



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Devils shut down by Covid-19 outbreak after back-to-back games in Buffalo

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 1, 2021

After completing a two-game series against the Buffalo Sabres in KeyBank Center, the New Jersey Devils have had their training facility in Newark shut down by the NHL because of a Covid-19 outbreak.

The league announced Monday afternoon that 10 Devils players are now on the team's Covid protocol list, and five of them appeared in games against the Sabres. As a result, the Devils' games have been postponed through at least Saturday.

The Devils, led by former Buffalo coach Lindy Ruff, headed to Pittsburgh after Sunday's 5-3 win here, but were then sent home by league officials. Their games with the Penguins on Tuesday and Thursday have been postponed, as has Saturday's home game against the New York Rangers.

The earliest they will play is Feb. 9 against Pittsburgh. Their next meetings with the Sabres are Feb. 20 and 22 in Prudential Center. The NHL said it is reviewing and revising the team's schedule.

The league's protocol list does not differentiate between positive tests, players listed as close contacts or players serving required quarantines.

Goaltender Aaron Dell has been on the list while quarantining after being claimed on waivers from Toronto. Goaltender MacKenzie Blackwood went on the list Jan. 22 and remains out. Veteran center Travis Zajac was added to the list Saturday and did not appear against the Sabres, and veteran winger Kyle Palmieri played here Saturday and then was sidelined for Sunday's game due to Covid protocols.

Also on the list are forwards Michael McLeod, Pavel Zacha, Janne Kuokkanen and Andreas Johnsson and veteran defensemen Sami Vatanen and Connor Carrick. McLeod had his first career two-goal game in Sunday's victory, including a breakaway goal after 20 seconds of play. Johnsson scored with 16.1 seconds left in the first period Sunday to give New Jersey a 2-0 lead. Zacha played in both games.

Kuokkanen scored his first NHL goal with 5:19 left in the third period Saturday to pull the Devils into a 3-3 tie. Buffalo won that game, 4-3, in a shootout.

The Devils are the fourth NHL team to have their facility shut down this season, joining Dallas, Carolina and Vegas. There are 11 teams with at least one player on the league's Covid protocol list. Former Buffalo forward Marcus Foligno was added to the list Sunday by the Minnesota Wild. The Sabres have yet to have a player on it.

It seems like Casey Mittelstadt will get more looks in Sabres' lineup

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 1, 2021

Casey Mittelstadt is giving Sabres coach Ralph Krueger food for thought. That's the first step in the former first-round draft pick rejuvenating his career.

Krueger liked Mittelstadt's game enough Sunday against New Jersey that he had the 22-year-old on the ice in the final minute when the Sabres had pulled Carter Hutton and were pressing for a tying goal. With Sam Reinhart's upper-body injury leaving him a question mark for a game Tuesday against the New York Islanders, Mittelstadt could get a chance for some prime ice time alongside Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson.

That's where Mittelstadt spent Monday in practice and, while Krueger offered the daily caveat that nothing is set in stone, Mittelstadt is definitely going to get more chances on the club's four-game road trip to New York and Boston.

"We liked his game yesterday," Krueger said after practice Monday in KeyBank Center. "I think his offseason program has helped increase his foot speed. He looks lighter on his skates and has not at all sacrificed in the skillset that he has. So what's important is he is definitely a future offensive threat, power-play player and a playmaker with the scoring ability."

Mittelstadt flamed out last year in Buffalo with four goals in 31 games after a 12-goal rookie season in 2018-19. When he went to Rochester, he had nine goals and 25 points in 36 games. The pandemic prevented him from gaining some valuable experience in the AHL postseason.

"No one wants to have that long of an offseason, but to some degree, it was good for me, just because I've always needed to get in the weight room," Mittelstadt said. "And it gave me a little extra time to do that and kind of catch up in some sort of sense. That's the focus for everyone every year. I guess you can't be quick enough."

