Colorado.

Linus Ullmark (lower body), Victor Olofsson (lower body) and Kyle Okposo (upper body) were listed as week-to-week on the Sabres' injury report. Wingers Tage Thompson (shoulder) and Vladimir Sobotka (knee) remain out indefinitely.

Remi Elie (upper body), Casey Fitzgerald (upper body) and Kevin Porter (lower body) are day-to-day for Rochester.

Roster move

Jean-Sebastien Dea was assigned to Rochester in time for the Amerks' game in Cleveland on Wednesday night. In a corresponding move, Scott Wilson was recalled by the Sabres.

Wilson, 27, had nine goals with nine assists in 27 games with the Amerks. He was pointless in two games during his previous stint with the Sabres this season. Dea, meanwhile, played only 10:07 in Buffalo's 6-1 loss to Colorado on Tuesday.

Back to work

The Sabres focused on special teams Wednesday in preparation for their matchup against the Detroit Red Wings in KeyBank Center.

With Dahlin out, Jeff Skinner remained on the top power-play unit, which also featured Rasmus Ristolainen, Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Marcus Johansson. The Sabres' power play went 0-for-2 against Colorado, while they did not have to kill a penalty.

Detroit (12-38-4) has a negative-96 goal differential and has lost nine games in a row. The Sabres are 10-2-2 against the Red Wings since the start of the 2016-17 season. The game will be televised by NBC Sports Network.

Jonas Johansson soaking in his first NHL experience

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

February 5, 2020

When Linus Ullmark went down with a lower-body injury back on Jan. 28 in a 5-2 loss to the Ottawa Senators, the Buffalo Sabres called up 24-year-old netminder Jonas Johansson from the Rochester Americans to back up goalie Carter Hutton in Buffalo.

It has been a long road for Johansson to get to this point, starting out as the Sabres' third round pick (61st overall) in the 2014 NHL Draft out of Sweden's SuperElit Junior League with Brynäs IF. From there, he went from playing in the Swedish second-tier league Allsvenskan to signing his entry-level contract and starting his North American career in the ECHL to getting some work in the American Hockey League with the Amerks to finally earning his first call up in the National Hockey League.

"It's been like a roller coaster for me, even ever since I got drafted," Johansson said following Wednesday's practice at Harborcenter. "This has always been the goal, so it's nice to get rewarded and to be here. I'm just taking it in and enjoying every moment."

In his third full season in North America, Johansson has really started to set himself up as a legitimate goaltending option for the Sabres organization in the coming couple of years.

Last season was when he first started to show his potential with a strong start with the Cincinnati Cyclones, going 18-5-3 with a 2.60 goals-against average and a .908 save percentage. In some limited action with the Amerks that year, he went 4-1-0 with a 2.26 goals-against average and a .926 save percentage. However, a mid-season injury halted his progress after it was determined that he needed season-ending surgery in February.

However, he bounced back nicely in training camp and went to work on focusing in on a full-time spot with the Amerks in 2019-20.

"I don't know if I put pressure on myself more than usual. You always want to prepare, you always want to play well, but I think I just felt better and better the longer the year went starting from camp," Johansson said. "Up until now, I feel more comfortable in the net so that's a good thing."

This season has been the breakout year for Johansson with the Amerks as he posted a 13-3-3 record in Rochester with a 2.19 goals-against average and a .925 save percentage in 20 games played at the time of his call up last week Wednesday. At the time of his call up, Johansson had ranked third in the AHL in goals-against average, while his save percentage had him ranked fourth in the league.

Now that the rookie netminder has had some time to get acclimated to the NHL level of hockey, he's starting to notice the differences.

"Everything around is [up another] level. Even though it's really good in Rochester, you can definitely tell this is another level [of hockey], even in practice and how things work around the game," Johansson said.

The Sabres have played three games since Johansson was called up from Rochester, and he was able to make his NHL debut on Tuesday night in a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche. He entered the game at the 10:58 mark of the second period after Hutton had given up five goals-against on 13 shots on goal.

It may not have been the debut that he was expecting to make, but Johansson says he has to be ready for anything on a nightly basis.

"You always try to stay prepared," Johansson said. "I prepare myself before the game exactly as I would if I were to play, so you really can't do much about it when you go in there or you stay on the bench. You just got to have to deal with it as it comes, I guess.

"I try not to focus on what the score is or who we're playing against. I just try to help the team as much as I can and do my part. That's what I try to focus on even if it's a 1-1 game or a 5-1 game."

Despite giving up a goal on his first shot faced in the NHL, a decent shot from forward Mikko Rantanen off the post and in the top part of the net, he was able to turn away the remaining 13 shots he faced on the night.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger was certainly pleased with the effort from his young netminder coming in cold off the bench.

"We really liked the way he came in," Krueger said with Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Wednesday morning on WGR. "He ended up eating [a goal-against] off a 2-on-1 early. It was an unbelievable shot that he really didn't have a chance on the short side, and we thought he settled in nicely and showed a very calm first performance and made some nice plays with the puck... There weren't a lot of holes in his game and there were some scoring chances in the third as we were trying to force some opportunities at the other end to give our fans something to cheer about going home. We thought overall it was a really good performance from him, and probably that's one positive that we all need to take out of last night was his performance."

