



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 9, 2020

Washington visits Buffalo after Dowd's 2-goal game

Associated Press

March 8, 2020

Washington Capitals (41-20-7, first in the Metropolitan Division) vs. Buffalo Sabres (29-31-8, sixth in the Atlantic Division)

Buffalo, New York; Monday, 7 p.m. EDT

BOTTOM LINE: The Buffalo Sabres host Washington after Nic Dowd scored two goals in the Capitals' 5-2 victory over the Penguins.

The Sabres are 17-18-5 against conference opponents. Buffalo has scored 36 power-play goals, converting on 18.7% of chances.

The Capitals are 25-14-3 in Eastern Conference play. Washington is second in the league averaging 3.4 goals per game, led by Alex Ovechkin with 47.

In their last meeting on Nov. 1, Washington won 6-1. Tom Wilson recorded a team-high 3 points for the Capitals.

TOP PERFORMERS: Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 77 points, scoring 35 goals and collecting 42 assists. Kyle Okposo has four goals and three assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

John Carlson has recorded 75 total points while scoring 15 goals and totaling 60 assists for the Capitals. Nicklas Backstrom has recorded 9 points over the last 10 games for Washington.

LAST 10 GAMES: Capitals: 4-4-2, averaging 3.1 goals, 5.3 assists, five penalties and 11.2 penalty minutes while giving up 3.4 goals per game with a .895 save percentage.

Sabres: 3-7-0, averaging 2.6 goals, 4.2 assists, 2.1 penalties and 4.2 penalty minutes while giving up 3.1 goals per game with a .901 save percentage.

INJURIES: Sabres: Lawrence Pilut: day to day (illness).

Capitals: None listed.

Giroux, Hart lead Flyers past Sabres 3-1 for 9th straight

By Aaron Bracy
Associated Press
March 8, 2020

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — The Flyers are still streaking. And they have Carter Hart to thank for that.

Hart made 38 saves, including some brilliant stops during Philadelphia's lackluster first period, and Claude Giroux scored twice to lead the Flyers to their ninth straight victory, 3-1 over the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night.

"Carter Hart was the best player on the ice," Flyers coach Alain Vigneault said. "Our other 18 guys were OK. Our goaltender had his best stuff and that was the difference."

Joel Farabee also scored and Jakub Voracek and Travis Sanheim each had a pair of assists for Philadelphia, which remained tied for first place with Washington in the Metropolitan Division. The Capitals beat Pittsburgh 5-2 earlier Saturday.

"Good teams find ways to win," Vigneault said.

Philadelphia improved to 25-5-4 at home, where Hart has been nearly unbeatable. The 21-year-old netminder upped his home mark to 20-2-2.

"Having fun," Hart said. "That's probably the biggest thing with us right now. We're enjoying coming to the rink."

Dominik Kahun scored for Buffalo, which dropped its sixth straight. The Sabres have gone six games without a point for the first time since Dec. 28, 2015, to Jan. 8, 2016.

Buffalo dominated the opening period, and could've been up at least two goals if not for Hart. He stopped Sam Reinhart on a breakaway six minutes in and then made two good saves off a 2-on-1 about 4½ minutes later, first on Johan Larsson's slap shot and then Zemgus Girgensons' follow from close range.

"Carter made some huge saves for us," Giroux said. "And when we had a chance to put it in, we did."

Giroux's second goal of the night, which put Philadelphia ahead 2-1 with 10:32 left, was one for the highlight reel. Voracek's pass went off the stick of Buffalo defenseman Jake McCabe and into the air. Giroux wound up and connected just as the puck was landing on the ice, firing it past the left leg of goalie Carter Hutton for his 21st of the season.

"It was in the air and I was waiting for it to land," Giroux said.

Farabee made it 3-1 with 5:11 remaining after a gaffe by the Sabres. Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen passed back to Hutton from inside the defensive zone. Farabee pressured the goalie, intercepting Hutton's attempt at a return pass to Ristolainen before shooting between Hutton's legs.

Farabee was recalled Thursday from Lehigh Valley of the AHL to fill in for injured James van Riemsdyk (broken hand).

"If he doesn't forecheck hard, he doesn't score," Giroux said. "He hustled for the goal."

It was a great break for the Flyers, and the kind teams on winning streaks get.

Meanwhile, the Sabres played well but only had another defeat to show for it.

"The fight was there, the effort was there, we liked so many things we saw, but we sure don't like the result," coach Ralph Krueger said. "We need to get some fruits from all this labor."

Buffalo star Jack Eichel extended the longest drought of his five-year career to seven games without a point.

"We really put ourselves in a position to break their winning streak," Krueger said. "But they're on a roll. They're playing excellent hockey. Very confident team. They didn't need much, and compliments to them that they kept their streak alive."

Giroux opened the scoring midway through the second period. Voracek also set up that goal with a pass across the crease. Giroux corralled it with his skate and then backhanded the puck just under Hutton.

Buffalo tied it with 3:06 left in the second when Kahun scored after a stellar pass from Victor Olofsson, who faked a shot and then dished to a wide-open Kahun to the right of the crease.

NOTES: The Flyers face the Eastern Conference's top two teams in their next two games, at home against the Boston Bruins on Tuesday and at Tampa Bay on Thursday. Philadelphia's last loss was Feb. 15 at the Lightning. ... Buffalo D Lawrence Pilut (illness) didn't play. ... Van Riemsdyk missed his second straight game. He is expected to miss four to six weeks. ... Philadelphia leads the season series 2-0. The teams play for the final time April 4 in Buffalo.

UP NEXT

Buffalo: At Washington on Monday night.

Philadelphia: Hosts Boston on Tuesday night.

Alex Ovechkin keeps putting pucks in the net but his team is struggling to keep them out

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
March 8, 2020

The Sabres will get a pair of looks at Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals this month. The first one comes Monday night in KeyBank Center and it's going to be interesting to see which version of the Caps they see.

The Capitals played one of their best games in recent weeks Saturday in Pittsburgh, posting a 5-2 win that allowed them to keep pace with Philadelphia in the Metropolitan Division. Both teams are 41-20-7.

(Memo to the NHL schedule maker: Could you have stuck it to the Sabres any worse with back-to-back-to-back against Pittsburgh, Philadelphia and Washington?)

Still, the Capitals are just 11-12-2 this season inside the Metro, which means they are a stunning 30-8-5 vs. the other three divisions. Overall, they are just 15-14-2 since two days before Christmas. That 26-6-5 start seems a long time ago.

The big problem is being unable to keep the puck out of their net. Among Metro teams, only the Rangers and Devils have allowed more goals than the Capitals' 212. Veteran Braden Holtby is having the worst season of his career in goal, with a goals-against average of 3.14 and save percentage of .897. You don't want to be going into free agency with numbers basically equivalent to Carter Hutton's (3.18/.898).

Of course, the big thing in the Caps' favor is Ovechkin keeps putting the puck in the net.

The Great Eight's run to 700 career goals is over and now he's on to moving up the all-time charts even more. He's at 47 goals for the season, a hat trick away from his ninth 50-goal campaign and 705 for his career. That's four shy of passing former Capitals great Mike Gartner (708) for No. 7 on the all-time list. Next are Phil Esposito (717), Marcel Dionne (731) and Brett Hull (741), all of whom he could pass by the end of next season.

All that would be left would be Jaromir Jagr (766) and Gordie Howe (801) before the ultimate chase: Wayne Gretzky's all-time record of 894.

Ovechkin had two goals Thursday night in New York and it was the 145th multi-goal game of his career, two shy of Howe for fourth place on the all-time list. The leaders ahead of him are Gretzky (189), Hull (158) and Mario Lemieux (154).

"I'm confident with the team. I know the response is there," Ovechkin said last week. "We just have to realize we have to play smart, we have to play simple. As soon as we start thinking through it too much and do some stupid decisions on the ice, it costs us the game."

Ovechkin turns 35 in September and will need to average around 50 goals a season until he's roughly 39 to pass Gretzky. His durability has been amazing, not missing more than four games in any season in the last 10 years. He's going to have to keep that up.

"It's been amazing to coach against this player and now to be able to coach him and see him every day," Capitals coach Todd Reirden told CBS Sports last week. "He is beyond a generational talent, that's for sure. Multi-generational in what he's been able to do, how he's been able to do it, the size that he is and the fact he's been basically able to do it with very few injuries. It was just an awesome thing to be a part of."

"I was here for 600 as well. To see the 700th one has taken on a life of its own with the number of absolutely amazing players he's passed recently. ... It just made 700 more special. Certainly, he's a guy who works at his craft and he's earned it. It's a special thing to watch every day."

For his career, Ovechkin has 32 goals and 49 points in 49 games against the Sabres. Buffalo is just 3-8-3 in its last 14 games against the Capitals but has won two of the last three against the Caps in KeyBank Center.

If you're thinking down the road for the playoffs, here's one stat Ovechkin will have to turn if the Capitals meet the Flyers. The Caps went 1-3 against Philadelphia this year but Ovechkin was held pointless, had just 10 shots on goal and a minus-4 rating in four games.

Interference issues

The first goal the Penguins scored here Thursday night might have been the worst example of goalie interference on a play that was allowed to stand that I have ever seen. While Curtis Lazar certainly got Nick Bjugstad's feet as the Penguins forward was en route to the goal, it was Bjugstad who led with his arms and lunged into Buffalo goalie Jonas Johansson to create the interference.

It was absurd the play was called a goal on the ice, which made it tougher to overturn on review. And equally absurd, the review focused on the ticky-tack trip and not the pummeling of the goalie. Classic case of good team getting a call and a bad team not. If, say, Zengus Girgensons had done the same thing to Matt Murray in a game in Pittsburgh, which way do you think that call is going?

Two other points: Not a fan of the Sabres doing nothing but standing around and watching after their goalie got drilled. Sure, the puck is in the net, but where's the statement? And Ralph Krueger is a fine, respectful fellow, but this is a case where he should have lost his mind at the officials and helped incite the crowd, too. Once in a while, you've just got to stand up for your team and your franchise.

Notwithstanding refusing to play Jeff Skinner with Jack Eichel until Saturday night, that particular incident might be the most disappointed I've been with Krueger all season.

Sabre points

* The standings get more embarrassing by the day. The Sabres have now fallen behind New Jersey – which went into full sell mode at the deadline and already fired its coach (John Hynes) and GM (Ray Shero) this season. Buffalo is 14th in the East (ahead of only Ottawa and Detroit), 26th overall and staring at a good chance of yet another top-5 pick in the draft. No chance that was on the agenda of ownership and this front office this year.

The tank brigade that still exists here in the wake of the spring of 2015 may be loving that fact again, but it's a complete guarantee that the top levels of the Sabres organization are not.

* With Saturday's 3-1 win in Wells Fargo Center over Buffalo, Philadelphia improved to an NHL-best 10-0-1 this season when tied after two periods. The Sabres fell to 5-8-5, with the 13 losses the most in the league. A big difference between a good team and a mediocre one is you have to come through at winning time.

* So the Penguins traded Dominik Kahun, who looks like a keeper, for both Conor Sheary and Evan Rodrigues? Advantage Jason Botterill for once. Sidney Crosby must have made it very clear he wanted Sheary back on his wing for Pens GM Jim Rutherford to make that kind of move. Rodrigues, by the way, returned to the land of the healthy scratch on Saturday.

* Fighting is way down around the league but old friend Nic Deslauriers, now playing in Anaheim, is throwing down like a throwback player. Deslauriers took his 14th fighting major of the season Friday night, scrapping with Toronto's Kyle Clifford. No one else in the league has more than seven.

Around the boards

* A salary cap between \$84 million and \$88.2 million for next year? Good news for a lot of teams, including the Sabres. Of course, it remains to be seen if ownership will trust Botterill to be the one to spend all that money. Now the league and the Players' Association need to get cracking on a multi-year system so teams can better make their plans and not find out on draft weekend – a week before free agency – what the cap is going to be for the next season.

* The Sabres are in Montreal on Thursday night and again on March 24, and the Habs already have announced there won't be a coaching change for next season. GM Marc Bergevin says Claude Julien, who has two years left on a five-year deal, will be back.

"Claude Julien will be at training camp in the month of September," Bergevin told French network RDS at last week's GM meetings. "I believe in the message he's giving to our players. It's certain that the season we've had has been a difficult one. We all have to take responsibility, Claude, myself, the players. Our goal is, essentially, to be better in September next season so we can be in the playoffs."

* When Edmonton's Leon Draisaitl scored four goals last week vs. Nashville, it gave him multiple goals in five straight games against the Predators that have produced 12 goals and 14 points.

The latest outburst made the NHL's leading scorer just the third player in league history to record two-plus goals in five consecutive games against one team. It's previously been done by Pittsburgh's Lemieux against Quebec in 1987-88 and Punch Broadbent of the original Ottawa Senators against Montreal in 1922.

Sabres' new-look lineup can't break through as losing streak reaches 6

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 7, 2020

PHILADELPHIA — Jake McCabe stared at the Buffalo Sabres' bench with an expression of disbelief on his face and Carter Hutton watched a replay on the video board above center ice as an announced crowd of 19,781 roared inside Wells Fargo Center.

One of the Sabres' most complete efforts of the season had just been spoiled in the third period Saturday night when a pass went over McCabe's stick blade and toward Philadelphia Flyers captain Claude Giroux, who one-timed the puck inside the far post for the go-ahead goal.

"That's how it's going for us right now," Sabres winger Dominik Kahun said in a solemn tone following the 3-1 loss to the Flyers.

While the Flyers celebrated their ninth consecutive victory, the Sabres were left wondering how another impressive performance ended with a familiar result. Buffalo (29-31-8) has lost six in a row and scored two or fewer goals for the seventh straight game, despite firing 39 shots at Philadelphia goalie Carter Hart.

Though the Sabres' 66 points are the third-fewest in the Eastern Conference, one significant development came out of the loss: Coach Ralph Krueger may have found the right line mix to ignite the struggling offense.

After refusing to make the change for the first 67 games, Krueger reunited Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart on a line. Victor Olofsson was also placed with Marcus Johansson and Dominik Kahun.

Skinner, Eichel and Reinhart combined for 15 shots on goal, including seven in the third period. Kahun, who was acquired from the Pittsburgh Penguins at the trade deadline Feb. 24, recorded his fourth point in five games with Buffalo by tying the game, 1-1, at 16:54 into the second period.

The Sabres bested the Flyers in 5-on-5 shot attempts (17-8) and scoring chances (11-6) with the Eichel line on the ice, according to NaturalStatTrick.com. Additionally, the group had six high-danger scoring chances.

"I thought we had some good chances," Skinner, who had six shots on goal, said. "We'd like to get one there and create some momentum, get us on the board. I thought Eichel and Reinhart played really well. Reinhart was really strong on the walls, won a lot of battles. That allowed us to stay in their end and create those opportunities."

Skinner sprung Reinhart for a breakaway in the first period, only to watch from the bench as Hart made the save. Hart, 21, entered Saturday with a 19-2-2 record and .942 save percentage at home this season. The line earned another quality even-strength scoring opportunity four minutes into the second period, as Reinhart had two shot attempts from atop the crease stopped by Hart.

The Sabres were a one-line team last season when Skinner scored many of his career-high 40 goals on Eichel's left wing. Additionally, the trio wasn't strong defensively, which led Krueger to keep Olofsson with the top line for much of this season.