Mittelstadt played 10 minutes, 2 seconds and had an assist in Buffalo's shootout win Jan. 24 at Washington. He played 10:40 in Sunday's 5-3 loss to New Jersey. He's seemed calmer with the puck and more sound positionally, and now the goal is to start to create more offense.

"He just seems more confident and more assertive," said winger Kyle Okposo. "He seems to know the play that he's going to make before he gets the puck and when he gets it, he's really confident with it. Really like what he's brought in when got in the lineup and he got on the power play against Washington. He definitely seems to have taken some steps, which is great."

Mittelstadt said his work on the taxi squad with Matt Ellis, the Sabres' player development director, has allowed him to hone more skills.

"You have less guys and more reps so you can focus on the things you want to get better at versus a full-team practice," Mittelstadt said. "So that part of it was positive for me. It's nice to bounce ideas off him and he's always listening and incorporating what you think into the practice. So I've enjoyed my time on the taxi squad."

Mittelstadt said he didn't make too much of his 6-on-5 shift at the time but understood afterward the confidence shown in him by Krueger.

"It was good for me and I was happy to be out there," he said. "I was comfortable. I've been in plenty of those situations in my life so it didn't feel too out of the ordinary for me. Obviously, it would have been nice to get one there."

"He has a natural competitiveness that you always see and that's interesting," Krueger said. "That is an important unmeasurable component that can be a difference maker for a skill guy to also bring grit. ... He's a positive spirit. He gives off good energy to his linemates and teammates, but also in the direction of doing and fighting for the things that are necessary to win. So he is on the verge here and we're excited to see what's happening."

Travel troubles

The Sabres scrapped their flight to Long Island on Monday because of the storm pounding New York City. They'll try again Tuesday morning and pass on the morning skate in advance of the 6 p.m. start on NBC Sports Network.

"We're trying to make this a positive. The guys can spend an afternoon at home and we do a same-day trip," Krueger said.

The logistics of the trip are not bad, as the team's hotel is across the parking lot from the arena and players simply walk to the game without needing to have a bus navigate traffic.

"Sometimes a shakeup or a mixup kind of brings a refreshing entry into a road game," Krueger said. "So we've definitely embraced this situation."

Reverse Retros debut Feb. 11

The Sabres announced a six-game schedule of home games during which they will wear their new "Reverse Retro" alternate jersey will start Feb. 11 vs. Washington. They also will be worn Feb. 13 against the Capitals, for the two-gamer against New Jersey on Feb. 20 and 22, the Feb. 26 game against Philadelphia and the March 11 visit by Pittsburgh.

Roster moves

The Sabres called up Jean-Sebastien Dea and C.J. Smith from Rochester to the taxi squad so they could go on the road trip. No. 1 pick Jack Quinn, who was on the taxi squad and has been dealing with an upper-body injury, has been assigned to Rochester.

Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Taylor Hall's scoring rates are down; too soon to worry?

By Travis Yost
The Buffalo News
February 1, 2021

Now is not the time to be gun shy.

That is the advice I would give new acquisition Taylor Hall, who signed a one-year, \$8 million contract in with the Buffalo Sabres. The signing made sense for team and player: The Sabres were in dire need of explosive attackers beyond the likes of Jack Eichel, and were one of the few teams that had the salary cap space to sign a player of Hall's caliber. For Hall, it's a chance to prove he is still a high-end gamebreaker worthy of a big contract this offseason, whether from Buffalo or another team.

One of the biggest questions surrounding Hall in recent years has concerned his environment. Hall's offensive production has slowed, but that slowing has been collinear with the teams he has played with. Neither the New Jersey Devils nor Arizona Coyotes offered much in terms of supporting cast, and he was traded midseason before the Covid-19 stoppage. So yes, it's a bit challenging to tease out how much Hall's game has eroded versus how much he's been dragged down by poor offensive teams.