"He made some really big saves," Sabres forward Conor Sheary said of his young goaltender on Wednesday. "In the third, he probably had three or four Grade-A chances that he turned away. It's good for him to get that opportunity, obviously in some unfortunate circumstances, but maybe better that way [because] he wasn't thinking about it all day and he just got to jump in there and know he can play at this level. I think we're going to need him moving forward with Linus out, so hopefully that will grow his confidence."

With the Sabres set to close out their five-game homestand on Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings, followed by a Friday night road matchup with the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden, it is likely that Johansson will get the opportunity to make his first career NHL start. What Krueger did not confirm on Wednesday is which of the two games that he would have the chance to start.

In spite of that, Johansson is already looking forward to getting the opportunity to get his first start under his belt in the NHL.

"There's some excitement, for sure," Johansson said. "It would be really awesome to play some more up here, but I feel prepared and I feel confident, so I'm just feeling ready and prepared if the opportunity comes."

Before Tuesday's game against Colorado, the team announced that forwards Johan Larsson (lower-body injury) and Curtis Lazar (illness), as well as defenseman Rasmus Dahlin (upper-body injury) were all day-to-day. On Wednesday, Lazar and Dahlin both were still not back to action, while Larsson was back skating with his teammates.

Dahlin had taken the ice just before practice began to test his upper-body injury, but did not take part in the team skate that followed. Krueger said that Dahlin is questionable to Thursday's game against Detroit and that he remains day-to-day and it's not a long-term injury.

Krueger also said that he feels like Larsson will be good to go for Thursday against the Red Wings, but they would confirm that in the morning.

Here are the lines from practice on Wednesday:

Forwards:

Vesey - Eichel - Reinhart
Skinner - Rodrigues - Asplund
Sheary - Johansson - Frolik
Girgensons - Larsson - Dea

Defense:

Montour - Ristolainen
McCabe - Jokiharju
Pilut - Miller
Bogosian

With Dahlin still not practicing, the defense rotated in and out with one another at practice.

Here is also a look at the power play units:

PP1:

Reinhart
Eichel - Skinner - Johansson
Ristolainen

PP2:

Vesey
Montour - Rodrigues - Sheary
Miller

Later on Wednesday, the Sabres called up forward Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans, while assigning J.S. Dea back to the Amerks.

Krueger: The play in the loss to Colorado was 'not acceptable'

WGR 550

February 5, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres dropped, what felt like, a must-win game on home ice on Tuesday with a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche at KeyBank Center.

Buffalo's five-game homestand has not gone the way the team had probably envisioned it going with losses in three of their four games against teams like the Avalanche, the Montreal Canadiens and the Ottawa Senators.

Tuesday saw the Sabres come apart in the second period, giving up four goals to go from a 2-1 deficit after 20 minutes to a 6-1 deficit in a matter of minutes. 24-year-old goaltender Jonas Johansson was forced into the game and made his NHL debut after Carter Hutton was pulled after Buffalo's fifth goal-against of the night.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger joined Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Wednesday as part of his weekly appearance on WGR, and he called the second period of last night's game 20 of the most disappointing minutes of the season.

"Taking six goals in a 20-minute period is not acceptable," Krueger said. "There were individual breakdowns right through it. We are going through it right now in the coach's room. There's a lot of situations that we can learn from, but our frustration is there, and we are going to work with it and we're going to do all we can to improve from this disappointment"

While the Sabres had their chances in this game, Colorado took advantage of their chances when given theirs, and they did so often. The Avalanche even didn't have the greatest of starts to their game with the Sabres, but they ended up taking control of the game, especially early in the second period.

"We had a 13-13 shot clock at the halfway mark of the game, and it was just every time they went down, they're lethal," Krueger said. "Colorado is one of the better teams in the league, and you give them any spaces they use it and we certainly didn't. We came out of the starting blocks with a 7-1 shot total, and we didn't have a goal to show for it. It doesn't help you if you don't take advantage of a good start."

When asked how being pulled would affect Hutton, Krueger called Hutton a confident player that will continue to improve as he himself is the most critical, and Krueger believes he is someone who can help Buffalo get themselves in the right place.

In terms of Johansson's limited time out on the ice, Krueger was impressed with the rookie's stature in the crease.

"We really liked the way he came in," Krueger said. "He ended up eating [a goal-against] off a 2-on-1 early. It was an unbelievable shot that he really didn't have a chance on the short side, and we thought he settled in nicely and showed a very calm first performance and made some nice plays with the puck... There weren't a lot of holes in his game and there were some scoring chances in the third as we were trying to force some opportunities at the other end to give our fans something to cheer about going home. We thought overall it was a really good performance from him, and probably that's one positive that we all need to take out of last night was his performance."

Krueger is confident that Johansson will get his first NHL start at some point in this upcoming stretch of games as Linus Ullmark still recovers from his lower-body injury.

Other injured bodies that Krueger brought up the short-term was Curtis Lazar and Rasmus Dahlin, as he hopes that those two can be back for Thursday night's matchup with the Detroit Red Wings.

As for forward Victor Olofsson, Krueger said that he is still a few more games out from a possible return and will hopefully be back practicing with the team as soon as next week.

A look at some of the Sabres' ideal trade targets heading into the deadline

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 6, 2020

The idea makes sense – in theory.

After inheriting a last-place team in 2017, general manager Jason Botterill would use his honeymoon period to slowly build the Sabres with an eye toward the summer of 2020. He could start by improving the minor-league teams, then apply bandages to the NHL club. With a halfway decent player tossed in here and there, Buffalo could inch toward respectability, maybe make a playoff push and be primed for reinforcements when the roster and salary cap space really open up.