There were few significant defensive breakdowns against Philadelphia (41-20-7), and two additions to the roster helped form a potent second line: Johansson and Kahun.

Johansson, who signed a two-year contract with the Sabres last July, eluded two defenders behind Philadelphia's net and sent a centering pass to the slot for Olofsson. While Hart and his teammates expected Olofsson to shoot, the Sabres' rookie winger passed to the far post, where Kahun had an easy one-timer to tie the score.

"I think we played a pretty good game," Olofsson said of his line. "Just playing with JoJo is really easy. We had good chemistry at camp and I feel like Kahun fits perfectly into our line. I think we created some good chances. We could have probably had a couple more goals today too. Let's just build on that and I think we can find some really good chemistry."

The Sabres also had more 5-on-5 shot attempts (13-5) and scoring chances (5-2) when that line was on the ice. Additionally, Buffalo's other two forward groups excelled with puck possession, winning battles along the boards to sustain pressure in the offensive zone.

However, Buffalo failed to create enough traffic in front of Hart -- which resulted in poor shot quality -- and its power play failed to score on four opportunities, including three in the third period. Krueger shifted his power-play personnel in the third period by moving Skinner to the top unit, only to watch Buffalo's slump extend to 0 for 17.

"It felt really good," Krueger said of his lineup. "I really liked the team tonight. I thought we had two real nice pushing-more offensive lines with Johansson and Eichel. ... After two periods you'd say, 'Wow, we really put ourselves in position to break their winning streak,' but they're on a roll. They're playing excellent hockey. Very confident team."

The Flyers took advantage of Buffalo's mistakes, beginning with the first of Giroux's two goals. Hutton kicked the rebound from a point shot toward the corner, and Jakub Voracek sent a pass across the crease. Giroux, who was left uncovered near the far post, kicked the puck off his skate and used his backhand to beat Hutton for a 1-0 lead at 10:04 into the second period.

Voracek later passed the puck over McCabe's well-positioned stick blade, and Giroux timed his shot perfectly, as it went inside the far post for a 2-1 lead 9:28 into the third period.

The Flyers then pulled away when Rasmus Ristolainen passed the puck to his own goalie to relieve pressure from Philadelphia winger Joel Farabee. However, the puck bounced on Hutton, whose back-handed pass attempt to Ristolainen was intercepted by Farabee. The Flyers rookie then scored with a shot between Hutton's leg pads for a 3-1 lead.

It was the fewest goals the Flyers have scored during their win streak, and the Sabres left Philadelphia knowing how they need to play defensively to give themselves a chance in March.

There were no silver linings, though. Buffalo inched closer to a ninth consecutive season without playoff hockey, as even its best forwards are struggling to capitalize on opportunities.

"Anytime it's going like that it's not fun," Skinner said. "You want to win games and we're getting opportunities. We're just not finding ways to bury them and the other team is. That's the difference in most of the games lately."

The Wraparound: Flyers 3, Sabres 1

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 7, 2020

PHILADELPHIA — Every change coach Ralph Krueger made Saturday night seemed to ignite the Buffalo Sabres in Wells Fargo Center.

Jeff Skinner reunited with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart to create a formidable top line. Skinner even sparked the power play when he was moved to the first unit during the third period.

The adjustments led to arguably one of the Sabres' most impressive games of the season, yet they had nothing to show for it. Carter Hutton allowed two goals in the third period, as the Philadelphia Flyers extended their winning streak to nine with a 3-1 victory over Buffalo.

The Sabres (29-31-8) have lost six games in a row and have scored two or fewer goals in seven straight. Dominik Kahun scored his second goal with the Sabres and 12th of the season to tie the score, 1-1, in the second period.

Flyers captain Claude Giroux scored two goals, including one in the third to give Philadelphia a 2-1 lead, and Joel Farabee added to the lead by taking advantage of Hutton misplaying the puck with 5:01 remaining in the third. The Flyers (41-20-7) remain tied with Washington for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Strong start: The Flyers did not have a shot on goal until 12:16 into the first period, when Hutton stopped Travis Konecny's attempt from the left circle. Additionally, Buffalo allowed only three shots during consecutive penalty kills. Colin Miller's holding infraction occurred only 10 seconds after Brandon Montour's slashing penalty expired.

Missed opportunity: The Sabres recorded zero shots on goal during their first-period power play, as they committed neutral-zone turnovers and failed to generate much offensive-zone time.

Close call: Skinner sprung Reinhart for a breakaway, but Flyers goalie Carter Hart stopped the shot at 5:51 into the game. The Sabres out-shot Philadelphia, 13-4, in the first period and had four more shot attempts than the Flyers. Entering Saturday, Buffalo was 11-8-1 when tied after the first period this season.

Top line: Skinner, Reinhart and Eichel made a significant impact after starting a game for the first time this season. Reinhart almost gave the Sabres a 1-0 lead at 4:07 into the second period by corralling a pass from Skinner and getting two shots on net from atop the crease, but Hart managed to make both saves.

Opening salvo: Giroux gave the Flyers a 1-0 lead at 10:04 into the second period on a play in which he used his skate to stop a centering pass from Jakub Voracek and fired a backhand shot past Hutton.

Settling in: Kahun, who was acquired from Pittsburgh at the trade deadline Feb. 24, recorded his fourth point in five games by scoring the tying goal with 3:06 remaining in the second period. The 24-year-old forward was left wide open to Hart's left because the Flyers thought Olofsson was going to shoot the puck from the slot. Instead, Olofsson snapped his six-game point drought with the primary assist to Kahun.

Marcus Johansson made the goal possible with his backhanded centering pass from behind Philadelphia's net. Johansson also has four points in his last five games.

Adjustment: During the third period, Krueger replaced Rasmus Dahlin with Skinner on the top power play and moved Ristolainen to the point. The change ignited the Sabres' special teams, leading to six shots on goal in less than five minutes, though Buffalo was unable to score during their first power play of the third period.

Another lead: The Flyers took a 2-1 lead at 9:28 in the third period, when Voracek's centering pass went off Jake McCabe's stick and to Giroux, who scored his 21st goal of the season with a one-timer past Hutton.

Lineup: Defenseman Lawrence Pilut (illness) was not available to play against the Flyers, leading the Sabres to recall defenseman John Gilmour from Rochester. Gilmour and winger Jimmy Vesey were healthy scratches.

Next: The Sabres are off Sunday and will hold a morning skate Monday in preparation for their game against the Washington Capitals in KeyBank Center.

Sabres game day: Rugged March schedule continues with red-hot Flyers

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 7, 2020

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (29-30-8) vs. Philadelphia Flyers (40-20-7)

Where: Wells Fargo Center

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

PHILADELPHIA – If the Buffalo Sabres are going to play their way back into the playoff picture, they're going to need to solve their road problem.

The Sabres' 24 points away from KeyBank Center is the third-lowest road mark in the National Hockey League. The Philadelphia Flyers, meanwhile, have won eight games in a row and are tied with Washington for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

The Flyers' 13-3 record since Feb. 1 is tied with the Boston Bruins for the best mark in the NHL and Philadelphia has scored a league-high 68 goals during that span.

Philadelphia has five players with 19 or more goals: Travis Konecny (24), Kevin Hayes (23), Sean Couturier (22), Claude Giroux (19) and James van Riemsdyk (19), who is out four-to-six weeks with a broken finger.

"I think they have some special players that make some special plays," Giroux said following the Flyers' morning skate Saturday. "You give them room to make plays they will make it. I think they haven't had the bounces this year and they're a better team than their record says.

"We know maybe Buffalo isn't in the same race as us in the playoffs, but I don't think they're still out. We've seen crazier stuff happen before. If there's a team that can come back and make a push for it, it's definitely them."

Blender: Krueger finally blew up his forward lines during practice Friday after the Sabres scored two or fewer goals for a sixth consecutive game.

Jeff Skinner was reunited with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart on the top line, while Victor Olofsson skated with Marcus Johansson and Dominik Kahun. Skinner and Eichel downplayed the move, but this is a significant philosophical shift by Krueger.

Krueger previously expressed a desire to put a more defensive-minded left wing with Eichel and Reinhart. However, Eichel is marred in a career-long six-game pointless slump. Reinhart and Olofsson have zero points in six and seven games, respectively.

Last season, the Sabres scored 30 goals at 5 on 5 when Eichel, Skinner and Reinhart were on the ice at the same time. Comparatively, Buffalo has 27 goals this season with Olofsson, Eichel and Reinhart on the ice at 5 on 5.

Krueger would not say if the practice lines would be used during the game against Philadelphia.

"That combination has seen sporadic shifts here and there through the season," Krueger said of Eichel, Skinner and Reinhart. "It's not in the thousands, but there was a lot of ice there. It feels like something we wanted to look at in the skate today and we'll make that final call tomorrow, but it's just about getting our offense going and digging for combinations that can make that possible. We need more than one line to go here with the opposition that are coming at us but that will definitely be a potential option tomorrow."

Zemgus Girgensons (lower body) will be in the Sabres lineup, according to Krueger. Defenseman Lawrence Pilut (illness) is out, which led the team to recall John Gilmour from Rochester.

Here's how the Sabres lined up during practice Friday:

Skinner-Eichel-Reinhart

Olofsson-Johansson-Kahun

Vesey-Lazar-Simmonds
Frolik-Larsson-Okposo

Starting goalie: Linus Ullmark is back with the Sabres after missing more than a month with a lower body injury. However, the 26-year-old will serve as the backup Saturday night in Philadelphia, and Carter Hutton will get the start.

Hutton has posted a .904 save percentage while losing four of his last five starts and has allowed three goals in each of his past three games. Hutton is 4-2 with a .897 save percentage in six career games against the Flyers.

Carter Hart, who has a .911 save percentage in 41 games this season, will start for the Flyers.

Reunion: This is another return to Philadelphia for Wayne Simmonds, who played 584 games over eight seasons with the Flyers. Simmonds scored 203 goals with 175 assists in the regular season during that span. He also appeared in 30 playoff games with Philadelphia.

"Wayne is a strong voice in advocating a team game," coach Ralph Krueger said. "He's a strong voice in understanding the value of a team game and somebody who's proven in the past that that helps. So, he's an important voice for us right now where our team game is being tested. We're in a state of adversity, we're in a state of character testing, and we need the right voices to fight us through this because it is also a time where we can really cement our game because if you do it here when it hurts and you do it here when it's tough, when you get momentum it just becomes a natural habit."

Extended look: The Sabres will likely give Kahun every opportunity to show he can be a top-six option next season. The 24-year-old winger has three points in four games since being acquired from Pittsburgh and recorded a secondary assist on Johansson's goal Thursday night against the Penguins.

Krueger told reporters Thursday morning that he views Kahun as an option at center, though the Sabres won't experiment with the move until Kahun learns the Sabres' defensive-zone structure. Kahun played only 7:16 against the Penguins and received three shifts in the third period.

"He's a spark plug," Krueger said of Kahun. "We think he has a strong skill set. We like his speed and his deception in the game. Also because he had a very long running past as a centerman in Europe. He hasn't brought that in here. He has a good understanding of the game away from the puck. We like the way he's integrated himself here so quickly and the principles and the concepts we're trying to cement here without the puck. You can see his smarts. A good sport, a good guy in the room. He's been an excellent addition here."

Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel reunite on top line as Sabres head to Philly

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 6, 2020

Ralph Krueger has been stubborn about this move all season. So after he finally reunited Jeff Skinner with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart on the top line at practice Friday in LECOM HarborCenter, the Buffalo Sabres' coach tried to act like it was no big deal.

"Just so we would have something to talk about," Krueger deadpanned to reporters.

"It doesn't mean much. It just means the coach changed the lines," Skinner said in similarly downplaying the move. "I just keep trying to build on my game and keep trying to improve."

Their words to the contrary, of course it's a big deal.

While Eichel has been having a career year playing with Reinhart and Victor Olofsson, Skinner's game has suffered. Skinner piled up 40 goals last season playing mostly on Eichel's wing, but the eight-year, \$72-million contract extension he signed in the season's aftermath hasn't been worth the paper it was printed on.

Skinner is going to easily post a career-low in points for a non-lockout season, with just 23 so far in 57 games. At least his 14 goals give him a shot to surpass his previous career low for a full campaign of 18 set in 2014-15.

"It just feels like something we wanted to look at during the skate today. We'll make that final call tomorrow," Krueger said of what appears to be the top-line trio for the Sabres on Saturday night in Philadelphia against the white-hot Flyers. "It's just about getting our offense going and looking for combinations to make that possible. We need more than one line to go here with the opposition coming at us."

"He's one of the best players in the world," Skinner said of Eichel. "He opens up a lot of space and he makes high-end plays. I played with him and 'Reino' before and I'm familiar with how they play. Hopefully we can get some chemistry going and produce a little bit."

Krueger has gone to the line in spots, notably late in games. But he's been steadfastly against using it for the long term, despite the howling of fans and regular questions about it from both local and visiting media. The coach has said he's been trying to strike a defensive balance in each line, a stance that has seemed dubious given the way a player with a \$9 million salary cap hit has been rendered invisible for long stretches.

The ultimate impetus for the change, of course, is the Sabres' five-game losing streak and their six-game streak of two goals or fewer in each contest. On top of that are point droughts of six games for Reinhart and Eichel, the latter a career high for the Buffalo captain, and Skinner's improved play of late on a line with Curtis Lazar and Wayne Simmonds.

Skinner had three goals in a five-game stretch to close February and has 23 shots on goal in his last seven games. He had five shots but did not score in Thursday's 4-2 loss to Pittsburgh in KeyBank Center.

"'Skins' has been playing really well. He's been moving his feet, taking the puck to the net," Eichel said. "He's been one of our best players recently."

In a season in which he's moved a lot through the lineup trying to find a fit, Skinner credited his most recent linemates for finally getting him going.

"I think Simmonds helped a lot," Skinner said. "Me, him and Lazar had some good chemistry. We'd like to have produced a little bit more. We generated quite a few chances that maybe we would have liked to have seen gone in, but there were obviously positive signs there. He's a big, strong guy who creates a lot of space for himself and his linemates. Lazar was solid down the middle and we did a good job on the forecheck."

Krueger moved Olofsson (no points in seven games) down a peg and had him playing Friday with Marcus Johansson and newcomer Dominik Kahun. Jimmy Vesey took Skinner's spot with Lazar and Simmonds while the

fourth line had Johan Larsson centering Michael Frolik and Kyle Okposo. Zemgus Girgensons (lower body) did not practice and is questionable for Saturday.

"We would like to have stability," Krueger said. "I'd rather stand here with you in 10 games and say, 'Wow, isn't it great we're playing the same lines?' You don't want to force that, but we will not give up on any game or any situation. Sometimes changing the lines is a way to keep the group reaching for victories and for successful games."

This season is lost in the standings and also on the stat sheet for Skinner. About all he has to play for is to hit 20 goals for the fifth consecutive season and then to go back to the drawing board to give the Sabres their money's worth come fall.

"When things aren't going well, you can't just flip a switch and change one thing and all of a sudden you get back in the positive swing of things," Skinner said. "You just have to slowly build. You're always looking to grow and improve. For me obviously it's sort of been that way this year. ... We have to build as a group and individually you have to continue to grow."

"I thought we worked, had a good team game," Eichel said when asked why the line was so effective last season. "We were able to play different styles. We grinded at times when we needed to and obviously we can make the pretty plays. It worked last year, hopefully it works tomorrow."