To that end, the Sabres won't be excused for a high-end offensive team, either, but a first line featuring Eichel and Sam Reinhart is a different story. If we sampled Hall's linemates over the last five years for example, you'd be hard-pressed to find a better situation for the 29-year old winger:

Hall's first 10 games in Buffalo have been a mixed bag. He has shown flashes of his usual brilliance, and the stat sheet is still being filled up, with nine points. But there are two areas of concern: Hall's individual offensive numbers have really dried up outside of the assists category, and the team has had abysmal puck luck with him on the ice.

Puck luck is what it is – Sabres' goaltenders are stopping just 84% of shots with Hall on the ice, a number so paralyzing it would make prime Wayne Gretzky look ineffective. That sort of goaltending run drives ugly goal differentials no matter how positive a contributor a player is, and ultimately those will regress closer to team averages.

The offensive production is potentially more of a concern. One of the components of Hall's game that excited Sabres fans is that he would bring much-needed speed and playmaking elements to Eichel's wing. The idea is that each would help make plays for the other – Hall benefiting from Eichel's vision, Eichel betting from a secondary attacking option that would force defenses to shade away from the center of the ice.

But the combination has been off to a bit of a slow start offensively, with the Sabres scoring just 2.4 goals per 60 minutes of even-strength play with the duo on the ice. Expected goals are higher (2.7), but still not as high as some might have envisioned. And one of the reasons why the start seems slower than expected is simply because Hall is less active in the offensive zone:

The goal numbers (and the associated shooting percentage, of course) might not be of concern yet, but the numbers underpinning goal scoring – how frequently players generate shots, and how dangerous those shots are – are pointing in the wrong direction. And pointing in the wrong direction at a time when the teammates around him have improved.

There are any number of explanations as to why the downshift has occurred so far, and some of them might have little to do with Hall. Similarly slumping linemates might be struggling to get him the puck, as one obvious example. And it shouldn't be discounted yet that measuring a line – especially a newly minted line – is hard to do over just a few weeks with a limited training camp and no preseason games.

But it's also something to keep an eye on. A 56-game season means a short runway, and coaches aren't going to have a lot of patience for struggling lines. Much of those early season struggles might be outside Hall's control or involving other than Hall with Reinhart injured, but the organization needs to figure out a way to get Hall more involved offensively – and quickly.

Sabres announce 'Reverse Retro' jersey schedule starts Feb. 11

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres have announced a six-game schedule of home games that will see them wear their new "Reverse Retro" alternate jersey.

The "butter knives" sweater will be worn for the two-game series against Washington on Feb. 11 and 13, the two-gamer against New Jersey on Feb. 20 and 22, the Feb. 26 game against Philadelphia and the March 11 visit by Pittsburgh.

The jersey is modeled after the team's red alternate jersey that debuted in 2000 and featured a crossed swords logo on the crest. The "goat head" logo that was the team's primary mark from the 1996-2006 red and blacks appears on the shoulders, and there is an updated blue and gold scheme.

All 31 NHL teams are wearing Reverse Retro for a few games this season, and a handful of teams made their debut in them over the weekend.

Mittelstadt taking in everything he can this season in Buffalo

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

February 1, 2021

Casey Mittelstadt had an impressive training camp this January that helped him earn a spot on the Buffalo Sabres' taxi squad to start the 2020-21 season. Now, 10 games into the year, Mittelstadt has already appeared in two games, registering an assist and a minus-1 rating, while logging an average of 10:21 of total ice-time.

Mittelstadt got his second game of the season on Sunday afternoon, skating in place of Tage Thompson in the lineup. While he took his line rushes with Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson in the pregame skate, he spent a majority of the game skating on the fourth line with Curtis Lazar and Riley Sheahan.

While it took a while for Mittelstadt to finally get back in the lineup, he feels that the time working on the taxi squad and watching games from the press box has been good for him.