But theory has given way to reality. And the reality is Botterill can't wait until this summer.

Oh, sure, he can wait from a hockey standpoint. The draft floor is where franchise-altering deals usually happen. But the Sabres still have 14 home games left, which is nearly 35 percent of the schedule. The organization has 4,000 tickets to sell most nights and wants to convince 15,000 people to use the tickets they already bought. Season-ticket renewals and deposits will be due way before Botterill heads to the draft, and inaction on the team's part could lead to inaction from the fans and their checkbooks.

If Botterill waits until June and July to build a legitimate team, that will mean millions of dollars lost. Add in the anger that is giving way to apathy, and the time to do something is now.

The trade deadline is Feb. 24, giving Botterill less than three weeks to change the Sabres and their outlook. Nothing should be off the table. OK, so Jack Eichel, Rasmus Dahlin, Dylan Cozens and Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen are untouchable for their skills and potential, while Jeff Skinner isn't going anywhere with a no-movement clause. Anyone else can be moved for the right return.

And who should Botterill look to get? Here are a few ideas based on our look at the next three seasons. The Sabres need help all over, but the most pressing needs are:

A No. 2 center to back up Eichel until Cozens or Casey Mittelstadt are ready for the role in 2021-22 (or later). Second- and third-line right wingers.

Let's go hunting and aim for a real impact, keeping in mind the players' GMs might not be shopping them – unless they hear the right offer.

No. 2 centers

Dylan Strome, Chicago – Aside from the score sheet, the forward hasn't quite found a home with the Blackhawks. He's been a No. 2 center and a winger on the first and third lines.

In Buffalo, he can be the guy Skinner needs. Strome is a pass-first player. He's averaging 1.58 assists per 60 minutes over the last two seasons, which ranks 20th in the NHL. He takes only 1.78 shots per game, making him the type of center who'd turn Skinner into the star of the line.

As our Athletic cohorts in Chicago wrote, Strome is getting passed by Kirby Dach on the depth chart. The 22-year-old is a pending restricted free agent on a team that needs to give raises to other players. A trade with the Sabres could supply cost certainty and let the Blackhawks fill other needs.

Anthony Cirelli, Tampa Bay – Yeah, yeah, he's not going anywhere, as The Athletic's Joe Smith wrote. Aside from Cirelli's talent, the Lightning are Stanley Cup contenders. Since pummeling the Sabres in Sweden, their 27-10-3 record is the second-best in the NHL. They won't disrupt the run by subtracting a major piece.

But as much as the Bolts are focusing on the Cup, they still have to worry (at least a tiny bit) about next year. Like Strome, Cirelli is a pending RFA. Tampa already has \$73 million committed to 13 players, a list that includes only three defensemen. Will it have enough cash to pay Cirelli (and fellow RFA Mikhail Sergachev)?

Buffalo would. Cirelli is another pass-first playmaker who spends his nights feeding Steven Stamkos. Put the two-way player in the same role alongside Skinner or Olofsson.

Tomas Hertl, San Jose – This certainly won't help now. The 26-year-old had surgery this week to repair his torn ACL and MCL, knee injuries that might not be fully healed when training camp starts in September.

But these are uncertain times for the Sharks, whose last gasp to win a Cup with Joe Thornton and Patrick Marleau has failed miserably. Hertl has grown into San Jose's most popular player, but if management has any doubts about him or his knee problems, now is the time for a deal.

Hertl is in the second season of a four-year contract that pays \$5.625 million a year. The kicker, according to CapFriendly, is a highly limited modified no-trade clause that begins July 1. Hertl submits a three-team trade list, which leaves 28 teams off San Jose's radar. Until July 1, however, there are no limitations. The Sharks can send him anywhere.

In addition to getting older, the Sharks are near the bottom of the prospect rankings. They could prop up their future while the Sabres get a bona fide No. 2 center who gives fans hope for next season.

Right wingers

Kasperi Kapanen, Toronto – Edging toward being the odd man out with the Maple Leafs, the 23-year-old could be an impact player in Buffalo. He scores at higher rate per 60 minutes than Mitch Marner (albeit against weaker competition) and would immediately be the No. 2 right winger to Sam Reinhart.

He just signed a three-year deal worth \$3.2 million per season, so he'd fit into the Sabres' salary structure. He recently got scratched for oversleeping and being late to practice, increasing talk that Toronto may be willing to part with him.

Brendan Gallagher, Montreal – The 27-year-old checks the right boxes. He's coming off consecutive 30-goal seasons. He's a leader and would assume that role on a team that lacks them.

Since the Canadiens are in the same boat as the Sabres – trying to finish a rebuild to compete with the elite teams in the Atlantic Division – he's not on the market, according to our friends in Montreal. But he has what Buffalo needs.

Patrik Laine, Winnipeg – The Sabres desperately need scoring. Few players deliver like Laine, who ranks 10th in the NHL in goals since joining the league in 2016. The 21-year-old has seemingly fixed some of his five-on-five woes, boasting a 42-33 scoring edge after getting outscored 57-43 at even strength last year.

Laine, who was the subject of trade chatter during the summer before signing a two-year, \$13.5 million extension, certainly wouldn't come cheap.