Flyers are soaring

Philadelphia enters the game on an eight-game winning streak and tied for the Metropolitan Division lead with Washington, both with 40-20-7 records. The Flyers lead the NHL in home wins (24-5-4) and are three points ahead of Pittsburgh. The Penguins host the Caps Saturday afternoon in PPG Paints Arena.

The Sabres are 0-5-1 in their last six trips to Wells Fargo Center – and have been outscored, 26-9, in those games. Buffalo hasn't won a road game in regulation in Philadelphia since its 1-0 victory in Game 1 of its first-round playoff series on April 14, 2011.

The Flyers bludgeoned Buffalo, 6-1, on Dec. 19 in a game that saw Eichel scratched five minutes before faceoff, thus ending a 17-game point streak that was the longest of his career.

Ullmark ready to back up

The Sabres returned rookie goalie Jonas Johansson to Rochester and Krueger said Linus Ullmark, out since Jan. 28 with an ankle injury, is ready to back up. Carter Hutton will start Saturday but that could mean Ullmark's return will happen Monday at home against Washington. Johansson went 1-3-1 in six appearances (five starts), with a 2.94 goals-against average and .894 save percentage.

Pilut sits out

Defenseman Lawrence Pilut, who has been paired with Rasmus Ristolainen the last two games, sat out practice Friday with the flu and is questionable for Saturday. Colin Miller, who has been a healthy scratch, would come back into the lineup.

How healthy scratch helped spur Sabres prospect Jacob Bryson

By Bill Hoppe
The Buffalo News
March 6, 2020

ROCHESTER – Jacob Bryson saw an opportunity materialize late in a tie game Wednesday and pounced on it, aggressively leading the Americans' attack.

Three or four months ago, the Buffalo Sabres' defense prospect likely would have made the safe play with 11 minutes remaining in a tight contest.

"I might've been a little timid to make plays like that, just a new coaching staff, my first year pro," Bryson said following the Amerks' 3-1 loss to the Utica Comets in Blue Cross Arena. "It comes with confidence, and I've played a lot of games now. I kind of know what to expect, and I think I have the ability to make those plays."

So the rookie zoomed into the left circle and adroitly fed defenseman Zach Redmond in the slot before goalie Michael DiPietro stymied the chance.

The scoring opportunity illustrates Bryson's slick playmaking ability and growing confidence. Bryson, 22, has rapidly developed during the second half this season, earning big minutes and praise from Amerks coach Chris Taylor.

"He's headsy, he works hard, he's focused on what he wants to do, he keeps it pretty simple," Taylor said. "He doesn't try to do a lot of different things. He's simple and he gets his feet moving and he uses his strengths, and his strength is he can escape guys.

"He's very intelligent, but I just like how he makes simple plays, and all of a sudden that's the right play."

Bryson said: "I try to keep it simple, because I know that's part of our game plan, make the simple play if you can. Sometimes I like to do a little extra, like that play (Wednesday)."

On Wednesday, the 5-foot-9-inch, 179-pound Bryson also created winger Taylor Leier's power-play goal, carrying the puck to the Utica blue line before moving in front of DiPietro.

"He was our best defenseman," Taylor said of Bryson's performance.

If Bryson, a fourth-round pick in 2017 (99th overall), keeps progressing, he will likely earn a recall from the Sabres at some point.

"He's just the whole package," said Redmond, Bryson's defense partner all season. "He reads plays really well. He reads offensively and defensively what he needs to do. That was just a good showcase of everything he can do and what he's about.

"I'm excited for him. He's got a really good career ahead of him."

The potential genesis of Bryson's second-half surge came Jan. 22 in Cleveland.

Bryson looked comfortable in the American Hockey League from the get-go following his three-year career at Providence College. But after playing the Amerks' first 40 games, Taylor scratched Bryson and relayed a message, telling him he experienced something similar early in his playing career.

So Bryson studied the action on the ice in the Amerks' 3-2 overtime win against the Monsters from high above in Rocket Mortgage FieldHouse.

"I have never done that before," Bryson said of being a healthy scratch. "I mean, it was different. I think it did help. In the back of my head, I was like, 'I can be a really good player here,' and I was watching it from up top, and I think that helped a lot."

He added: "I guess from there out I've been playing good hockey lately."

Taylor said sometimes taking a step back helps a young player, especially someone fresh out of college. Bryson played only 42 games last season, with his college career ending at KeyBank Center in the NCAA semifinals.

"You're coming from college and you don't play a lot of games and probably things went a lot smoother because he probably dominated the league, and this is a tough league," he said.

Bryson has compiled two goals, 11 points and a plus-4 rating in 18 games since being scratched. Overall, he has two goals, 20 points and a plus-10 rating in 58 appearances.

He scored his elusive first AHL goal Feb. 19 in his 52nd outing before getting another the next game.

"That's kind of a confidence booster, and now that I know that I can put the puck in the back of the net, I can just kind of play with that in the back of your head," Bryson said. "It made the game a lot easier, I think, as far as my confidence goes and ability to make plays."

Amerks notes

The Amerks, who have lost five of their last seven games (2-2-3), have scored two or fewer goals five times in that stretch. On Wednesday, they pumped 37 shots on goal. "We got to get more guys in front of the net, we got to get better shot selection," a frustrated Taylor said. "Our shot management, it seems like we're always going high. We don't get second and third opportunities." ... The Amerks play road games against the Belleville Senators on Friday and Saturday. ... Defenseman Casey Nelson returned Wednesday after an upper-body injury sidelined him 10 games. ... The Sabres returned goaltender Jonas Johansson to the Amerks on Friday.

How Floyd Smith became Sabres' first captain, coached team to Stanley Cup Final

By Jason Wolf

The Buffalo News

March 6, 2020

Floyd Smith was in the office at Memorial Auditorium when the man who talked him out of retirement had a heart attack.

"I was right there with him," Smith said. "It all happened so fast."

It was Jan. 7, 1972, and Smith, the Buffalo Sabres' first captain, knew his coach needed help. He knew to call for team doctors. He always had a knack for keeping cool under pressure.

Smith first played for George "Punch" Imlach with the Toronto Maple Leafs in the late 1960s, earning his trust after joining the team in a trade toward the tail end of Imlach's tenure. The irascible coach and general manager had won four Stanley Cup championships during the Original Six era, but the Leafs' domination dissipated after the NHL's expansion, and Imlach was fired after the 1968-69 season.

A year later, Smith was ready to call it quits. He was 35 and his production had plunged, the right wing's four goals and 14 assists by far the fewest in a full season in his long career.

"I hadn't officially retired, but my game was finished, as far as being productive in the NHL," Smith said. "It just came to a point where I couldn't do what I wanted to do. I was getting older, my skating wasn't improving any; it was getting worse. So it came time. My wife and I said, 'Enough is enough.' And then the Sabres called and I talked to Punch about this role he wanted me to do."

Smith's most iconic moments were yet to come.

Fifty years ago, Imlach, who'd been hired as the Sabres' first coach and GM, convinced Smith to continue his career in Buffalo.

He promised Smith he'd play on a line with rookie center Gilbert Perreault, the French Canadian phenom and future Hall of Famer drafted by the expansion franchise with the No. 1 overall pick.

Imlach said he'd name Smith team captain, and Smith was immortalized in the black and white photo of the first ceremonial puck drop at the Aud.

And, most important, he said he'd let him run some practices, launching the career of the most successful coach by winning percentage in franchise history.

Five years later, 45 years ago in May, Smith led the Sabres to the 1974-75 Stanley Cup Final against the Philadelphia Flyers in his first season as head coach. The team featured The French Connection, the star-studded top line of Perreault, Rick Martin and Rene Robert, and a young core of players who, in 1972-73, Smith had guided to the AHL Calder Cup championship as coach of the Cincinnati Swords, illustrating the importance of a strong farm system.

"I was going to kind of help him with coaching," Smith, 84, said last week from his home in Orchard Park, recalling that life-changing conversation with Imlach. "When he was busy, I would take the practices and all that. So that's basically why I came. I knew that down the road I'd get into coaching somewhere, if I came and did this for a couple of years."

That timetable accelerated in a heartbeat.

'Invaluable'

It had been a hectic couple of days at the Aud.

"Everybody was running around," Smith said. "Everybody was worried, 'Just how healthy is Punch? What is his status,' and everything? And the Knoxes were very concerned about their franchise and everything. There was just a lot of things happening."

Once Imlach was stable, he and team co-owner Seymour Knox III spoke and decided to promote Joe Crozier, the head coach of the Swords, to Sabres' interim head coach and send Smith to Cincinnati to oversee the minor league affiliate.

But two days after Imlach's heart attack, Smith stood behind the bench for the first time in the Sabres' 2-1 home loss to Toronto.

"I was no head coach," Smith said. "I just filled in when they didn't have anybody else for one game. I knew that I wasn't going to coach the team the rest of the year. I didn't have the experience. So I went down to Cincinnati with a bunch of young kids."

Smith knew the players – they were part of the organization – and he got to work.

"I just remembered what all the coaches I'd played for, what Sid Abel did in Detroit or what Imlach did," Smith said.

Smith knew how to read a locker room and quickly ingratiated himself with his knowledge of the game, a genuine belief in his players and a little bag of motivational tricks. He knew something as simple as swapping a puck for a tennis ball could liven a practice and make the daily grind less of a chore.

"He was kind of a fun-loving guy, so he brought that attitude that he had playing at the highest level in the NHL into his coaching," former Swords and Sabres defenseman Bill Hajt said. "For the situation he was in early on there in Cincy and with us in Buffalo, it was perfect."

The Swords excelled under Smith's guidance, reaching the playoffs in his first partial season.

"You could tell he had a really good feel for the chemistry," said former Swords and Sabres defenseman Larry Carriere, now the assistant general manager for the Montreal Canadiens.

A year later, the Swords set AHL records for wins and points and won the Calder Cup, an experience that laid the groundwork for the most iconic team in Sabres history.

"I don't think there's any doubt that it was invaluable, both to Floyd and us," former Swords and Sabres forward Rick Dudley said. "There were a lot of players who went from that Swords team to Buffalo. We understood what a long playoff run was. We understood it very well."

'He believed I could'

Dudley, now senior vice president of hockey operations for the Carolina Hurricanes, began that 1972-73 season as little more than an enforcer.

"I was a minor league guy who fought a lot and that was about the extent of it," Dudley said. "All of a sudden, I got a call into the coach's office, and when you're a player that doesn't know exactly where he fits in in the scheme of things, you're not sure what being called into the coach's office means."

Dudley had just six goals and 29 points the previous season, compared to 272 penalty minutes, but Smith had seen something and wanted to play him on a line with Billy Inglis, the Swords' captain and one of the best players in the AHL.

This was a tremendous compliment and responsibility.

"That alone was a validation of how I played," Dudley said. "But I can remember the words almost exactly. He said, 'I know you're tough, but don't think you have to fight every shift you go out there. If Billy gets in trouble, you might have to step in, for sure. But don't think you have to fight every time. I want you to play. I think you can play.'"

"He made me feel like he believed I could do it," Dudley said. "And I did not want to let him down."

Dudley responded with 40 goals and 84 points in 64 games, while nearly halving his time in the penalty box. He added seven goals and a team-leading 22 points in the playoffs.

The Swords went 54-17-5 and defeated the reigning champion Nova Scotia Voyageurs, the Canadiens' affiliate, in five games for the title. Inglis was named league MVP.

Dudley was promoted to the Sabres, along with several teammates the next year, then racked up 31 goals and 70 points during the team's run to the Stanley Cup Final in 1974-75.

He'd go on to coach the Sabres from 1989 to 1992.

"I wanted to be more than a pugilist," Dudley said. "I didn't mind that part of the game, but I don't think there's a lot of people who are singularly fighters who didn't want to be more than that. It's the reason why when I coached the Sabres, every so often I'd put Rob Ray for a game or two on a line with top players like Dave Andreychuk, and it was kind of a validation that he's more than just a thug.

"I learned that part of it from Floyd. I realized that you could actually have a major impact on somebody's career and you can help people believe in themselves a little bit."

'A comfort level'

A year after the Swords lifted the Calder Cup, the Sabres were in disarray, coming off a losing record and shaken by the death of defenseman Tim Horton in a car crash.

Imlach, acting as general manager, fired Crozier and promoted Smith to head coach, putting him in charge of several former teammates and reuniting him with many of his best players from Cincinnati.

"We had a comfort level with Smitty because we'd already gone through war with him for a couple of years, won a championship together," Hajt said. "So because of that, the transition was easier. And even the guys that were there that weren't as familiar with Floyd, certainly had to have respect for him because he had played at the highest level for a long time in the NHL himself."

The transition, however, wasn't so simple for the coach.

"One of the biggest things I cautioned myself against was not to play favorites, but take the best players, you know?" Smith said. "When we're putting the team together, to make sure that when we left training camp we had the best players in the organization there."

The Sabres lurched to a 3-3-1 record over the first two weeks of the season, a stretch capped by a 7-2 loss at Los Angeles despite vastly outshooting the Kings, a team that lost just twice in its first 26 games. But in that drubbing, something clicked.

"We looked at ourselves and said, 'Holy cow, we dominated LA in LA,' " Hajt said. "We said, 'We have a good team here.' The light went on for the whole team."

The Sabres lost just once in the next 22 games, improving their record to 21-4-4, the best mark in the NHL, and added a 12-game unbeaten streak in February.

Buffalo finished the season with a 49-16-15 record and 113 points, in a three-way tie for first place with Montreal and defending champion Philadelphia.

The Sabres defeated the Chicago Blackhawks in five games in the first round, then took a 2-0 series lead over Montreal in the conference finals. When the Canadiens knotted the series with consecutive home victories, Smith kept the team from panicking.

"We got beat bad in Montreal and he came back and he just took a very positive approach," said former Sabres forward Danny Gare, then in his rookie season. "He said, 'Boys, look, we're at home. We're in control of this series.' And we ended up winning the next two to go to the finals. He was a positive influence in that regard. He knew what type of team we had."

The Sabres defeated the Canadiens, 4-3, in Game 6 in Montreal, and played for the Stanley Cup in just its fifth year of existence.

"That was really neat. That was big," Smith said. "That turned the franchise into a real, first-rate franchise, that win."

'Goosebumps'

Buffalo erupted in pandemonium.

Thousands of Sabres fans swarmed the Buffalo Niagara International Airport, jamming the surrounding highways and causing the team to redirect its charter flight to Niagara Falls. But word got out and the horde spread north, where it overwhelmed the triumphant players as they stepped off the plane.

"That was a funny thing," Smith said. "But it was scary. They didn't leave much room for you to maneuver. They were all around."

Smith said he heard the crowd was estimated at 15,000 fans.

They were shaking hands with the players, hugging them and getting autographs as the Sabres made their way to buses waiting to transport them to their cars.

"You talk about passion, and as you're getting off the plane and everyone is high-fiving you and hugging you," Carriere said. "I have goosebumps now talking about it. So we finally get on the bus at the Niagara Falls airport, and we're going down the highway and it's lined with people honking their horns and waving and signs and all of that and you just go, 'Wow. What a town this is.' "

The Sabres lost to the Flyers in the Stanley Cup Final, stymied by two-time Conn Smythe Trophy-winning goalie Bernie Parent. The series lasted six games, including the Sabres' famed "Fog Game" victory in Game 3 in Buffalo.