"Watching some of the games before has been helping me be able to see things from up-top a little bit at least. Obviously nothing replaces playing, but getting to see the game and see the time and the space you have in certain areas and different things, especially after a while, I think has helped me in my first couple of games," Mittelstadt said after Monday's practice at KeyBank Center. "I think the first period in Washington was going a little fast, but after that I kind of settled in and started feeling the puck a little bit and making a couple of good plays. I felt comfortable out there. I thought I was better last night than I was the first game, so I'm just trying to keep building on it."

When Mittelstadt first appeared on the scene in Buffalo, the young forward was thrown into the fire and appeared to adapt to the new settings of the National Hockey League well. However, after a while, it was very apparent that he needed more time to develop his game and get fully up to the speed of the NHL game.

Luckily for Mittelstadt, he got some time playing in the American Hockey League with the Rochester Americans last season to fine-tune his game. On top of that, he had the time this offseason to work on his conditioning due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The 22-year-old feels that the time given to him this offseason was especially helpful with getting him ready for the opportunity this season to, at the very least, get the chance to stick around with Buffalo on the taxi squad.

"No one wants to have that long of an offseason, but to some degree it was good for me," Mittelstadt said. "I've always needed to get in the weight room, and it gave me a little extra time to do that and catch up in some sort of sense. I think that's the focus for everyone every year, you can't be quick enough. For me, just being in the weight room and having some time to focus on that was good for me.

"I've always tried to have a little more focus on speed and quickness in my workouts, just because I think that's a big part of the game, especially with how I play. I got some extra time to work on that, and I think it was a good summer for me. I'm a young guy, I have some growing up to do, and I think it was a good to take the time, take a deep breath and look back on some things that I would like to fix and some things I would like to have back."

While the work Mittelstadt has put in helped him back into game action, the way he played in his short time on Sunday actually earned him some ice-time late in the game as the Sabres attempted to tie the game at 4-4.

"Looking back on it, you don't want to be in that situation where you have to go 6-on-5, but it was good for me. I was happy to be out there," Mittelstadt said. "I was comfortable out there, and I've been in plenty of those situations in my life. It didn't feel too out of the ordinary for me, but it sure would have been nice to get one there."

This situation may be just a small example, but it shows that the coaching staff in Buffalo is starting to trust in Mittelstadt to be able to step into key situations like that to try and help the team produce more offensively.

"We liked his game yesterday, and I think that his offseason program has helped him increase his foot speed," Krueger said following Monday's practice. "He looks light on his skates and has not at all sacrificed in the skill set that he has. He is definitely a future offensive threat, a power play player, a play-maker with the scoring ability.

It was important for him to increase his foot speed and to give himself more separation on the rush to be able to make those plays that he can make so well. We thought that was lacking last season, and it's good to see [that he's] worked on that in the offseason. We're looking forward somewhere here in the next few games, if it's not tomorrow, somewhere very near with getting him another look so we can feel that development a little but more."

Mittelstadt was back at practice on Monday skating on a line with Eichel and Olofsson on the left wing. That's because Sam Reinhart is still not skating with his teammates after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury.

At this point, it's uncertain if Mittelstadt will be back in the lineup when the Sabres face the New York Islanders on Tuesday. When asked about his status for the upcoming road trip, Krueger said that Reinhart will travel with the team, and that he is hopeful that he will be available for the game.

If Reinhart is back on Tuesday, there is a chance that Mittelstadt gets reassigned to the taxi squad before the game starts.

While he said that this season has been a bit unusual given the circumstances, Mittelstadt feels that his time with the team on the taxi squad has been a helpful one.

"I think having [Director of Player Personnel] Matt Ellis there has been huge. He's just a good guy. You can bounce things off of him, things you want to work on, and obviously you have less guys and more reps, so you can focus on a few things you want to get better at versus the whole team practice. That part of it was a positive for me," Mittelstadt said. "I've enjoyed my time on the taxi squad. I have [Will Borgen], and me and him are pretty close, so it's nice to be around him. All of those guys have great, so it's fun too hang out with those guys. Having a great group of guys make it a lot better."