Ondrej Kase, Anaheim – Coming off shoulder surgery that shortened his 2018-19 season, Kase has just seven goals in 47 games. But he's been effective when healthy. The 24-year-old potted 20 goals in 66 games two seasons ago and finished with 11 in just 30 outings last year.

He's in the second season of a three-year deal that averages \$2.6 million and is still an RFA when it expires, which puts the Ducks in an ideal position to keep a talented player who's relatively cheap. But they're seemingly behind Buffalo in their rebuild, and a couple of pieces for Kase could be enticing.

Viktor Arvidsson, Nashville – The Predators are going through big changes, including a swap of coaches. Part of the reason is a rough year for Arvidsson. The two-time 30-goal scorer was assaulted by St. Louis' Robert Bortuzzo and missed a month. Perhaps still struggling with the injury, his goals per game has dropped to 0.30 after previous totals of 0.59, 0.39 and 0.37.

But there's no denying the 26-year-old's talent and tenacity.

Patrick Kane, Chicago – There are so many reasons this name shouldn't even be on here. He's a Blackhawks icon and one of the NHL's best players. He has a no-movement clause. Although he's probably the greatest athlete in Buffalo history, he's not really a beloved member of the community because of his previous off-ice headlines.

But Kane is one of the few players in the NHL who could fix nearly all of the Sabres' main problems by himself. He's a 40-goal, 100-point player. He would alleviate the pressure on Eichel. He'd increase attendance simply through South Buffalonians alone. If there's one team that Kane would waive his no-move clause for, this is it.

It's a pipe dream. It obviously won't happen, but it's an impossibility that's interesting for fans to imagine.

However, there are legitimate trades that are possible, and Botterill needs to find them before more of the fans' money and attention go elsewhere.

Even for a player with a history of streaky scoring, Jeff Skinner's current drought has taken on unique significance

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

February 5, 2020

It's been 15 games since Jeff Skinner last potted a goal. That's it, that's the introduction.

When Skinner signed his long-term deal to stay with the Sabres, one thing he did not expect was a struggle to score goals. Yet in a season where things have started to go wrong in many ways, one of the biggest issues that has befallen the Sabres is where Skinner is expected to contribute the most.

"I know my job is to produce offensively and score goals to win games," Skinner said. "So for me, I think you try your best to help the team win games. That's obviously a big part of my role."

Since returning from the bye week and All-Star break, the wins have been difficult to come by. The Sabres have lost three of four games at home to kick off a stretch of nine out of 10 games at KeyBank Center. They've scored six goals in those four contests and Skinner hasn't even registered a point. The goal drought is one thing, but he hasn't had a point since Dec. 21.

Skinner's last goal came on Dec. 2 in the Sabres' 7-1 scoring bonanza over the Devils that ultimately cost John Hynes his job. Since then, he's dealt with an upper-body injury that kept him out of action for a month. The timing couldn't have been worse, as he was starting to resemble the player we watched last season prior to that injury in late December against Boston, albeit still without the goal scoring.

"He definitely had a setback with the injury, first of all. I spoke to you a lot just in the games leading up to the injury he was really finding his groove," coach Ralph Krueger said. "Lots of scoring chances, lots of shots, and the goals were just going to come and then he had that setback and I think right now just getting back to where we were there. I thought it's normal coming off a long injury. You might have a couple of games (where) you might have a little bit of a dip. We're also working hard together with Jeff to just get him back to that space."

"The pressure of scoring is so big on him and he needs to park that and just create chances again and get involved in our game 5-on-5 and the chances will follow. He wants to add and he feels that pressure because we aren't scoring as a team right now. We need to just get him back focused on doing all the other things and have that be a byproduct of his game."

The chances to score before and after his time on the shelf have seemed like a muddy, uphill battle. Unlike last season, Skinner hasn't spent a lot of time on a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart. That trio spent most of last season together under Phil Housley and led to a lot of point production for everyone. Krueger has been reticent to put them together full-time this season in part because of Victor Olofsson's success with Eichel and Reinhart. But even with Olofsson out with an injury, Skinner has been separated from them, apart from occasional shifts when they're pushing for a goal.

But a player like Skinner should be able to produce away from players like Eichel and Reinhart. The problem is he still needs an offensive muse. He's been on a line with Marcus Johansson for the majority of the season. In 5-on-5 minutes (via NaturalStatTrick.com), he's played 311:46 with Johansson and 184:31 away from him. It hasn't been a rousing success. Their CorsiFor percentage is 46.7, they've been outshot 160-151 and been on the ice together for more goals against than goals scored (14-9). In limited minutes, Skinner has had better fortune with both Eichel (unsurprisingly) and Johan Larsson but far worse with Casey Mittelstadt. What this points to is the need for Skinner to have a capable true center to work with. The lack of center depth in a middle-six role to help be a playmaker has been a known need since the summer.

What has made the decision to not get center help is that Skinner's cooldown from last season's 40-goal season (boosted by his high shooting percentage) is his history of scoring in bunches. Call it streaky if you wish, but the results work out the same way.