Smith led the Sabres to the second round of the playoffs in each of the next two seasons, losing each time to the New York Islanders, before coming to a "mutual agreement" with Imlach, he said, to step down.

"Punch was a great guy, a great hockey man. But he also was a coach," Smith said, laughing. "And once you coach once, you never forget, they say. So dealing with him wasn't the easiest thing in the world at the end."

The following season, Smith coached the Cincinnati Stingers of the World Hockey Association, reuniting with executives who had been involved with the Swords. The 1978-79 Stingers roster included Robbie Ftorek, Mike Liut, Barry Melrose and an 18-year-old named Mark Messier.

Dudley also played for Smith on that team, thrilled to again skate for the man who offered his big break, who led him to the Calder Cup and Stanley Cup Final, the most genuine coach he'd ever had.

"People figure it out if you're not genuine, eventually," Dudley said. "They might be fooled for a while, but they're going to figure it out. With Floyd, there was no figuring it out. He was who he was.

"He was just a good person who happened to be able to take a group of people and make them believe in themselves."

Smith went on to work as a coach, scout and general manager for Toronto, then served as a consultant for Anaheim. He dropped the puck on opening night at KeyBank Center in October, when the Sabres honored former team captains to begin their 50th anniversary season.

Smith said he and his wife, Audrey, still attend a few Sabres games each year. They sit in the stands.

"We do the same thing as everybody else – have a beer and have a hot dog," Smith said. "I go and try to blend in with everybody and just watch the game. And listen to the crowd."

The Sabres miss numerous chances in their sixth straight loss

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 7, 2020

Philadelphia, PA (WGR 550) - The Sabres threw numerous Grade-A scoring chances at Flyers goalie Carter Hart on Saturday, but in the end, Buffalo had its sixth straight loss, 3-1 in Philadelphia.

Buffalo had 39 shots and the only goal they could get by Hart was a tic-tac-toe layup by Dom Kahun. I thought Kahun's line with Marcus Johansson and Victor Olofsson was the Sabres' best line. Olofsson did break his six-game pointless streak picking up an assist on the goal.

Philadelphia won its ninth straight game, but Buffalo outplayed them through much of this game. The chances came quickly as Olofsson set up Johansson in-tight on Hart, but he put the puck over the net.

Jeff Skinner sent Sam Reinhart in all alone, but Hart made a great save.

During their streak, the Flyers had the NHL's best power play, but the Sabres did a terrific job of killing back-to-back penalties. During the four minutes, Philadelphia got one scoring chance. It was a good one as Sean Couturier ripped a one-timer from the slot that Carter Hutton made a great save on.

Buffalo even got a great chance of its own when Johan Larsson led a shorthanded 2-on-1 rush. Hart stopped Larsson's shot from the left circle and Zemgus Girgensons on the rebound.

Buffalo left the first period with a 13-4 shots advantage, yet the game was 0-0.

Olofsson opened the second period wide-open in front of Hart, but his shot was just wide of the post.

Hart was really strong when Jeff Skinner found Sam Reinhart, who brought the puck right to the front of the net, but Hart didn't budge.

Kahun's goal tied the game before the second period was over.

The game-winning goal came for Philadelphia when Jake McCabe did his job and deflected a pass headed for an open Claude Giroux in front. The Flyers captain hit a fluttering puck that was on end perfectly inside the post.

The Sabres worked very hard on their last two power plays, winning many battles, but in the end, the power play let them down again, going 0-for-4.

In the end, the Sabres aren't going to win many hockey games with Jack Eichel and Reinhart going seven games without a point. I talked about the scoring chances, but notice Eichel really didn't have any as he plays through a core injury.

Rasmus Ristolainen was moved to left defense for this game. The only other time he played on the left side in the NHL was during one preseason game.

Buffalo has Sunday off and then hosts Washington on Monday.

Flyers soar past the Sabres, 3-1

WGR 550

March 7, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres came out flying, looking like a team that was hungry for their first win in quite some time.

In fact, it had been five games since the Sabres tallied the victory column. After this one, make that six.

The Sabres opened up the game by outshooting the Flyers 13-4 in the first period. Sabres winger Sam Reinhart had a breakaway on Carter Hart, but Reinhart couldn't get the puck past the Flyers' young netminder.

The 2nd period saw Claude Giroux net his 20th goal of the season. Travis Sanheim's shot was tipped in front by Jakob Voracek. Giroux barely caught the puck on his forehand before switching over to his backhand for the first goal of the game. Carter Hutton was able to get a piece of it, but it wasn't enough.

The Sabres were able to answer right back with a great tic-tac-toe play from Marcus Johansson, who drew a defender after floating a puck over to Victor Olofsson. Everyone in the building figured Olofsson would shoot the puck, which is how Dominik Kahun ended up wide open for the tap-in past Hart.

The Sabres would carry the 1-1 draw to the third period, where Buffalo unraveled once again.

Buffalo got two power plays early in the period. Each time, they couldn't convert, and on the 2nd time around, Claude Giroux once again made the Sabres pay. Jakob Voracek found Giroux in the slot and Giroux fired a shot straight to the back of the net to put the Flyers up 2-1 halfway through the 3rd period.

Later in the period, Rasmus Ristolainen gave the puck away, finding it's way behind the net where Carter Hutton tried to play it. He successfully played it straight to Joel Farabee, who put it past the unsuspecting Hutton for a two-goal Flyer lead, a lead they would never let up.

GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

PHI: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: 16:54 - Dominik Kahun (12) (Victor Olofsson, Marcus Johansson)

PHI: 10:04 - Claude Giroux (20) (Jakub Voracek, Travis Sanheim)

Third Period:

BUF: NONE

PHI: 9:28 - Claude Giroux (21) (Jakub Voracek, Travis Sanheim); 14:49 - Joel Farabee (8) (Unassisted)

Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 7:36 - Brandon Montour (Slashing - 2 min.); 9:46 - Colin Miller (Holding - 2 min.)

PHI: 1:51 - Travis Sanheim (Tripping - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

PHI: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: 19:39 - Rasmus Ristolainen (Hooking - 2 min.)

PHI: 1:43 - Scott Laughton (Cross-checking - 2 min.); 6:36 - Philippe Myers (Hooking - 2 min.); 11:09 - Scott Laughton (Cross-checking - 2 min.)

Strategic Financial Solutions Stats of the Game:**Shots on Goal:**

BUF: 39 (13, 11, 15)

PHI: 24 (4, 10, 10)

Goalies:

BUF: Carter Hutton - 21 saves

PHI: Carter Hart - 38 saves

Power Plays:

BUF: 0 for 4 (0%)

PHI: 0 for 3 (0%)

Three Stars:

Carter Hart - PHI

Claude Giroux - PHI

Jakub Voracek - PHI

What's Next:

The Sabres come back home to host Alex Ovechkin and the Washington Capitals on Monday night at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starting at 6 p.m. with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog at (716) Food and Sport.

The Sabres face a red hot team in Philadelphia

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 7, 2020

Philadelphia, PA (WGR 550) - It won't be easy for the Sabres on Saturday to break their five-game losing streak. Buffalo skates into Philadelphia facing a Flyers team that has won eight straight games and 13 out of 16.

Going into Saturday's action, Philadelphia had caught Washington for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

I find it amazing that the Flyers have scored four or more goals in all eight of their wins during their current streak. Leading scorer Travis Konecny has seven goals and 10 assists for 17 points in 13 games.

Kevin Hayes has six goals and nine points in eight games.

Sean Couturier has nine goals and 13 points in 13 games.

Scott Laughton has seven goals and nine assists for 16 points in 17 games.

James van Riemsdyk didn't play the last game, but has seven goals and 10 assists for 17 points in 21 games.

Claude Giroux has six goals and 10 assists for 16 points in 13 games.

Newly acquired and former Sabre Derek Grant has five points in three games.

Jakub Voracek has a goal and 10 assists for 11 points in eight games.

Carter Hart is 8-1 since returning from injury. His season numbers are very average, but he gets the job done at 23-12-3 with a 2.47 goals against and .911 save percentage.

As you can see the Flyers score from anywhere in their lineup, yet they don't have anybody in the NHL's top 25 scorers.

Philadelphia has all those streaks, but Buffalo's Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson have combined for no points in the last six games. Ralph Krueger has seen enough so Jeff Skinner is going to take Olofsson's spot on that line.

Zemgus Girgensons has a lower-body injury and Lawrence Pilut is ill and Krueger didn't sound real encouraging on Friday that either will play which would put Michael Frolik and Colin Miller back into the lineup. John Gilmour has been called up from Rochester to give the Sabres one extra player.

Carter Hutton gets the call in goal with Linus Ullmark coming off the injured list to back him up. Hutton is 12-13-4 with a 3.18 goals against and .898 save percentage. Hutton has lost his last three starts and four of his last five. He allowed three goals in all three of his losses out west.

Wayne Simmonds played three seasons in Los Angeles before coming to Philadelphia to play eight years and 584 games. Simmonds had years with the Flyers where he scored 32, 31, 29, 28 and 28 goals.

Buffalo got pasted by the Flyers back in December 6-1.

Join Brian Koziol for the pregame starting at 6:00 when he'll be joined by Ralph Krueger, Linus Ullmark and Wayne Simmonds.

Sabres' Ullmark is getting closer to the crease

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 6, 2020

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Linus Ullmark isn't ready to start a game, but he will be the backup to Carter Hutton on Sunday. Jonas Johansson was sent back to Rochester on Friday before practice.

Ullmark went down in the crease during the Ottawa game on Jan 28. He said he didn't get caught in a rut on the ice, "It wasn't the ice's fault. I got stuck on the outside of the post and it was just a freak injury."

With this type of injury Ullmark has had to remain patient rehabbing while missing 17 games. He said it's just what had to be done, "I've had good dialog with the medical teams during these weeks so I had to know what I had to prepare myself for."

Ullmark said one of the biggest difference between a goalie and a regular player is goalies have trouble putting extra padding into their equipment when they're injured.

It's a lonely place for injured players as they rehab away from the team. Ullmark said that was very difficult for him, "That's probably the biggest thing is you're not really around the boys, you're in your own bubble trying to work on the things that you need to work on to get back as soon as possible."

Logical thought would say that if Ullmark is ready to backup, He should be able to start. Ralph Krueger said that's not the process, "It's just the next step as we're being patient in this process and making sure he's getting ready.

"We liked what we saw today, we liked his feedback from today."

Zemgus Girgensons and Lawrence Pilut missed practice on Friday. Girgensons has a lower body injury and Pilut is sick. Krueger said it's a good chance the group on the ice Friday will be the group that plays.

Jack Eichel is in a career high six game points slump. He's been fighting through a core injury and Krueger likes the guts his captain is showing, "Jack is showing a lot of character here and part of being a really good National Hockey League team is fighting through injuries and try to get yourself healthy while you're playing and our off-ice staff is working so hard to get him 100% up to speed and he keeps wanting to play and he wants to be an important part of the growth that we have and let's just hope we get him to 100% in the next few days."

Friday's lines:

Skinner Eichel Reinhart

Frolik Larsson Okposo

Vesey Lazar Simmonds

Olofsson Johansson Kahun

Waiting in the wings: Sabres will see scoring options on the free-agent market

By John Vogl

The Athletic

March 7, 2020

As the Sabres look to add offense this summer, two of the leading goal scorers on the market will be ...

Derek Grant and Tyler Ennis.

Hey, maybe it would work this time.

Since the odds are against reunions with those former Buffalo forwards, who else is scheduled to be out there? Are there players who could vault the Sabres into the top half of NHL scoring for the first time since 2010-11?

For sure.

As we've detailed often, the Sabres' biggest needs now and in the future are a No. 2 center, two right wingers and one left wing. Some long-awaited good news: Right wingers will highlight the free agent market, giving the Sabres legitimate options.

The Sabres will also have money to spend in 2020-21. Let's assume:

\$84 million salary cap, which is the low end of the NHL's expectations.

\$2 million overage subtracted from the Sabres' ceiling, though the exact figure will not be available until June.

\$47 million committed to 10 players (Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner, Marcus Johansson, Kyle Okposo, Jake McCabe, Rasmus Dahlin, Rasmus Ristolainen, Colin Miller, Henri Jokiharju and Carter Hutton).

\$12.7 million in qualifying offers to eight restricted free agents (Sam Reinhart, Brandon Montour, Linus Ullmark, Dominik Kahun, Curtis Lazar, Victor Olofsson, Lawrence Pilut and Tage Thompson). It will certainly cost more than a qualifying offer to re-sign Reinhart (\$3.75 million) and Olofsson (\$735,000), but we'll start there.

\$791,667 for Cody Hodgson's buyout, which is on the books through 2022-23.

That leaves the Sabres with \$21.5 million to spend. It's certainly enough to compete dollar-for-dollar on the biggest names available.

And here's who is scheduled to be available, barring a decision to re-sign before July 1. All statistics are entering March 6 and salaries (in millions) are from this season.

Right wingers

Name	Games	Goals	Points	Salary
Mike Hoffman	67	27	56	\$5.65
Evgenii Dadonov	67	25	46	\$3.60
Tyler Toffoli	65	23	41	\$4.80
Craig Smith	67	18	30	\$4.75
Mikael Granlund	61	17	30	\$6.50
Vladimir Namestnikov	61	15	28	\$4.00
Jesper Fast	66	12	28	\$1.95
Ilya Kovalchuk	44	10	26	\$700,000

Hoffman will be the No. 1 name on the market at any position. He has six straight 20-goal seasons and is about to top 30 for the second consecutive year. Since 2014-15, Hoffman ranks 18th in the NHL with 167 goals. The 30-year-old can play either wing and is a legitimate top-line skater, though he's on the second line in Florida.

Dadonov, who gets the juicy role with the Panthers alongside Aleksander Barkov, scored 28 times in each of the previous two seasons and is on pace to top that. Buffalo has not been a top destination for Russian players.

The 27-year-old Toffoli has picked an ideal time to bounce back. After scoring just 14 goals last season, he's topped 20 for the fourth time. Changing teams hasn't fazed the longtime Los Angeles forward, who has five goals in his first seven games with Vancouver.

Smith, 30, is on pace to score at least 20 goals for the sixth time in seven seasons. The 28-year-old Granlund should score 20 for the third time in four years.

The well-traveled Namestnikov, who's on his fourth team in three seasons, has just one 20-goal year to his credit. Fast's career high is 13, though he seems destined to top that.

Kovalchuk needs no introduction as a two-time 50-goal scorer, but it's unlikely he'd view Buffalo as an ideal landing spot.

Left wingers

Name	Games	Goals	Points	Salary
Taylor Hall	63	15	50	\$6.00
Carl Soderberg	68	16	33	\$4.00
Tyler Ennis	67	15	36	\$800,000
Josh Archibald	59	12	20	\$1.00
Zemgus Girgensons	67	12	19	\$1.60
Josh Leivo	36	7	19	\$1.50

(Note: Archibald re-signed with the Oilers for two years on Friday night, taking him off the market).

Since winning the Hart Trophy in 2018, things have rolled downhill for Hall. He was limited to 11 goals in 33 games last year. A trade from New Jersey to Arizona this season has yet to ignite his offense. Still, the 28-year-old is two years removed from a 39-goal season and has topped 20 an additional five times.

The 34-year-old Soderberg scored a career-high 23 goals last year but may fall back to his usual sub-20 level.