"I've always thought Casey was a great player," said defenseman Will Borgen after practice of his teammate. "He's strong on the puck, and he's always been confident with it out there. I don't see anything really different about him. I just think he's a really good player."

The young defenseman has yet to appear in a game this season, spending that time on the taxi squad as the team's eighth defender. He practiced on Monday skating on the team's extra defensive pairing with Matt Irwin.

While the 24-year-old is trying to be patient to get his first game of the season, he says the time spent on the taxi squad in Buffalo is going well so far.

"It's obviously a different time, different than what I'm used to, but it's been pretty good so far," Borgen said. "We still practice with the team, and when we don't, we've got Matt Ellis out there, who does a great job with us and helps us out a lot keeping us ready to play if we get our name called upon."

"It's been a long time since we've played a game. I know everyone that's been in the taxi squad room wants to play, but when one of the guys get in, we get pretty excited for them. We keep each other positive in there, and we just have a good attitude when we come to the rink every day."

Borgen has been a very sturdy presence in the Sabres organization since he was signed to his entry-level contract in 2018. He's a workhorse all over the ice who can play all sorts of minutes, while being capable of playing all sorts of situations, especially in the defensive zone. Borgen will never really be a producer of points offensively, he certainly can step in when the time is right with his exceptional skating skills and vision on the ice.

Even though he has not gotten the playing time this season, he feels that his game year-to-year continues to grow as he gets more comfortable in his own skin.

"I don't know if my skill set gets any better or not. I think it comes with confidence and knowing the game, just a little more experience," Borgen said. "When I first joined Rochester at the end of the [2017-18 season], I don't think I played my game as much as I could have because I wasn't as confident out there. But as you get to know guys and it's been a couple of years now, I think that confidence is just a big thing for me. I've [also] put on some weight too, which makes me feel a little bit stronger out there. I think those two things, just being physically bigger and confidence on the ice."

The team got some good news on Monday as defenseman Henri Jokiharju was back on the ice for practice, skating on a pairing with Colin Miller. He missed Sunday's matchup with the New Jersey, as he has been dealing with, what Krueger called, a "minor" injury.

Here were the lines for Monday's practice:

Forwards:

Mittelstadt - Eichel - Olofsson

Hall - Staal - Cozens

Rieder - Eakin - Okposo

Skinner - Lazar - Sheahan

Defense:

McCabe - Ristolainen

Dahlin - Montour

Miller - Jokiharju

Borgen - Irwin

Tage Thompson worked in as the extra skater.

Due to the ongoing nor'easter affecting the New York area on Monday, the team decided it will not travel to Long Island until, at least, Tuesday morning, which means the group will not have a morning skate prior to the game. The puck drops at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum on Tuesday evening at 6 p.m. EST.

Sabres call up C.J. Smith, J.S. Dea to taxi squad

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

February 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres announced on Monday the team has called up a pair of players from the Rochester Americans to the team's taxi squad. Forwards C.J. Smith and Jean-Sebastien Dea have both joined the Sabres in Buffalo, while forward Jack Quinn has been assigned to the Amerks.

This is the first time that Smith and Dea have been called up to the Sabres' taxi squad this season, as both players have spent the past couple of weeks preparing for the Amerks' season in Rochester. Smith was in Buffalo to take part in training camp before the 2020-21 season got started, while Dea was placed on waivers just before training camp and he did not take part in the two-week period.

As for Quinn, he has been a part of the taxi squad since training camp came to a close, but head coach Ralph Krueger did recently mention that he was dealing with an upper-body injury that forced him to be placed on Injured Reserve. Now that it appears that Quinn is healthy, he will join the Amerks in Rochester and likely be available for Friday night's season opener against the Utica Comets at Blue Cross Arena.