During his career, Skinner has had bouts where the goals dry up, although his current 15-game drought is the second-longest of his career. Look at how his goal scoring has gone through his career and who his two most

common forward teammates at 5-on-5 were (teammate stats via NaturalStatTrick.com; goal numbers via Hockey-Reference.com):

2010-2011 (Tuomo Ruutu, Chad LaRose)

31 goals scored in 26 of 82 games played

Goal droughts (games):4, 5, 6 (twice), 9

2011-2012 (Ruutu, Jussi Jokinen)

20 goals scored in 18 of 64 games

Goal droughts: 3 (six times), 4, 5, 9

2013 (Jordan Staal, Patrick Dwyer)

13 goals scored in 12 of 42 games

Goal droughts: 4 (three times), 5, 9

2013-2014 (Elias Lindholm, Eric Staal)

33 goals scored in 25 of 71 games

Goal droughts: 3 (twice), 4, 5 (three times), 8

2014-2015 (Lindholm, Victor Rask)

18 goals scored in 17 of 77 games

Goal droughts: 3, (twice), 4 (twice), 5, 7, 10, 18 to end the season

2015-2016 (Rask, Phillip Di Giuseppe)

28 goals scored in 21 of 82 games

Goal droughts: 3 (twice), 4 (three times), 5 (four times), 6, 7

2016-2017 (Rask, Lee Stempniak)

37 goals scored in 29 of 79 games

Goal droughts: 4, 5 (three times), 6, 7

2017-2018 (Derek Ryan, Lindholm)

24 goals scored in 21 of 82 games

Goal droughts: 3 (three times), 4 (twice), 5, 6 (twice), 8, 13

2018-2019 (Eichel, Reinhart)

Scored 40 goals in 30 of 82 games

Goal droughts: 3 (three times), 4 (twice), 8, 13

To go with his 15-game run, he's also had two four-game stretches without a goal this season. This isn't a "shoulda, coulda, woulda" scenario about what they paid to retain Skinner, nor is it a lament that GM Jason Botterill hasn't addressed a need at center immediately this year, but it's a warning for the future.

If Skinner isn't going to be reunited with Eichel, which it appears won't occur under Krueger this season, then finding a center next season — be it Dylan Cozens, a rejuvenated Mittelstadt, or an option outside of the organization — will be vital to make sure the investment in Skinner isn't a lost one.

Sabres' Conor Sheary focused on present, not thinking about trade

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 5, 2020

BUFFALO – In the near future – perhaps through a trade this month or as a free agent following the season – winger Conor Sheary will likely leave the Sabres, ending his disappointing two-year run here.

Sheary, 27, has struggled throughout his 124-game career with the Sabres, battling long slumps and scoring only 21 goals. He was even scratched three times in December.

Having scored 48 goals and earned two Stanley Cup rings over his first two and a half NHL seasons, Sheary arrived from the Pittsburgh Penguins with a track record of producing offense and winning.

But like so many players the Sabres have acquired over the last decade or so, he started struggling once he arrived in town.

Sheary has a 10-game goal drought entering Thursday's contest against the hapless Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center. The Sabres, meanwhile, have lost three of their last four outings.

"It's definitely frustrating not only that I'm not having personal success, I think the team is in a bit of a lull right now," Sheary said following Wednesday's practice. "You want to do what you can to get the team out of it, but you can only do your own part. I think as individuals throughout our lineup, I think if we get back to that, we'll be a more consistent team."

Consistency has dogged the 5-foot-8, 179-pound Sheary with the Sabres.

After scoring two goals Oct. 3 in Pittsburgh, opening night, he mustered just one over his next 22 games. Following another two-goal performance Dec. 2 against the New Jersey Devils, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger benched him eight days later.

Sheary scored twice over a three-game stretch in early January before sputtering again.

Krueger said he wants Sheary, who played a season-high 20 minutes, nine seconds Tuesday, "to be a spark plug and a ball of energy for us."

"When he's doing that, he adds to our game and his offensive production seems to be a byproduct of that," he said. "At the moment, he might be thinking here and there too much about the offense and not just doing the gritty work and the hard work."

"We saw that coming now, lately again. I'm sure the goals will follow if he keeps on that track."

That's partly why Sheary received a massive bump in ice time – he hadn't played that much since since the 2016-17 season – in the Sabres' ugly 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche. In the previous game, Saturday afternoon's 2-1 overtime win against the Columbus Blue Jackets, he skated just seven minutes, 56 seconds.

"It was a big jump," Sheary said of his playing time. "I don't know, it's just kind of how the game went, I think. Once we kind of lost it in the third there I think we were just rolling lines and got everyone into the game. With the 11 forwards, I happened to get a few more shifts. But, yeah, that was a big spike, that was different."

The diminutive Sheary knows he must play tenaciously to generate opportunities.

"I'm not a guy who's going to kind of score a flashy goal or dangle someone or score that way," said Sheary, who scored six of his 14 goals last season in the first 16 games. "I've probably scored 90% of my goals from within 10 feet of the net, so I think I just have to get back to getting to those dirty areas, and gritty I think is a good word."

"Sometimes when you're not scoring for a while, you try different things. But I think getting back to basics and what made me successful I think is important moving forward."

If Sheary starts scoring, the Sabres could move him before the Feb. 24 trade deadline. Despite his inconsistent play, he could be in demand.

The UMass product has already played 57 NHL playoff games and possesses the talent to play on scoring lines.

But Sheary doesn't want to think about his future.

"You just try to have a small-picture focus," he said. "I think I'm just going to worry about this game and helping this team right now. I don't want to look too far forward or get too far ahead of myself. I think if you're not living in the moment, it's going to be a long year and a long season. I think right now, we're focused on the next game, and that's my focus as well."