Ennis, who spent his first eight seasons with the Sabres, has scored his most goals since 2014-15. Traded from Ottawa to Edmonton, he's skating alongside Connor McDavid. It's hard to envision him next to Eichel.

Girgensons' resurgence has him on pace to match his career best of 15.

Leivo was enjoying a career year before suffering a fractured knee cap in December.

Centers

Name	Games	Goals	Points	Salary
Derek Grant	54	15	25	\$700,000
Erik Haula	46	12	23	\$2.75

Grant has already set a career high in goals. He's fitting in with the surging Flyers, putting up five points in his opening five games. But with zero goals in 40 games with Buffalo in 2016-17, his time with the Sabres isn't fondly remembered.

Not long ago, Haula's career was trending up. He established personal bests in goals for three straight seasons, culminating with 29 for Vegas in 2017-18. But a devastating knee injury has slowed him considerably. The 28-year-old is on his third team in two seasons.

Clearly, the Sabres won't find a No. 2 center on the free-agent market. But there are certainly wingers who can help. Buffalo can offer money and key roles. That's especially true on the right side, where Reinhart sits alone as a proven top-six commodity.

Hoffman would shoot to the top of the Sabres' right wings. Toffoli would give Reinhart a run for playing time. The other right wingers would at least improve the Sabres' depth.

It's essentially Hall or bust on the left side. Buffalo would have legitimate three-line punch with Skinner, Olofsson and Hall, though committing that much money to one position while lacking centers to feed them the puck may not be the best option.

But the Sabres will see options as they look toward next year.

After much consternation, the Skinner-Eichel-Reinhart line is back for Buffalo

By Joe Yerdon

The Athletic

March 6, 2020

The Sabres offense has been in a terrible slump during their five-game losing streak, so Ralph Krueger has decided to do the one thing he didn't want to do all season long. He's putting Jeff Skinner, Jack Eichel, and Sam Reinhart back together again.

The trio that racked up goals and generated offense like mad last season skated together at practice on Friday. Krueger said there was a good chance that Friday's practice lineup will be the one to play in Philadelphia on Saturday night.

"That combination has seen sporadic shifts here and there through the season, it's not in the thousands, but there was a lot of ice there," Krueger said. "It feels like something we wanted to see in the skate today and we'll make that final call (Saturday), but it's just about getting our offense going and digging for combinations that can make that possible. We need more than one line to go here with the opposition that is coming at us, but that is definitely a potential option (Saturday)."

The Sabres are 67 games deep into a season in which they'll almost certainly miss the playoffs for the ninth straight year. Like I pointed out after the loss to Pittsburgh, the offense has been dire of late, with nine goals in the past five games. The combination of a season destined for yet another NHL Draft lottery and a coach looking for different ways to fix the offense brought us to this point.

Krueger's reasons for not putting the three best offensive producers together have been clear. He wanted to have a lineup with more than one line that could produce goals and he wanted to spread the talent throughout his forward group. The Sabres are 21st in the NHL in goals scored and losing games because they're not scoring enough.

In the limited time Skinner-Eichel-Reinhart played together this season, the results are clear — they can generate offense.

Via NaturalStatTrick.com, they've played 50:55 together at 5-on-5. A lot of that time has come in situations where the Sabres are chasing goals late in games or on offensive zone draws late in periods trying to steal a goal. They've had 86 percent of faceoffs in the offensive zone. Krueger has viewed them as a specialized offensive weapon and not often as a regular line.

Unsurprisingly, they've had 68 percent of scoring chances against their opponents, 60 percent of high-danger chances and 65 percent of the shot attempts. Being mindful of the situations in which they've been put out there, that's very impressive.

There has been a downside though. They've been outscored 4-2. It's not a massive sample size and the situations sometimes come with an empty net. That would help at least partially explain the .826 on-ice save percentage when those three have been on the ice together, but shots on goal were even at 23 when they're together.

Eichel and Reinhart have had tremendous success together offensively this season. In 913:43 together at 5-on-5, their shot attempts are above 50 percent, although their shots on goal are not. They've outscored opponents 42-38. Their defensive numbers aren't as strong but they're out there to score goals and they push the pace of the offense most of anyone on the team.

We've written plenty regarding Skinner's offensive struggles this season, but he's picked up the pace of late with three goals in the past seven games. Putting him back with Eichel and Reinhart doubles as a move to strike while the iron is hot with him and give Eichel and Reinhart a boost, as they've cooled off recently with zero points each in the past six games.

"I just keep trying to build on my game and keep trying to improve," Skinner said. "Obviously (Eichel) is one of the best players in the world so he opens up a lot of space and he makes high-end plays... Hopefully we can get some chemistry going and we can produce a little bit."

We know how good they were together last season. In 541 minutes at 5-on-5, they outscored opponents 30-22 and were above 50 percent in shots attempted, shots on goal, scoring chances, high-danger chances and goals, and still got 67 percent of offensive zone faceoffs. Even goalies played well when they were out there, with a .930 save percentage.

"I thought we worked, I thought we had a good team game, I thought we were able to play different styles," Eichel said. "We grinded at times when we needed to and obviously we can make the pretty plays. It worked last year and hopefully it works tomorrow."

There can be concerns about how they defend, but puck possession and offense can be a better defense when players can score the way they can. The trio just worked well – reuniting them should be like pushing the "easy" button. With 15 games left in the season, that move is probably overdue, but exhausting all options is something Krueger will do to make sure this March doesn't result in an absolute collapse. Since 2013-2014, the Sabres are 24-50-14 in March. Making these games meaningful in a different way is the next challenge.

"We will continue to look at different looks but we would like to have stability. I'd rather stand here with you in 10 games and say, 'Wow isn't it great we're playing with the same lines again,'" Krueger said. "We don't want to force that but we will not give up on any game, we will not give up on any situation and sometimes changing the lines is a good way to keep the group reaching for victories and for successful games."

The Satchel: Tim Graham on Sabres vs. Bills management, NFL free agency and more

By Tim Graham
The Athletic
March 6, 2020

The Sabres have won as many games since the NHL trade deadline as David Ayres has, or Gump Worsley for that matter.

Buffalo has scored as many goals over its past three games as one player scored Thursday night.

And ticket prices are going up.

Need a diversion from all the misery?

Climb inside The Satchel and envelop yourself in its snugly goodness.

Obviously, the Sabres and Bills seem to be trending in very different directions when it comes to success on the ice/field. Recently, a lot of heat seems to be directed towards the Pegulas for the Sabres' lack of success and their inexperience in owning an NHL team (many fans have been calling for a president of hockey ops to be hired). The problem is that they have just as much experience running a NFL team as they do a NHL team, but the NFL team is starting to show signs of success and promise. What do you think the Bills' organization is doing to have the team trending in a promising direction that the Sabres might be lacking? — Joey M.

The Pegulas have *more* experience running an NHL team by three and half years. The difference is that they recovered from the Rex Ryan fiasco by hiring the right tandem in coach Sean McDermott and general manager Brandon Beane.

McDermott established a wholesome and character-driven culture. Beane assembled a fantabulous scouting department, consisting of several evaluators who have served upper-level roles with other teams or are considered attractive candidates to do so eventually: assistant GM Joe Schoen, pro personnel director Malik Boyd, college scouting director Terrance Gray, player personnel director Dan Morgan, college scouting assistant director Lake Dawson, senior scout Dennis Hickey and personnel adviser Brian Gaine. We at The Athletic Buffalo have written feature stories on most of them.

Think back to previous Bills GMs and their top lieutenants; most never got another NFL job.

Back to the Sabres ... I don't think a hockey czar is needed just as the Bills' front office proves a football czar is unnecessary. Jason Botterill could be the Sabres' boss man in the same way Beane commands the Bills.

The significant difference is that Botterill's staff doesn't resemble his Orchard Park counterpart's deep crew.

Sabres assistant GM/Rochester Americans GM Randy Sexton previously was Ottawa Senators GM for two and a half years and Florida Panthers GM for seven months, and his teams failed to reach the postseason. He worked with Botterill in Pittsburgh as amateur scouting director. Sexton oversaw the Penguins' drafts in 2016 and 2017. None of those picks have played in the NHL. The Penguins didn't have any first-round selections, but they did take three second-rounders with Sexton.

Buffalo's other assistant GM, Steve Greeley, is considered a front-office riser. The 39-year-old former Boston University associate head coach interviewed for the Carolina Hurricanes' top job in 2018.

Amateur scouting director Ryan Jankowski was assistant GM with the New York Islanders from 2005 to 2010 and oversaw player personnel for Canada's world junior and under-18 teams before joining Buffalo.

An answer to fortifying the Sabres' front office would be to spend money to make those lieutenant jobs more attractive to top scouts with better credentials. But with rumblings of more personnel cutbacks across Pegula Sports and Entertainment offices, a substantial cash infusion into hockey operations seems unlikely.

Any chance the Bills add legitimate competition to their QB room? Josh Allen has shown growth, but they will only go as far as he can take them. I'm sure they believe he's really a franchise, Super Bowl-winning type of QB based on when they drafted him, but does the league really view him that way? — Eric P.

Second question first. No, I don't perceive the NFL at large considers Allen a Super Bowl-caliber quarterback, but who is? There maybe are six or seven quarterbacks you think of and envision Lombardi Trophies: Tom Brady, Drew Brees, Patrick Mahomes, Russell Wilson, Aaron Rodgers, Ben Roethlisberger and maybe Lamar Jackson and DeShaun Watson. The thing is, it's hard to picture until they win it all or come close.

Allen doesn't turn 24 until May. Jim Kelly was almost 29 when he posted his first winning record with Buffalo and almost 31 when he made his first Super Bowl appearance.

Now to your first question. Allen is the no-doubt starting quarterback. Buffalo has zero desire to add a challenger. Buffalo isn't even interested in Brady. On my radio show in January, Beane cleverly reasoned there would be no need to pursue Brady because the potential free agent wouldn't have any interest in being Allen's backup.

Where competition might materialize is down the depth chart. As our Matthew Fairburn wrote last weekend, the Bills could be in the market for a developmental quarterback. Last year, they signed Tyree Jackson from the University at Buffalo, but cut him after a disastrous preseason. Then the Bills added Davis Webb to the practice squad, indicating they weren't concerned about losing him to another club. The Bills kept only Allen and backup Matt Barkley on their active roster. Barkley is in the final year of his contract.

On the topic of backup quarterbacks, I often think back to a conversation I had with Bill Belichick at 2009 Patriots training camp.

"Are you comfortable with them?" Belichick said of his philosophy. "If you feel like you can win with him, then you probably feel comfortable with him. If you don't feel that way, then that means you're probably looking for somebody else."

Belichick has benefited from savvy backup quarterback management more than most coaches. Brady was Drew Bledsoe's backup before emerging as a superstar. When the Patriots lost Brady on opening day 2008, unheralded Matt Cassel guided them to 11 wins. Former Belichick backups Jimmy Garoppolo and Jacoby Brissett started in the NFL last year. Belichick is quick to cycle through backup quarterbacks — even those he drafted — if he doesn't think they're working out.

"If you're trying to get your backup guy to eventually be your starter or be able to go in and win for you, and you draft a young player like Cassel, you know he's not ready that first year," Belichick said. "But you hope in time you can get him ready."

"That's the problem with a young quarterback. It takes a little bit of time to develop them. The problem with the old quarterback is it's a year-to-year proposition. It's a combination of how far you really think you'll be able to go with that player and if you feel he's keeping it warm until you had your starter back — but then you're looking for someone else."

Barkley has been the year-to-year proposition, while the Bills have been unable to identify a project worth committing to. This could be the spring, as Fairburn wrote, to use a mid-round draft pick on a quarterback.

How do the Sabres get a No. 2 center and a goalie? They didn't last year. Why should we believe they will this offseason? — Garry M.

Buffalo's goaltender situation will be fascinating to monitor. An upgrade would be welcome, but the depth chart could remain intact for 2020-21. Carter Hutton is under contract for one more year, and I doubt the Sabres will waive him. Linus Ullmark is a restricted free agent they should bring back.

In a perfect world, Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen and Jonas Johansson continue to develop next season in Rochester.

Botterill — or whoever the general manager is — could trade Hutton or buy him out, but finding a team that wants a 34-year-old journeyman at \$2.75 million will be difficult. If the Sabres can create an opening, then they

could look at free agents such as Braden Holtby, Jacob Markstrom or old friend Robin Lehner if he's willing to try winning here again.

As for a second-line center, oy, who's to say? The Sabres have failed to address the screaming need for two years. There's no reason to assume they'll suddenly conjure a solution this offseason.

As longtime Satchel ally Kris Baker (follow him on Twitter @SabresProspects) says, they should submit to the idea of installing Sam Reinhart in the role.

Who is to blame for the horrific penalty kill this year? This seems to be a very glaring issue. — Brandon B.

The Sabres are the NHL's rock-bottom unit, snuffing power plays only 74.2 percent of the time.

Perhaps it's too simple, but the old hockey maxim states that a team's best penalty killer is its goaltender. Of the 65 goalies who have played at least 10 games, Ullmark (.836) ranks 54th and Hutton (.831) ranks 57th in short-handed save percentage.

Johansson has a .909 short-handed save percentage, but he has played only six games.

Have you ever just completely lost the ability to read and write, similar to how the Sabres completely forget how to play hockey? — Andrew F.

Flizk now minniwirm.

Don't the Sabres have the new "dynamic pricing" program reversed? Based on the past 10 years, shouldn't the fans that are closest to the action pay the least to see the carnage that goes down on the ice? — Vincent S.

You raise a stellar point there, Vincent.

A legitimate quibble I have with the price adjustments are for those who are getting a discount. Sounds nice on the surface. But what that downward adjustment indicates is that some fans have been overpaying for their seats for however many years.

Hearing a lot of talk about certain Bills possibly being cut for cap space, like Trent Murphy, Tyler Kroft, etc. But in reality, don't they have enough cap space to wait until cuts to do that? — Chris H.

The Bills do not crave additional salary cap space. They have so much, in fact, that cutting those veterans becomes more plausible. The Bills can assume dead money without flinching.

As detailed in my salary cap analysis last month, the Bills expect to have roughly \$80 million to work with when the offseason begins in a couple of weeks. In that story, Spotrac founder and Bills fan Mike Ginnitti, naming Kroft, Murphy and Star Lotulelei specifically, noted that Beane has created a situation where he simply can walk away from certain contracts. Beane can upgrade those positions without feeling handcuffed by unfavorable deals.

Hey, Tim! Just wondering, since you have been in both hockey and football locker rooms, good and bad, what are good things that usually give the team a leg up and what are some bad things that you see translate to the field or rink? Broad question, but I would love diving into it, considering how the two franchises seem to be at two separate points. — Phil M.

We can talk about character and confidence and practice habits and coaching, but the nucleus of sustained team success is player talent.

Winning and losing locker rooms feature motivators and overachievers. Kyle Williams and Stu Barnes were admired as leaders, but their teams flopped more often than not. Marshawn Lynch and Steve Ott did not lack confidence. Chan Gailey and Ted Nolan expected to win every game.

Where success starts, however, is winning. Teams get into situations where they've "done it before," whether it's the 2005-06 Sabres overcoming two-goal deficits in the third period or last year's Bills making a critical defensive

stand. Moments such as those are the headwaters of faith, where you don't merely believe in yourself, your teammates and your coaches, but you know they will get the job done.