Smith and Dea will now be able to travel and practice with the team going forward, as the Sabres get set to head to Long Island for a matchup with the New York Islanders on Tuesday night at Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum. Faceoff on Tuesday is set for 6 p.m. EST with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show starting at 5 p.m. EST with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog.

OPINION: Sabres get outworked in loss to New Jersey

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 31, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres didn't play well in any of the four games at home this week, and things were no different on Sunday in a 5-3 loss to the New Jersey Devils.

Buffalo just had too many mental breakdowns and too many mistakes to beat a team that totally outworked them.

Giving up goals at the end of the period is always a killer, but in the first period, a bouncing puck wound up behind Carter Hutton with just 17 seconds left in the period. In the second, Miles Wood took advantage of Colin Miller and Matt Irwin to fly by them and scored on his own rebound with 0.6 second left in the period.

Wood got his second of the game into the empty net with eight second left in the third, meaning New Jersey scored three of their five goals at the tail end of all three periods. Mix in the goal that Michael McLeod scored just 20 seconds into the game and it adds up to four goals scored when it appeared the Sabres lost concentration.

"Disastrous. It's unacceptable in those phases of the game where you need to be tight and activated defensively, properly, and understand where you are in the game management," said Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger following the loss. "All three situations were extremely disappointing."

The second period goal by Wood was particularly bad because Buffalo decided to get some folks to the net and it scored them two goals in 1:12. On the first, Curtis Lazar was in front and tipped in Rasmus Ristolainen's shot from the right point the cut New Jersey's lead to 2-1. Then on a power play, Ristolainen was camped in front of Eric Comrie and Rasmus Dahlin ripped a shot that Comrie never saw, scoring his first goal of the season.

You would think two hard-working goals would fuel them to get to their A-game, but it didn't.

They lost concentration late in the second and had to use the third period to come back again. It was Ristolainen on the power play turning and scoring on a rebound, but a puck got through Hutton for the Devils' fourth goal, and the Sabres couldn't recover.

"We didn't play our A-game, that's for sure," Ristolainen said after the loss. "We didn't start well, and they won more one-on-one battles. By the end of the third, we for sure looked like the team that was more tired out there."

Ever since Wood has come into the league, the Sabres have had no answer for him and his speed. In 11 games against Buffalo, the 25-year-old has six goals and eight points against them.

People keep asking me why the Sabres make every goaltender look like they're the best in the league, and it's because it's too easy around the net. When they get a net-front presence, they tend to score goals, but it's not enough.

"I feel that we are the better team. We have more skill, but we need to match their work ethic," Ristolainen said it best following the game.

This was a game where Krueger tried Jeff Skinner with Eric Staal and Dylan Cozens. It didn't work, as they were Buffalo's worst line.

The loss broke Buffalo's five-game point streak, and another streak where they had picked up points in six out of seven games.

Buffalo is now tied for fifth with New Jersey in the East Division. The Devils have a better points percentage, because they've played one less game.

The Pittsburgh Penguins hold down the division's fourth and final playoff spot, one point in front of New Jersey and the Sabres.

Buffalo will next be in action on Tuesday night in Long Island against the New York Islanders.

Casey Mittelstadt impressing Sabres, could earn more game action

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO – Having spent the entire game skating on the fourth line, Casey Mittelstadt hardly seemed like a forward Sabres coach Ralph Krueger would utilize in the waning seconds of a one-goal game.

Mittelstadt, 22, was only making his second appearance this season in Sunday afternoon's 5-3 loss to the New Jersey Devils. The Sabres had just elevated him from the taxi squad earlier in the day.

Krueger had two former 40-goal scorers – Jeff Skinner and Eric Staal – on the bench. Still, Krueger liked what Mittelstadt had showcased in his limited role as a winger. He also offered the Sabres some freshness, having not played the previous day.