Sabres recall Scott Wilson from Amerks, send Jean-Sebastien Dea back

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 5, 2020

BUFFALO – The Sabres recalled winger Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans this afternoon and sent forward Jean-Sebastien Dea back to the AHL club.

Dea, 25, went pointless in two appearances during his recall.

Wilson, 27, has spent most of the season with the Amerks, scoring nine goals and 18 points in 27 games. He recorded three goals and four points in five contests after the Sabres sent him Rochester following a two-game recall last month.

Dea has scored 13 goals and 30 points, both team highs, in 41 appearances with the Amerks this season.

Sabres centers Johan Larsson (lower body) and Curtis Lazar (illness) missed Tuesday's 6-1 loss the Colorado Avalanche, a game the Sabres used seven defensemen.

Larsson practiced today and could return Thursday against the Detroit Red Wings, coach Ralph Krueger said. Lazar, meanwhile, missed the session.

Sabres' Rasmus Dahlin questionable for game against Red Wings

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 5, 2020

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Rasmus Dahlin briefly tested his upper-body injury during this morning's practice inside LECOM Harborcenter before leaving the ice.

Coach Ralph Krueger said Dahlin, who missed Tuesday's 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche, is questionable for Thursday's home game against the Detroit Red Wings.

"It's definitely not a long-term injury," Krueger said.

Krueger said the Sabres are being cautious to make sure Dahlin feels 100% when he returns. Officially, Dahlin is day-to-day.

"We did not feel that today," he said.

In other injury news, center Johan Larsson, who also missed Tuesday's contest with a lower-body injury, practiced today and could play Thursday.

"He felt good today in the skate," Krueger said. "Larsson feels like a go right now. We'll confirm that tomorrow morning."

Krueger also said rookie goalie Jonas Johansson will make his first NHL start this week. The Sabres also play a road game Friday against the New York Rangers.

Johansson, 24, played nearly half of Tuesday's game, stopping 13 of the 14 shots he faced in relief of Carter Hutton in his NHL debut.

"There's some excitement, for sure," Johansson said of starting a game. "It would be awesome to play more up here."

Center Curtis Lazar, who's sick, also missed today's session.

Jeff Skinner's scoring drought just one of many Sabres woes

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

February 5, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Another collapse on home ice has Sabres fans feeling frustrated once again at this point in the season, something they're all too familiar with as it looks like the playoff drought will reach nine straight seasons.

The Sabres are coming off a 6-1 loss to Colorado on Tuesday night where they were booed off the ice, another thing that's all too familiar.

They're currently 12 points out of a playoff spot, and given the way they're playing, that's an almost impossible hill to climb.

Defensive break downs, shaky goaltending and a lack of offensive production are just some of the issues surrounding this team.

Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart seem to be the only ones able to put pucks in the back of the net. Even Jeff Skinner, coming off his 40-goal season, is in a slump. He hasn't scored in 15 games and has only 11 goals this season.

You can see just how fed up this fan base is. Anytime I tweet anything about the Sabres, fans can't help but express their frustration.

One example: when it comes to things that will change, Ralph Krueger said Jonas Johansson will get a start coming up.

That's not enough change. And those changes and major shakeups need to come from a higher up.

And when it comes to the state of this team, it seems like there are more questions than answers right now.

"I don't know I mean I think there are a lot of variables that go into it," Jeff Skinner said when I asked him what isn't clicking with this team right now.

"You just sort of have to chip away at some of the little things, just sort of correct them as you go along. I think that's sort of the way every season goes. You go through up's and down's and when you have a bad game you have to correct the things you did wrong and come back and be better next game."

The only thing is, that doesn't seem to be happening. It seems like all the right things are being said but they aren't practicing what they preach.

Rasmus Dahlin suffers setback and is questionable vs. Detroit

By Heather Prusak

WGRZ

February 5, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. — While the Sabres suffered a setback with a 6-1 loss to Colorado on Tuesday, so did Rasmus Dahlin as he's still dealing with an upper-body injury.

Dahlin did not play against the Avalanche and missed practice on Wednesday even though it seemed like he was going to return. Dahlin left the ice after the first few minutes of practice and did not return.

Head coach Ralph Krueger said Dahlin is considered "day-to-day" and is questionable for Thursday's game against the Red Wings.

Krueger would not go into how Dahlin got hurt but did say the injury "definitely isn't long-term."

Sabres tickets for upcoming home games drop as low as \$6

By Megan Erbacher

WKBW

February 5, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — It's been a frustrating season for Sabres fans, and they're starting to show their feelings-- by putting up their tickets for sale.

Following Tuesday's 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche at home, tickets for Thursday night's game against the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center start at \$6 on StubHub. The Sunday afternoon game against the Anaheim Ducks has tickets as low as \$13.

The Sabres are currently 23-23-7 in their 50th anniversary season, and the team has lost four of their last five games.

Frustration among fans is evident on social media. A rant by a fan named Duane Steinel on WGR 550 went viral, with fans using the hashtag #WeAreAllDuane. Steinel shared a letter to Sabres owners Kim and Terry Pegula on Twitter.

The Sabres have not competed in the NHL Playoffs since the 2010-2011 season.

Dahlin could return for Sabres against Red Wings

NHL.com

February 5, 2020

Rasmus Dahlin could return to the lineup for the Buffalo Sabres when they play the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, NHL.TV).

The defenseman did not play in a 6-1 loss to the Colorado Avalanche on Tuesday because of an upper-body injury but was on the ice before the team practiced Wednesday.