Great teams have their share of jagoffs, but you don't notice them as much. On losing teams, they're known as cancers.

All of this said, I am a big believer in locker-room and organizational culture — only not as the driving force to success. I see it as an invaluable complement to existing talent, a powerful additive to foster a winning environment.

Any chance the Bills make a serious run at Yannick Ngakoue? — John L.

The chances are slight, if not nil. The Jacksonville Jaguars have until March 12 to apply the franchise tag to Ngakoue, who reportedly wants to be the NFL's highest-paid defensive end at \$22 million a year. He announced this week on Twitter he was not interested in signing a long-term deal with the Jaguars. The tag would let them hold onto Ngakoue a little longer to possibly swing a trade.

Beane said at his season-ending news conference the Bills "probably won't be spending at the deep end of the pool like we did last year." I have no reason to doubt that. While the Bills have the salary-cap space to take on a behemoth contract like the one Ngakoue seeks, \$22 million would double the average annual salary of Buffalo's highest-paid player, center Mitch Morse. The Bills also must extend their own expensive players, particularly cornerback Tre'Davious White and quarterback Josh Allen from their rookie contracts.

Ngakoue is a fabulous pass rusher, with 37.5 sacks, 85 quarterback hits, 14 forced fumbles, three recoveries, two interceptions and two defensive touchdowns in his first four seasons. He'll turn 25 in four weeks. But Beane didn't painstakingly maneuver Buffalo into such an envious cap situation only to spend his way right back out of it.

How difficult is it for the Sabres and Bills to land any real top-end free agents without overpaying? Seems like we always get second-tier signings. Also, did you unfollow Bobo? — Brian W.

I did not unfollow Bobo, the self-proclaimed Howard Stern superfan, because I never would follow him to begin with.

Overpaying to lure free agents to Buffalo is a legitimate issue. I've written about the Bills' concerns a couple of times. Playoff appearances and a decided quarterback undoubtedly enhanced their appeal, but my canvassing of free agents at the Pro Bowl suggested that no amount of winning can overcome weather and small-market concerns for some players.

The Sabres are an easier sell to hockey players, but stigmas still exist. While getting paid in American dollars and living so close to Canada can be attractive to some, anonymous NHL player polls — as with NFL surveys — repetitively list Buffalo as the locale guys least like to visit or live in.

Yes, winning would help the Sabres' chances, but how many coveted free agents tripped over themselves to play with Dominik Hasek or the teams that reached consecutive Eastern Conference finals?

How many more seasons can we expect No. 9 to accept this team being terrible before he finally can't take it any more and demands a trade? Personally, I feel like he's already been more than patient. — Brian M.

Jack Eichel has carried the Sabres on his back. Like you, Brian, I wouldn't begrudge any frustrations he might have, any resentments he might harbor, any wanderlust he might entertain.

His yearly progress shows he hasn't taken his stature for granted. Already an elite player at 23 years old, Captain Jack earns his \$10 million salary.

This season, he became only the fifth Sabres player (Thomas Vanek three times, Miroslav Satan twice, Jeff Skinner and Chris Drury) to score at least 35 goals since Marine Midland Arena opened. With 15 games to play, Eichel is nine goals from posting the highest total since 1992-93, when Alexander Mogilny netted 76.

Sabreland would be livid if Eichel wanted out, but probably not at him. He is respected for having toiled five seasons for nothing. Fans are fed up with the Pegulas. A trade demand would detonate what has been a smoldering PR fire for the Sabres' owners.

Eichel is under contract through 2025-26, when he will be 30 years old.

I am disappointed the Bills have not replaced their offensive line coach and nobody is talking about it. In their three biggest games of the year (Ravens, Patriots and Texans), the O-line failed each time with the game on the line. Their O-line coach is inexperienced, and it showed. Why do you think Sean McDermott and Brandon Beane do not see that and have not acted? This will be a fatal flaw for 2020 and will keep Josh Allen and the team from progressing? Do you think McDermott will do anything? — Greg T.

Bobby Johnson joined Buffalo last year as an upgrade to veteran offensive line assistant Juan Castillo, an original McDermott hire who lasted two seasons.

The Bills overhauled their line with new faces at every position except left tackle. Football Outsiders metrics ranked the Bills' unit 16th in the NFL last year after rating it third-worst in 2018 and fifth-worst in 2017.

He might be inexperienced compared to Castillo, but Johnson has credentials. Johnson was the O-line coach at Indiana University from 2005 to 2009 and an assistant O-line coach at three NFL stops: Bills in 2010 and 2011 (working with Joe D'Alessandris on Gailey's staff); Detroit Lions in 2014; Indianapolis Colts in 2018. Johnson otherwise coached tight ends with the Jaguars, Lions and Oakland Raiders.

Oakland is where Johnson identified right guard Jon Feliciano and blocking tight end Lee Smith as free agents Buffalo should sign.

I'll never profess to be an expert on offensive line play. My opinions on such matters arise from conversing with experts and people directly involved. Bills offensive linemen have told me over and over that they love playing for Johnson.

To get a wiser perspective, I reached out to former Bills center and captain Eric Wood for his thoughts on Johnson.

"Bobby Johnson is well-respected amongst the guys on the team and guys around the league," Wood said. "He's a smart coach that gets his guys to play well together."

Johnson will have additional help in 2020. McDermott this week promoted former Patriots center Ryan Wendell to assistant O-line coach, joining Terry Heffernan in the same role.

Who runs a faster 40: Joe B. or Fairburn? Also, what grade do you give to Beane and McDermott for their time in Buffalo so far? — Cody C.

I assume nothing. So rather than guess, I asked Buscaglia and Fairburn if they'd ever been timed in a 40-yard dash. Neither had.

Alas, no hard data.

I played pickup basketball with both at the "Hoosiers" gym in Knightstown, Ind., and while Buscaglia was the better athlete, I also know Fairburn was an accomplished prep goalie in Massachusetts. And if you want to judge athleticism by what happened on the court that day, then you'd guess my personal best in the high jump was 2 feet, 7 inches.

But Fairburn told on himself by claiming his 40-yard dash time would be "awful." With that attitude, I'll have to put my money on Buscaglia.

We have a lot more information to go on regarding a grade for McDermott and Beane. Despite some turbulence that first year (switching from Tyrod Taylor to Nathan Peterman and various head-scratching in-game decisions), the Bills ended a 17-year playoff drought and have reached the postseason twice in the past three years. That's worth a B+ to me.

How many primetime games for the Bills this year? I am predicting K.C. as a Sunday nighter and two of the NFC West games, Seattle, L.A. or S.F. — Jeffrey B.

The Bills were great for primetime television last year, defeating the Dallas Cowboys on Thanksgiving and the Pittsburgh Steelers in a flexed game. Both performances were entertaining.

As nasty as the Bills' 2020 schedule looks from a competitive standpoint, the list of sexy opponents should make them candidates for more night ball than fans are accustomed.

The list of marquee quarterbacks includes Patrick Mahomes, Russell Wilson, Ben Roethlisberger and maybe Tom Brady. The NFL's inaugural season in Las Vegas could make that road game appealing to network executives. The 49ers game will be another TV candidate.

I'm predicting two scheduled primetime games, with more flexes possible if they maintain a healthy record.

Goalie Linus Ullmark Sabres' best option this season and likely next one

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 8, 2020

BUFFALO – Expect Linus Ullmark to morph into a workhorse again over the final four weeks this season. If the goalie can stay healthy, he might start 12 or 13 of the reeling Sabres' 14 remaining games.

Ullmark, who hasn't played since suffering a lower-body injury Jan. 28, will likely start Monday against the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center.

Before Ullmark missed 17 games – he backed up Carter Hutton on Saturday – he seized the No. 1 job, starting 25 out of 30 contests and 13 of the last 14.

The Swede, 26, developed into the Sabres' backbone during his career-best run, compiling an 11-5-2 record with a 2.64 goals-against average and a .913 save percentage.

"I played well," Ullmark said Friday. "The guys played well in front of me as well, made it easy for me to go to work every night."

In his absence, it became clear Ullmark is the Sabres' best option in net this season and next year.

Hutton, 34, enjoyed some terrific performances subbing for Ullmark, possibly saving his career by winning six out of eight starts over a three-week stretch.

But Hutton isn't the long-term solution in net. The veteran endured a stunning in-season decline, losing 12 straight games after starting 6-0-0. He has struggled again in the last two weeks – not that he's had much help – losing four times during the Sabres' six-game skid.

In Saturday's 3-1 loss in Philadelphia, Hutton cemented the Flyers' win late by committing one of the worst goalie gaffes this season. After Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen dished the puck back to Hutton in his crease, he appeared not to see Joel Farabee zooming toward him, and he gave it to the Flyers forward for an easy goal.

Meanwhile, goalie prospect Jonas Johansson, who was recalled when Ullmark went down, looked impressive at times during his first six NHL games, going 1-3-1 with a 2.94 goals-against average and an .894 save percentage. But the Swede, an AHL All-Star with the Rochester Americans, clearly isn't ready for the big leagues yet.

With Johansson in Buffalo, the Amerks recalled top Sabres goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen from the Cincinnati Cyclones, their ECHL affiliate.

Luukkonen, 20, has posted below-average numbers – 3-4-3, 3.15 and .874 – in 10 AHL outings. While it's a small sample size and the Finn is a rookie, his play in the AHL illustrates he almost certainly won't be ready for the NHL next year. Goalies often need two, three or even four years to develop in the minors.

With Johansson, 24, back with the Amerks, Luukkonen could be sent back to the Cincinnati again soon.

Ullmark, who has compiled a strong .914 in 33 total appearances, was on pace to play 54 times this season before getting injured. If he stays healthy next year, he could surpass that number.

–

The Sabres' feeble offense, which has scored only 10 goals in the last six games, showed signs of breaking out Saturday.

Against the Flyers, the NHL's hottest team, the Sabres pumped 39 shots on goal.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger rearranged his lines before the game, most notably putting winger Jeff Skinner back with top center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart for the first time this season. Meanwhile, rookie Victor Olofsson moved beside center Marcus Johansson and newcomer Dominik Kahun, who scored the Sabres' only goal.

"It felt really good, I really liked the team tonight," Krueger said of the new lines to reporters Saturday in Philadelphia. "I thought we had two real nice pushing more pushing more offensive lines with Johansson and Eichel. I thought they created some nice opportunities, they had a different look to them.

"I thought (Johansson's) line was more of a free-flowing (line), kind of moving pucks, supporting each other. Jack's line was pretty linear and also had some good o-zone time, especially in the first period. Both the (Curtis) Lazar and (Johan) Larsson lines created a lot of those offensive zone grind time, which is what you like to see."

Every trio generated a Corsi For – the percentage of shot attempts by the team while the line is on the ice five-on-five – of at least 57.1% on Saturday, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

Johansson's line had the highest Corsi For at a whopping 72.2%.

Notes: The Sabres had Sunday off. ... The Sabres sent defenseman John Gilmour back to the Amerks on Sunday. They summoned Gilmour on Saturday because defenseman Lawrence Pilut (illness) couldn't play. Gilmour was scratched. ... Sabres winger Michael Frolik played Saturday after sitting out four straight games as a healthy scratch. To make room, the Sabres scratched winger Jimmy Vesey.

Wieland talks new book, same struggling Sabres

By Chuck Pollack
Olean Times Herald
March 7, 2020

OLEAN — It was supposed to be a discussion of a new book, followed by signings from its author.

But, two-thirds of the way into Thursday night's session at the Olean Public Library, Paul Wieland couldn't help himself. He worked a quarter century for the Buffalo Sabres, first in public relations, then on-air in the team's radio and TV broadcasts and finally as executive producer of Sabres productions. The St. Bonaventure alumnus, who actually served as an occasional fill-in practice goalie for the NHL team, couldn't resist a frustrated rant about the now-struggling franchise that once employed him.

Oh, he started out on-topic, talking about his third and newest book: Taro Lives: Confessions of a Sports Hoaxer. That followed his 2008 compilation of Sabres stories Then Perreault said to Rico... and 2011's The Father ... The Son ... and the Sweet Sixteen which recounted the St. Bonaventure men's basketball scandal of the 2002-03 season involving late university president, Bob Wickenheiser, and his son, Kort, an assistant coach on the team.

Wieland, of course, is the perfect source for a book on hoaxes ... he's been a prankster of long-standing.

Indeed, Thursday night he admitted that trait dated to his college years when, as a junior, he opted for a Little Three basketball stunt. He went to an Olean military surplus store and bought a container of purple dye. He then dumped it into the pool in the basement under Butler Gym, figuring that Niagara, home of the Purple Eagles, would get the blame.

Only later did he realize the dye was for pilots who had to ditch and was to be used in open water to aid rescuers. In a pool it became a stain agent and took weeks for St. Bonaventure's clean-up crew to remove. Wieland was never identified as the culprit, yet admitted at the book signing "that was over 60 years ago ... I hope they don't take my degree away."

He also related a much more recent prank after returning to Bona as a mass communications professor. Tired of his students complaining about parking tickets, he had dozens of faux citations printed at his own expense, albeit with bizarre penalties — "first offense, one week in Olean; second offense, two weeks in Olean" — and had them tag every faculty member's car, including then-president Sr. Margaret Carney.

BUT HIS crowning pranks were during his Sabres PR days.

One, still alive via Wieland's current book title, is Taro Tsujimoto. He was the fictitious Sabres 11th round draft pick in 1974, a creation of Wieland at the behest of coach/general manager Punch Imlach who was tired of the slow pace of that year's lottery as the NHL tried to keep it secret from the competing World Hockey Association.

But Wieland's best April Fool's stunt came in 1977.

In a release, dated April 1, it was revealed the Sabres would be the first NHL team to use a synthetic ice surface called "Sliderex." Reading the whole document quickly revealed the story was a ruse.

But the night before, WGR-TV's sports anchor Ed Kilgore reported the story as an "exclusive." Wieland phoned him immediately after the telecast and scolded "You broke the release date," not mentioning it was an April Fool's joke.

For years thereafter, on April 1, fellow media members reminded Ed, "You broke the release date."

AS THURSDAY'S session wound down, Wieland's talk evolved into a frank discussion of the Sabres.

"It's easy for me to criticize today because you leave someplace and you're like 'Eh, they don't do it the right way any more.' But, guess what, they don't do it the right way any more ... I'm talking about the product," he said.

"I find going to a game an obnoxious experience because of the noise, it's just terrible.

I was at a game this year, '70s night, and I did second period color with (play-by-play announcer Rick) Jeanneret and it was a great time ... but the noise. I said to Rick, 'How do you stand this?' He said, 'You just get used to it ... you sort of have to block it out.' But I couldn't stand it."

Wieland quickly added, "The thing about going to a game is ... the Sabres stink. It's nine years now. (Terry Pegula) and his wife bought the team and they're unable to provide management to produce a winning team. I don't know if they're capable of doing it. I think they were fortunate to find a couple of good guys to run the football team (coach Sean McDermott and general manager Brandon Beane) after Rex Ryan, of all people, and they're better now."

"Pat LaFontaine would have been a fine head of the hockey operations, but it didn't work out. I pretty much know what happened but I'm not at liberty to (say). He was told one thing (by management), then something else happened."

Wieland pointed out, "It doesn't matter how much money they have ... they have great attendance ... they have a nice building in a great hockey town and they've provided the town with nothing ... diddly squat."