"He's questionable for tomorrow against Detroit but it's definitely not a long-term injury," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "You can say he remains day to day for sure with this upper-body setback. We'll keep monitoring it."

Krueger said Dahlin didn't participate in practice because the team wanted to be cautious.

"Yeah, that's for sure. We're just being really careful here to make sure that he's a hundred percent if he comes back in," Krueger said. "We did not feel that today."

The No. 1 pick in the 2018 NHL Draft, Dahlin has 30 points (three goals, 27 assists) in 44 games this season and 74 points (12 goals, 62 assists) in 126 NHL games.

NHL.com independent correspondent Heather Engel contributed to this report

Sabres owners 'frustrated with results,' GM says

NHL.com

February 5, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres owners are not happy with how the team has played this season, general manager Jason Botterill said.

"My conversations with (Sabres owners) Terry and Kim (Pegula), they're frustrated," Botterill told WGR 550 in Buffalo on Tuesday. "They're frustrated with the results. They want better results. Our dialogue, we're in constant dialogue, the dialogue goes to, 'What are the solutions? What are we doing to get better?'"

The Sabres were defeated by the Colorado Avalanche 6-1 at KeyBank Center on Tuesday, their fourth loss in five games (1-4-0).

"I think it's all coming down to the players at this point," Sabres forward Sam Reinhart said. "I think that the systems and the game plans that are set out for us give us an opportunity to have success. I think it goes back to what I'm trying to preach here. Guys need to demand more out of themselves, and a lot of guys need to step the [heck] up."

The Sabres (23-23-7) are sixth in the Atlantic Division, 11 points behind the third-place Florida Panthers, and 12 points back of the Philadelphia Flyers for the second wild card into the Stanley Cup Playoffs from the Eastern Conference.

Buffalo, which has not qualified for the playoffs since 2011, is 14-21-6 since starting the season 9-2-1.

"Let's be totally honest. We had two games last week against Ottawa (5-2 loss) and Montreal (3-1 loss) that we had to win," Botterill said. "We should win. ... I think you look at our home-ice record (15-9-3). We've done a fairly good job with that but in crucial situations, when you have an opportunity to have a team come in that's below you in the standings, you have to capitalize on that."

The Sabres, who host the Detroit Red Wings on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, NHL.TV) play five of their next six games at home.

"It's all of us -- coaches, players -- all of us together," Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger said. "This is on all of us. We need to pull together and react to this. We have a game here at home in two nights. We need to show a different side, for sure."

Asked what the Sabres might do before the 2020 NHL Trade Deadline at 3 p.m. ET on Feb. 24, Botterill said it depends on the next few weeks.

"We have [nine] games before the [deadline]," Botterill said. "We want to see what materializes in these 10 games. You're having conversations with teams on both sides to be prepared for both scenarios. ... We have an opportunity for home games here to get some results and that's what we're going to be looking for."

Buffalo has allowed 3.13 goals per game (tied with the Los Angeles Kings for 21st in the NHL) and is 26th on the penalty kill (74.5 percent), tied with the Kings and Nashville Predators.

"There's always urgency to do something ... I think you look at our team, you look at portions of our season, we've played very well," Botterill said. "But over the course of the bulk of it, the majority of the season, we haven't gotten the results we wanted. ... The entire group... we haven't done it well enough."

"I can understand our fans' frustration. Our organization is frustrated."

Nazem Kadri's smack talk against Sabres is quite 's-tty'

By Mollie Walker

New York Post

February 5, 2020

Avalanche center Nazem Kadri had two points in the Avalanche's 6-1 whooping of the Sabres in Buffalo Tuesday night, but his trash talk was his most noteworthy contribution.

As things started to get chippy in the blowout game, Kadri had to be separated from Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour. As a referee attempted to steer Kadri away from the scuffle, the 29-year-old was caught on some hot mics.

"You're a s-tty defenseman on a s-tty f-king team," said Kadri, who had a goal and assist in the Colorado's fourth win in their last five games.

Harsh.

Kadri, who was traded from the Maple Leafs to the Avalanche this past offseason, has a history of foul play on the ice. He was suspended during last year's playoffs after cross-checking the Bruins' Jake DeBrusk in Game 2 of their opening-round series, which Toronto ended up losing in seven games.

Kadri previously was suspended for three games for a brutal late hit on Boston's Tommy Wingels in Game 1 of the 2018 playoffs. The Maple Leafs lost that series in seven games, too.

Reinhart calls out Sabres; owners frustrated

TSN

February 5, 2020

Sabres forward Sam Reinhart, who scored the team's lone goal in a 6-1 loss to Colorado on Tuesday, called out his teammates after the blowout loss, which left Buffalo 11 points back of a playoff spot.

"I think it's all coming down to the players at this point," Reinhart told reporters. "I think that the systems and the game plans that are set out for us give us an opportunity to have success. I think it goes back to what I'm trying to preach here. Guys need to demand more out of themselves, and a lot of guys need to step the hell up."

The Sabres trailed 2-1 after 20 minutes on Tuesday, but allowed four goals in the first 13 minutes of the second period.

"Today was s---," defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen said after the game. "I never thought I'd have to say this, but I had a lot of these games here. They're not fun to play. No one wants to play games like we had tonight."

Goaltender allowed five goals on 13 shots in Tuesday's loss, but Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger refused to place the blame on Hutton, despite the team only being outshot 27-24 on the night.