"I don't care if anybody quotes me about that. I'm not mad at them, it's not my business. But it is my business as a fan ... there's a little vested interest, 25 years of my life there (from) the literal beginning."

He continued, "I see this fan base, Western New York, getting a piece of crap as a hockey team. And, no matter what you say, just look at the numbers."

This year, they're a little bit better, but they're not going to make the playoffs ... they're far out of them, (though) they'll have a few more points. But year after year after year."

Wieland explained, "I get the entire hockey package on DirecTV and I'd stopped watching the Sabres, but I watched them more closely this year. I didn't think they were going to make the playoffs, but (Jack) Eichel was playing so brilliantly, he was fun to watch."

"But they don't have much ... average to bad goaltending — average when (Linus) Ulmark is in there, bad when the other guys are — they have a couple of good defensemen, they have four forwards, maybe ... (but) you're supposed to have nine. And they don't have anything in the minors."

He maintained, "What they do is stock Rochester with American League (level) players and a couple of young players. The Pegulas own the team and Rochester deserves to have a good team because it's a good market in the American Hockey League, one of the best, and they're used to having (one)."

"But what they're doing is putting 18 Swedes — and I'm not knocking Swedes, they're good players — and a bunch of guys that are veterans that you probably never heard of. They're not going to be called up because they're not NHL players. So where do you go from there?"

"They've been drafting for nine years now and they've got Eichel and (Rasmus) Dahlin, who is a wonderful young player, out of the draft and the rest is not much. (Sam) Reinhart is slow ... average," said the 82-year-old Wieland. "I'm irritated as a fan ... a blind pig finds an acorn once-in-awhile. It's ridiculous. They raise (ticket) prices again, charge more money, but still don't put a winner on the ice."

"Can't they get a playoff team once before I'm dead?"

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger finally puts Jack Eichel, Jeff Skinner back together

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 7, 2020

BUFFALO – For 67 games this season, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger refused to play center Jack Eichel and winger Jeff Skinner together for any notable stretch.

Other than some occasional shifts, Krueger kept the lethal duo separated before reuniting them for Friday's practice inside Harborcenter.

Krueger has often explained he likes balancing the lines by placing a defensive presence on each one. So Skinner, who scored a career-high 40 goals playing beside Eichel last season, has mostly skated with centers Marcus Johansson, Curtis Lazar and Evan Rodrigues this season.

Nothing, it seemed, could convince him to put Eichel and Skinner back together.

Krueger kept them apart as the Sabres plunged down the standings and Skinner endured a career-long 23-game goal drought. When Eichel's new left winger, rookie Victor Olofsson, missed six weeks of action, others substituted.

Then on Friday, a day after the Sabres suffered their fifth straight loss and Eichel's point drought hit a career-long six games, Krueger put Skinner back on the No. 1 line with Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

Krueger, of course, tried to downplay the move. But the trio will likely play together in tonight's road game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"It feels like something we wanted to look at in the skate today and we'll make that final call tomorrow," Krueger said Friday. "But it's just about getting our offense going and digging for combinations that can make that possible. ...

"That will definitely be a potential option."

Skinner, who showcases the same even-keeled personality in good times and bad, seemed unfazed by moving up beside Eichel.

"It doesn't mean much," he said. "It just means the coach changed the lines. I just keep trying to build on my game and keep trying to improve. Obviously, he's one of the best players in the world, so he opens up a lot of space and he makes high-end plays."

Eichel's struggles – he has been battling an undisclosed injury – and the Sabres' feeble offense probably forced Krueger to move Skinner up.

"Jack is showing a lot of character here," Krueger said of the captain playing through the injury.

The Sabres have scored just nine goals during their five-game skid. If Eichel, their catalyst, isn't generating offense, they're probably losing.

Skinner hasn't struggled all season. For the first two months, he kept producing without Eichel, scoring 11 goals the opening 28 games.

But after scoring Dec. 2, he did not register another goal until Feb. 22. An upper-body injury also sidelined him 10 games during that stretch.

Over the last seven games, however, Skinner has scored three goals, often looking like the player who earned an eight-year, \$72 million contract before the season. He pumped eight shots on goal in a 4-2 road loss to the Vegas Golden Knights on Feb. 28.

"Skins has been playing really well," Eichel said. "He's moving his feet, he's been taking the puck to the net. I think he's been one of our best players."

Skinner developed chemistry playing with Lazar and 6-foot-2, 185-pound newcomer Wayne Simmonds.

"He's a big, strong guy," Skinner said of Simmonds. "He creates a lot of space for himself and also for his linemates. Lazar, too, I thought he was real solid down the middle there. I thought we did a good job on the forecheck. Yeah, I think he's been a big addition."

Jimmy Vesey replaced Skinner beside Lazar and Simmonds on Friday. Meanwhile, Olofsson skated with Johansson and Dominik Kahun.

Olofsson compiled three goals and five points in his first three games after returning from a lower-body injury. Now, he has a seven-game point drought.

"We have to realize with that lower-body injury that it's difficult," Krueger said. "It takes time to get back right up to speed. But he's not complaining about anything and working through it. Victor Olofsson will get back to his pace."

Sabres send Jonas Johansson to Amerks; Linus Ullmark ready to dress

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 7, 2020

BUFFALO – With goalie Linus Ullmark ready to back up Carter Hutton tonight against the Philadelphia Flyers, the Sabres sent rookie Jonas Johansson back to the Rochester Americans on Friday.

A lower-body injury has sidelined Ullmark, 26, the last 17 games. He started practicing again Monday.

"It's just the next step," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said of Ullmark dressing for a game. "We're being patient in this process and making sure that he's game ready, so he'll get a good skate tomorrow morning. We liked what we saw today."

Johansson, 24, played six games during his first stint in the NHL, compiling a 1-3-1 record with a 2.94 goals-against average and an .894 save percentage.

The Swede stopped 28 shots in Thursday's 4-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, his fifth start.

Johansson has enjoyed a stellar season with the Amerks, compiling a 13-3-3 mark with a 2.19 goals-against average, a .925 save percentage and two shutouts in 20 outings. He was the Amerks' player representative at the AHL All-Star Classic.

In other news, Sabres winger Zemgus Girgensons (maintenance) and defenseman Lawrence Pilut (illness) missed Friday's practice inside Harborcenter.

Krueger said both players are day-to-day and could miss Saturday's game

"There's a good chance we'll be going with this lineup that practiced today," he said.

That means winger Michael Frolik, a healthy scratch the last four games, could return.

Update: The Sabres have recalled defenseman John Gilmour from the Amerks.

Sabres Skid Continues

By Jenna Harner

WIVB

March 7, 2020

The woes continued for the Buffalo Sabres, as they dropped their 6th straight, and their struggles to score continued. The Philadelphia Flyers won their 9th straight, defeating Buffalo 3-1.

The Sabres came out charging in the first period. Even though it remained 0-0 after the first twenty minutes, Buffalo dominated the period, holding a 13-4 edge in shots.

The Flyers broke the tie in the second period when Claude Giroux beat Carter Hutton on a backhand in front of the net. The Sabres would respond late in the period though, off a gorgeous tic-tac-toe sequence from Marcus Johansson and Victor Olofsson, which was finished off by Dominik Kahun.

The stalemate continued until midway through the final period, when Giroux found space in the slot, and rifled a shot past Hutton for his second of the night. Philly would add to their lead on a miscue from Rasmus Ristolainen to Carter Hutton. Joel Farabee would be in front to play cleanup duty on Buffalo's mistake.

The Sabres outshot the Flyers 39-24. Hutton made 21 saves. Buffalo plays host to Washington Monday night.

Sabres drop sixth straight in 3-1 loss to Philadelphia Flyers

By Adam Unger

WKBW

March 7, 2020

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Reuniting one of last season's most potent lines in hockey couldn't snap the Sabres' skid. After Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Flyers, Buffalo has lost six in a row.

Jeff Skinner was reunited with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart for the majority of the game. But the trio didn't produce any offense; Buffalo's lone goal came from Dominik Kahun.

Flyers captain Claude Giroux opened the scoring in the second period and added the eventual game winner early in the third. Carter Hart made 38 saves for Philadelphia.

The Sabres return to Buffalo to face another top team in the Metropolitan Division: the Washington Capitals. Puck drop is on Monday at 7:00 p.m.

Flyers defeat Sabres for ninth straight win, remain tied for first

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

March 7, 2020

PHILADELPHIA -- The Philadelphia Flyers won their ninth straight game, 3-1 against the Buffalo Sabres at Wells Fargo Center on Saturday, and remained tied for first place in the Metropolitan Division.

Claude Giroux scored two goals, and Jakub Voracek had two assists for Philadelphia (41-20-7), which has its longest winning streak since it won 10 in a row from Nov. 27-Dec. 14, 2016. Carter Hart made 38 saves.

"We didn't deserve to win tonight," Voracek said. "We were really flat throughout the 60 minutes. Hart made some huge stops when we needed it, and we got lucky that we won."

The Flyers are tied with the Washington Capitals, five points ahead of the Pittsburgh Penguins in the Metropolitan.

Dominik Kahun scored for Buffalo (29-31-8), which has lost six games in a row, its longest streak since losing six straight Dec. 28, 2015-Jan. 8, 2016. Carter Hutton made 21 saves.

It was the seventh straight game the Sabres scored two goals or fewer.

"I think we played overall a really solid game," forward Victor Olofsson said. "We kept their shots down too. Obviously, it's frustrating. I think it comes down to special teams. Our power play (0-for-4) has just got to be better."

It was Hart's seventh straight win. He is 9-1-0 with a 1.91 goals-against average and .934 save percentage in 10 games since returning from an abdominal strain sustained during practice Jan. 14 that kept him out for one month.

"It's just playing the game and having fun," Hart said. "That's the biggest thing for us right now. We're enjoying coming to the rink."

Hart made seven saves against the Sabres power play to help the Flyers go 4-for-4 on the penalty kill.

"I think we're getting used to that," Voracek said. "He's been rock solid since the beginning of the year. He was the main reason why we won the game, why we even had a chance going into the third to find a way."

Giroux scored his second goal at 9:28 of the third period to give Philadelphia a 2-1 lead. Voracek's centering pass went off Buffalo defenseman Jake McCabe's stick, and Giroux one-timed it.

Joel Farabee made it 3-1 at 14:49 when he blocked a Hutton clearing attempt and knocked the puck between the goalie's feet.

Kahun tied the game 1-1 with 3:06 remaining in the second period when he one-timed a pass from Olofsson.

The Sabres' 39 shots on goal were their most since they had since 44 against the Ottawa Senators on Dec. 23.

"We won a lot of battles tonight, and just that final push, our offensive players just are lacking confidence right now," Buffalo coach Ralph Kruger said. "The mojo is not there where the pucks are bouncing in; they're bouncing out. We haven't earned the puck luck of late."

Giroux gave the Flyers a 1-0 lead at 10:04 of the second. He reached back with his left skate to stop a Voracek pass and scored with a backhand.

They said it

"Any time you look at it from the big picture, you can break down the games. I think there's a lot of positive. But the overlying sort of bad taste in your mouth comes from the results. There's definitely positive things we can build on, but right now it's frustrating." -- Sabres forward Jeff Skinner

"Good teams, they find ways to win, and a lot of nights when they do win, it's the goaltender that made the difference. He's the one player on any team on any given night that can make a huge difference. Tonight, there's no doubt that Carter [Hart] was that difference." -- Flyers coach Alain Vigneault

Need to know

The Flyers are two victories from tying the Tampa Bay Lightning for longest winning streak in the NHL this season (11, from Jan. 29-Feb. 17). ... Voracek has 10 assists during a five-game point streak. ... Giroux has 18 points (eight goals, 10 assists) in the past 14 games. ... The Sabres are 0-for-17 on the power play in their past seven games. ... Buffalo reunited its top line from last season of Skinner with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart for the first time this season, and they combined for 15 shots on goal, including six each by Skinner and Reinhart.

What's next

Sabres: Host the Washington Capitals on Monday (7 p.m. ET; ESPN+, TVAS, MSG-B, NBCSWA, NHL.TV)

Flyers: Host the Boston Bruins on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN, NBCSP, NESN, NHL.TV)

Sabres at Flyers preview

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

March 7, 2020

SABRES (29-30-8) at FLYERS (40-20-7)
7 p.m. ET; NBCSP, MSG-B, NHL.TV

The Game

The Philadelphia Flyers will go for their ninth straight win and try to regain a share of first place in the Metropolitan Division when they host the Buffalo Sabres at Wells Fargo Center on Saturday.

A victory would tie Philadelphia for first place in the division with the Washington Capitals, who won 5-2 at the Pittsburgh Penguins earlier Saturday. It would also give the Flyers their longest winning streak since they won 10 in a row from Nov. 27-Dec. 14, 2016.

Goalie Carter Hart is expected to start for Philadelphia, which is 17-4-1 in its past 22 games. Hart is 6-0-0 with a 1.83 goals-against average and .935 save percentage in his past six starts and is 19-2-2 with a 1.64 GAA and .942 save percentage in 23 home games this season.

The Sabres, on a season-long five-game losing streak, have scored two goals or fewer in their past six games (1-5-0).

Players to watch

Sabres center Jack Eichel has five goals and two assists in a five-game point streak against Philadelphia.

Flyers forward Jakub Voracek has eight assists during a four-game point streak.

They said it

"It's just about getting our offense going and digging for combinations that can make that possible. We need more than one line to go here with the opposition that are coming at us but that would definitely be a potential option." -- Sabres coach Ralph Kruger on putting forward Jeff Skinner and center Jack Eichel on the same line Saturday

"If you don't respect the game it's not going to respect you. And they've got Jack Eichel over there. I don't think anyone is going to look past this game. And we're on a winning streak and it's a lot of fun to keep winning." -- Flyers center Kevin Hayes

Sabres projected lineup

Jeff Skinner -- Jack Eichel -- Sam Reinhart
Victor Olofsson -- Marcus Johansson -- Dominik Kahun
Jimmy Vesey -- Curtis Lazar -- Wayne Simmonds
Zemgus Girgensons -- Johan Larsson -- Kyle Okposo

Brandon Montour -- Rasmus Ristolainen
Rasmus Dahlin -- Colin Miller
Jake McCabe -- Henri Jokiharju

Carter Hutton
Linus Ullmark

Scratched: John Gilmour, Michael Frolik

Injured: Tage Thompson (upper body), Vladimir Sobotka (lower body), Lawrence Pilut (illness)

Flyers projected lineup

Claude Giroux -- Sean Couturier -- Jakub Voracek
Joel Farabee -- Kevin Hayes -- Travis Konecny
Scott Laughton -- Derek Grant -- Tyler Pitlick
Michael Raffl -- Nate Thompson -- Nicolas Aube-Kubel

Ivan Provorov -- Matt Niskanen
Travis Sanheim -- Philippe Myers
Robert Hagg -- Justin Braun

Carter Hart
Brian Elliott

Scratched: Shayne Gostisbehere

Injured: Nolan Patrick (migraine disorder), James van Riemsdyk (finger)

Status report

The Sabres did not have a morning skate. Girgensons didn't practice Friday because of a lower-body injury but will play. ... Pilut, a defenseman, will not play after missing practice Friday. ... The Sabres sent goalie Jonas Johansson to Rochester of the American Hockey League on Friday. Gilmour, a defenseman, was recalled from Rochester on Saturday but will not play. ... Patrick was a full participant in the Flyers morning skate but the forward remains out.

Stat pack

Simmonds needs one point for 500 in the NHL. ... If Miller plays, it would be his 300th NHL game. ... Giroux has 37 points (eight goals, 29 assists) in 37 games against Buffalo. ... Grant has five points (one goal, four assists) in a three-game point streak.

Sabres assign Gilmour to Amerks

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 8, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has assigned defenseman John Gilmour to the Rochester Americans of the AHL.

With Lawrence Pilut unavailable to play in last night's road game at Philadelphia due to illness, Gilmour was recalled to serve as the seventh defenseman.

In 36 AHL games this season, Gilmour has recorded 13 points (6+7) with two power-play goals.

Rochester is coming off a two-game sweep of Belleville on the road over the weekend. Last night, the Amerks scored three times in the third period to come away with a 4-2 victory. Jonas Johansson made 24 saves in his return to the Amerks lineup to earn the win.

They're in second place in the North Division, six points behind the Senators for the top seed.

Buffalo's next game will be Monday night against the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. Tickets are on sale now.

Despite numerous chances, Sabres unable to halt Flyers win streak

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 7, 2020

PHILADELPHIA - The Buffalo Sabres put 39 shots on net, but they could only beat Carter Hart once Saturday night.

The Sabres entered the third period tied, however, they ultimately fell to the Philadelphia Flyers 3-1 at Wells Fargo Center as the Flyers extended their win streak to nine games.

Dominik Kahun scored Buffalo's lone goal for his fourth point in the last five games. He has two goals and two assists since he was acquired by the Sabres at the NHL Trade Deadline. Claude Giroux scored twice for the Flyers and Joel Farabee added another late in the third. Carter Hutton made 21 saves for the Sabres.

Buffalo's power play went 0-for-4 on the night, and they had three opportunities in the third period alone. The Sabres have now lost six games in a row.

"Our power play has got to be a lot better. That's where we're losing a lot of these games," forward Victor Olofsson said. "We're don't score on the power play and I feel like the other team does. It's a big part in this league so we've got to get better there and, of course, 5-on-5 as well. We've got to keep taking pucks to the net."

Jeff Skinner led the team with nine shot attempts, including six that ended up on net. He was back on a line with Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, and saw power-play time with them, Olofsson and Rasmus Ristolainen, as well. Buffalo ended up with seven shots on their four power plays.

"Any time it's going like that, it's not fun. You want to win games," Skinner said. "We're getting opportunities, we're just not finding ways to bury them, and then the other team is. That's been the difference in most of the games lately."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger liked the way his new combinations spent time in the offensive zone and limited chances from the Flyers.

"I did like the feel of the team today. After two periods, you'd say, 'Well, we really put ourselves in a position to break their winning streak,' but they're on a roll," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "They're playing excellent hockey, very confident team. They didn't need much and compliment to them that they kept their streak alive tonight because we were very close to biting that off."

The Flyers took the lead with 9:56 to play in the second period when Giroux picked up a loose puck in front and slipped a backhand shot into the back of the net.

The Sabres tied it thanks to Kahun's goal, but the Flyers scored twice in the third to pull away. First, Giroux one-timed a puck from the slot that unfortunately bounced off the stick of Jake McCabe 9:28 into the final frame for what turned out to be the game-winning goal.

Then with 5:11 remaining, Farabee took advantage of a broken play to give the Flyers a 3-1 lead. Ristolainen, with Farabee on the forecheck, went to pass the puck back to Hutton to reset the play. Hutton, after receiving the pass, tried to send it back behind the net for Ristolainen, but Farabee picked it off and was able to stuff the puck over the goal line.

"You just can't blame the game on that one. It was a bit of a broken play," Krueger said. "I think Risto thought there was a good play off of Hutts, who we trust so much, and the puck bounced on him a little bit and it happened. I can't be angry with anyone on that one. It's just one of those freaks that happens sometimes in the game."

"It was long before that where we needed to have that game tied up and locked up, and we would've had a different situation there."

Finding chemistry

Kahun has played with Marcus Johansson, but on Saturday, Olofsson joined the line on the wing. They proved to be a formidable trio with the goal coming as the result of hard work from Johansson, a heady play from Olofsson, and a good finish from Kahun.

Down a goal with 5:11 left in the second period, Kahun tied the game on what ended up essentially being a tap in. The Sabres had kept the puck in the zone and Johansson circled behind the net with the puck, drawing two Flyers down low with him.

He then passed it out front to Olofsson, who faked a shot, freezing both Hart and defenseman Travis Sanheim, and sent the puck over to a wide-open Kahun.

Kahun said he's getting more comfortable and gaining confidence with each game. He liked a lot of the opportunities and the offensive zone time his line was able to generate.

"I think we're all kind of the same players. We make plays, we like to play with the puck. I think it was a good combination," he said. "It's unfortunate we couldn't win."

Olofsson was quick to credit Johansson for his effort when talking about the goal.

"Marcus did a really good job with the puck behind the net. He found me in the perfect space there in the middle and I just saw Dom on the far post," he said. "It was an easy play for me after JoJo's hard work."

Penalty kill success

Buffalo killed off back-to-back penalties midway through the first period, holding the Flyers to three shots on net. The Sabres generated two shots of their own while on the kill, including a slap shot by Johan Larsson and a subsequent rebound chance by Zemgus Girgensons, both of which, however, were stopped by Hart.

Entering the game, the Flyers had the best power play in the NHL since their win streak began on Feb. 18.

Buffalo killed off all three of their penalties, including a late one with 20.2 seconds remaining in regulation.

Up next

The Sabres will host the Washington Capitals on Monday and they'll look to build on some of the positives from the loss in Philadelphia.

"The retrievals were outstanding. It was like our 5-on-5 game, we won a lot of battles tonight. Just, that final push - our offensive players just are lacking confidence right now," Krueger said. "The mojo's not there where the pucks are bouncing in; they're bouncing out."

"We haven't earned the puck luck of late and again, so many things to take with for the Washington game, but we need to get some fruits from all this labor."

Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. with the GMC Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. Tickets are on sale now.

At the Horn: Sabres 1 - Flyers 3

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 7, 2020

Dominik Kahun scored the lone goal for the Buffalo Sabres in a 3-1 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers at Wells Fargo Center on Saturday.

The Sabres outshot the Flyers, 39-24, but saw chances stifled by Philadelphia goaltender Carter Hart throughout a 38-save performance. Claude Giroux scored twice for the Flyers, including the winning goal in the third period. Joel Farabee also scored.

Carter Hutton made 21 saves for the Sabres.

What happened

The Sabres came out firing against a Flyers team that entered the night on an eight-game winning streak. They ended the first period with a 13-4 advantage in shots and a 6-3 edge in 5-on-5 scoring chances (according to Natural Stat Trick) but were unable to push one past Hart.

Instead, it was Giroux who opened the scoring with 9:56 remaining in the second period. Kahun evened the score prior to the second intermission, the product of a tic-tac-toe passing play from linemates Marcus Johansson and Victor Olofsson.

Giroux scored his second with 10:32 remaining, a one-time shot from the inside edge of the right faceoff circle. Farabee added extra cushion with 5:11 left on the clock.

What it means

The Sabres managed to out-chance the NHL's hottest team, 32-22, but their offensive cold spell continued. They have been held to two goals or fewer in each contest during their current six-game winless streak.

The drought is in part the result of a cold power play, which went unsuccessful on four opportunities - including three in the third period - to fall to 0-for-17 over the team's last seven games.

It was the third instance during the winless streak in which the Sabres entered the third period tied. They are now 5-8-5 when tied after two periods this season.

Roll the highlight film

Kahun tallied his second goal and fourth point in five games with the Sabres.

Up next

The Sabres return home to host the Washington Capitals on Monday. Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. You can also listen to the game on WGR 550 with puck drop set for 7.

Sabres 'hungry' for tonight's road match against surging Flyers

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 7, 2020

PHILADELPHIA - The Buffalo Sabres know they have a tough task at hand tonight when they take on the red-hot Philadelphia Flyers on the road.

The Flyers have won eight games in a row and are currently one point behind the Washington Capitals for the top seed in the Metropolitan Division with 87 points and a game in hand. Washington defeated Pittsburgh this afternoon.

"They're playing a really confident team game. We took a deep look at them and they're playing very simple. They're working hard in both in directions and the depth of their lineup certainly helps them," Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said before the game at Wells Fargo Center.

Wayne Simmonds has a lot of familiarity with this Flyers team, having played 584 of his 907 NHL games with Philadelphia from October 2011 until last year's trade deadline. The newly acquired Sabres forward has one goal in three games against Philadelphia this season (when he was with New Jersey) and thinks that success tonight will start with making smart decisions with the puck.

He also sees first-year Flyers coach Alain Vigneault as a big reason for Philadelphia's success.

"With the coaching change, they've been pretty structured. Everyone's bought in," Simmonds said. "So it's going to take a complete effort - it's not going to be one guy and we've got to make sure we have a good team game."

The Flyers are led in scoring by Travis Konecny, who has 61 points, which is tied for 28th in the NHL. He's part of a balanced offensive attack - six players on their roster with at least 40 points.

"[Vigneault] balances out the energy as much as anybody in the league and that is tough to play against. But it's going to be a good challenge. We're hungry for this," Krueger said. "We're hungry. Guys are in a good place here and we're expecting a real tight game tonight."

Carter Hutton will start in net for Buffalo. At forward, Zemgus Girgensons is available after being given a maintenance day yesterday. Buffalo will take pregame warmups with 13 forwards.

Defenseman Lawrence Pilut will not be able to play due to an illness. John Gilmour was recalled from Rochester this morning and will serve as a healthy scratch. Colin Miller will return to the lineup for his 300th NHL game.

Pregame coverage on MSG will begin at 6:30. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray will call the action just after 7 on MSG and WGR 550.

Sabres recall Gilmour from Rochester

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 7, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres announced this morning that the team has recalled defenseman John Gilmour from the Rochester Americans.

Gilmour has played in four games this season for Buffalo. He's registered five shots on goal and has averaged 17:03 of ice time per game.

In 36 games with Rochester this season, Gilmour has recorded 13 points (6+7) with two power-play goals.

Defenseman Lawrence Pilut did not practice with the Sabres yesterday due to an illness and is considered day to day. Forward Zemgus Girgensons was also given a maintenance day.

After the skate, head coach Ralph Krueger said it's likely that the team will go into tonight's game against the Philadelphia Flyers with the group that participated in practice.

We'll hear more from Krueger later this afternoon when he addresses the media in his pregame interview.

Faceoff from Wells Fargo Center is set for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550. Catch the Buick Game Night pregame show starting at 6:30 on MSG.

Sabres switch up forward lines in search of offensive spark

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 6, 2020

With their offense in need of a spark, the Buffalo Sabres switched up their forward lines for practice at LECOM Harborcenter on Friday. Jeff Skinner skated alongside Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart while Victor Olofsson moved to a line with Marcus Johansson and Dominik Kahun.

The Sabres have been held to two goals or less in each of their past six games, a stretch that's coincided with the first significant slump of the season from the usual top line of Olofsson, Eichel, and Reinhart. All three players have been held without a point in those six games, marking their longest individual droughts of the season.

Skinner has played alongside Eichel and Reinhart at times within games this season, though not on a regular basis. The Sabres have instead leaned toward trying to establish balance in their forward lines, utilizing Skinner alongside Johansson and, more recently, Curtis Lazar, among others.

"It feels like something we wanted to look at in the skate today and we'll make that final call tomorrow but it's just about getting our offense going and digging for combinations that can make that possible," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "We need more than one line to go here with the opposition that are coming at us but that will definitely be a potential option tomorrow."

Skinner, Eichel, and Reinhart spent the majority of their ice time together last season, outscoring opponents 30-22 in 541:21 of shared ice time at 5-on-5 (data from Natural Stat Trick). The Sabres held a 52.22-percent share of shot attempts in those minutes.

The duo of Eichel and Skinner alone shared the ice for 845:28 at 5-on-5, with the Sabres outscoring opponents 53-43.

"I thought we worked," Eichel said when asked what drove that success. "I thought we had a good team game. I thought we were able to play different styles. We grinded at times when we needed to and obviously, we could make the pretty play. So, it worked last year, hopefully it works tomorrow."

Skinner has seen a resurgence in his game of late after snapping a 22-game goal scoring drought on Feb. 22. He has three goals in his last seven games and has accounted for at least three scoring chances in each of his last four contests (according to Natural Stat Trick), including six against Pittsburgh on Saturday.

Skinner credited recent linemates Lazar and Wayne Simmonds with helping spark the change in his play.

"I think playing with those two guys, I think we got on a little bit of a positive run there," he said. "We were able to feed off each other and make plays with each other. I thought the line clicked pretty well. Whenever you're going to have success in this league, I think it's going to be a result of all five guys - more specifically as a forward, all three guys playing well together."

Olofsson, meanwhile, will look to join in on the chemistry developed recently between Johansson and Kahun, who have connected on three goals since the latter was acquired from Pittsburgh last Monday.

Olofsson tallied five points (3+2) in three games upon returning from a lower-body injury on Feb. 13 but has gone without a point in seven contests since.

"We have to realize with that lower-body injury that it's difficult," Krueger said. "It takes time to get back right up to speed. But he's not complaining about anything and working through it and Victor Olofsson will get back to his pace."

Friday's practice

Zemgus Girgensons (lower body) and Lawrence Pilut (illness) were absent. Both players are day-to-day and could miss Saturday's game in Philadelphia, Krueger said.

The Sabres practiced with two goalies after assigning Jonas Johansson to Rochester earlier in the day. Johansson made five appearances during the absence of Linus Ullmark, who is set to back up Carter Hutton against the Flyers.

"It's just the next step," Krueger said. "We're being patient in this process and making sure that he's game ready, so he'll get a good skate tomorrow morning. We liked what we saw today, we liked his feedback today. He needs to get back into the group and that will be on the bench tomorrow."

Here's how the Sabres lined up.

Forwards

53 Jeff Skinner - 9 Jack Eichel - Sam Reinhart
68 Victor Olofsson - 90 Marcus Johansson - 95 Dominik Kahun
13 Jimmy Vesey - 27 Curtis Lazar - 17 Wayne Simmonds
67 Michael Frolik - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo

Defense

10 Henri Jokiharju, 19 Jake McCabe, 26 Rasmus Dahlin, 33 Colin Miller, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 62 Brandon Montour

Goalies

40 Carter Hutton
35 Linus Ullmark

Sabres assign Johansson to Rochester

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 6, 2020

The Buffalo Sabres have assigned goaltender Jonas Johansson to the Rochester Americans, the team announced Friday.

Johansson made six appearances with the Sabres after earning his first career recall on Jan. 29. He went 1-3-1 with an .894 save percentage and earned his first NHL win with a 25-save performance in a 2-1 victory over the Winnipeg Jets on Feb. 23.

The Sabres have been practicing with three goaltenders since Linus Ullmark rejoined the team on Monday. Coach Ralph Krueger said Thursday that Ullmark, who has not played since Jan. 28 due to a lower-body injury, could be ready to back up Carter Hutton this weekend.

Johansson is 13-3-3 with a .925 save percentage in 20 games with Rochester this season. He represented the team at the AHL All-Star Classic in January.

The Amerks are on the road for back-to-back games against the first-place Belleville Senators this weekend.