"I don't think it's fair to put this on Carter," Krueger said. "People look at the shot clock, but they out-chanced us, they out-chanced us even though the shots were quite equal there. It wouldn't be fair to put this one on him; it's all of us - coaches, players - all of us together. This is on all of us. We need to pull together and react to this. We have a game here at home in two nights (against the Detroit Red Wings). We need to show a different side, for sure."

The blowout loss came just hours after Sabres general manager Jason Botterill told WGR Radio in Buffalo that owners Terry and Kim Pegula are unhappy with the team's performance.

"I can understand our fans' frustration," Botterill said. "To put it bluntly, my conversations with Terry and Kim, they're frustrated with the results. They want better results. Our dialogue, we're in constant dialogue, the dialogue goes to, 'What are the solutions? What are we doing to get better?'"

The Sabres have missed the playoffs in each of the past eight seasons and last won a playoff round in 2007.

Sabres recall Wilson from Amerks

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 5, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has recalled forward Scott Wilson from the Rochester Americans of the AHL.

Wilson joins the Sabres for his second recall of the season. He's appeared in two NHL games so far this year.

On Friday against Syracuse, he recorded three points (2+1) for the Amerks, including the game-winning goal. In 27 games with Rochester, he has 18 points (9+9).

In a corresponding move, the team has assigned forward Jean-Sebastien Dea to Rochester.

The Sabres host Detroit tomorrow night. Tickets are on sale now. The game can be seen live on NBCSN at 7 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will have the radio call on WGR 550.

Johansson's debut was culmination of 'roller coaster' journey

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 5, 2020

Jonas Johansson admits his journey to the NHL has felt, at times, like a rollercoaster.

Johansson was drafted by the Sabres in the third round in 2014. He spent the next three seasons in Sweden, playing primarily in the country's second-tier pro league, HockeyAllsvenskan. The majority of his last two seasons were spent with Buffalo's ECHL affiliate, the Cincinnati Cyclones.

Last February, he had season-ending surgery to repair a torn meniscus. The NHL was always his goal, and he credits his family as well as Sabres development coach Seamus Kotyk with helping him ride the ups and downs. It wasn't always easy.

"There were times, for sure, when I was in Cincinnati when you're really wondering if it's ever going to happen," Johansson said after practice Wednesday. "But like I said, you've just got to keep on going. Keep good habits and work hard and hopefully they're going to pay off one day."

That long journey was part of the reason why Johansson, despite difficult circumstances, was able to enjoy his NHL debut on Tuesday night. He entered the game against Colorado in relief of Carter Hutton with the Sabres trailing 5-1 in the second period. The first shot he faced was a perfectly placed attempt from Mikko Rantanen on 2-on-1 rush that went in off the crossbar.

After that, Johansson recovered to stop Colorado's final 13 shots. Coach Ralph Krueger said the rookie will make his first start for Buffalo in one of the team's upcoming back-to-back games, at home against Detroit on Thursday or in New York against the Rangers on Friday.

"Coming in there in the second period when he did and us down 5-1, it was a situation where we all felt that that could go either way," Krueger said. "It could have gone rough for him or it was an opportunity for him to get some confidence.

"We feel the way it evolved and the way he put away that first goal, the sixth against, and then finished out the game was really solid. We liked the way he positioned himself, the way he played with the puck and involved himself in the game and it was definitely a good sign for us as a club moving forward."

Johansson, who split the net with veteran Andrew Hammond in Rochester during the first half of this season, said he prepares for games he backs up exactly as he would if he was starting. He got some brief words of encouragement from Hutton, worked through some early nerves, and said he felt more comfortable as the game wore on.

Asked if he feels any nerves with his first NHL start now on the horizon, he opted for another descriptor.

"There's some excitement, for sure," he said. "It would be really awesome to play some more up here. I feel prepared and I feel confident, so I'm just feeling ready and prepared if the opportunity comes."

Wednesday's practice

Johan Larsson was back on the ice with the Sabres after missing Tuesday's game with a lower-body injury. Krueger expressed optimism that the centerman will be ready to play against Detroit Thursday.

"He's looking really good," Krueger said. "I have to say, he felt good today in the skate. Larsson feels like a go right now. We'll confirm that tomorrow morning, but we were pleased with the skate today and that'd be real good news for us to at least get one of the centermen back."

Rasmus Dahlin (upper body) was on the ice ahead of practice but left before the session began. Curtis Lazar remained absent with an illness. Both are considered day-to-day.

"We'll keep monitoring it," Krueger said regarding Dahlin's injury. "He's questionable for tomorrow against Detroit, but it's definitely not a long-term injury."

The Sabres also issued updates on Kyle Okposo (upper body), Victor Olofsson (lower body), and Linus Ullmark (lower body), all of whom are now considered week-to-week. Find the full updated injury report in the tweet below:

Here's how the Sabres lined up at practice.

13 Jimmy Vesey - 9 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
53 Jeff Skinner - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 74 Rasmus Asplund
43 Conor Sheary - 90 Marcus Johansson - 67 Michael Frolik
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 22 Johan Larsson - 15 Jean-Sebastien Dea

62 Brandon Montour - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
19 Jake McCabe - 10 Henri Jokiharju
24 Lawrence Pilut - 4 Zach Bogosian / 33 Colin Miller

40 Carter Hutton
34 Jonas Johansson