So Krueger made what he called a "gut decision" and put Mittelstadt on the ice in a six-on-five situation with the Sabres pressing for the tying goal.

"I was happy to be out there," Mittelstadt said on a Zoom call following Monday's practice. "I was comfortable out there. I've been in plenty of those situations in my life."

Mittelstadt, however, hadn't experienced any situations like that this year. He has mostly served as an extra forward, shuttling between the taxi squad and the active roster.

The American has tried to tap into the knowledge of Matt Ellis, who runs the taxi-squad sessions, and study the action when he watches games.

"Getting to see the game and kind of seeing the time and space you have in certain areas and different things ... has helped me in my first couple games," Mittelstadt said.

While Mittelstadt's play has earned Krueger's praise – "He is on the verge here, and we're excited to see what's happening with him," he said – opportunities have been limited.

If winger Sam Reinhart can return from his upper-body injury for Tuesday's road game against the New York Islanders, Mittelstadt will likely play down the lineup or be scratched. He practiced at left wing beside top center Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson on Monday inside KeyBank Center.

But Krueger plans to award Mittelstadt, the seventh overall pick in 2017, more action soon.

"We're looking forward here in the next few games, if it's not (Tuesday), somewhere very near getting him another look so we can feel that development a little more firsthand," Krueger said.

That development seemed to stall last season.

Mittelstadt's career has been well documented and scrutinized. He jumped to the NHL late in the 2017-18 season following his freshman campaign at Minnesota and enjoyed regular duty for more than a year.

The Sabres, having limited options at center, kept playing Mittelstadt despite some struggles. Then before Christmas last season, they demoted him after he morphed into a regular scratch. He spent the rest of the season with the Rochester Americans.

Those early hiccups helped fuel the 6-foot-1, 196-pound Mittelstadt, whose maturation over the past year has impressed the team's brass. He used the long offseason to his advantage, returning to Buffalo stronger, faster and more confident.

"I got some extra time to work on that this year," said Mittelstadt, who recorded an assist and skated on the power play in his season debut Jan. 24. "I think it was a good summer for me. Obviously, I'm a young guy, I've got some growing up to do. It was good to take the time to take a deep breath and look back on some things I would like to fix and some things I'd like to have back."

Krueger said Mittelstadt has become lighter on his feet without sacrificing his skill set.

"He is definitely a future offensive threat, a power-play player, a playmaker with a scoring ability," Krueger said. "(It was important) for him to increase his foot speed and give himself more separation on the rush to be able to make those plays that he can make so well. We thought that was lacking last season and it's good to see somebody has worked on that in the offseason."

Sabres winger Kyle Okposo has noticed Mittelstadt looks more assertive.

"He seems to know the play that he's going to make before he gets the puck," Okposo said, "and when he gets it, he's really confident with it."

He added: "He definitely seems to have taken some steps."

Storm forces Sabres to change plans; Sam Reinhart will travel with team

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 1, 2021

The Sabres will be staying at home today and plan to fly to New York on Tuesday morning for their 6 p.m. game against the Islanders.

With Winter Storm Orlena battering the parts of the New York City area, most flights in and out the region have been canceled.

The Sabres planned to travel to New York this afternoon. Instead, they practiced inside KeyBank Center.

Coach Ralph Krueger said the Sabres aren't concerned about the game being postponed.

"We would've not touched the ice today, so now we will just leave out the pregame skate tomorrow," he said.

He added: "Sometimes a shakeup or a mix-up kind of brings a refreshing entry into a road game. So we've definitely embraced this situation."

In other news, Krueger said winger Sam Reinhart, who did not practice today, will accompany the Sabres on their four-game road trip. An upper-body injury has sidelined Reinhart the last two games.

"We're just still evaluating, but we're hoping that he'll be available tomorrow," Krueger said.

Meanwhile, Henri Jokiharju practiced among the Sabres' regular defensemen. An upper-body injury has shelved the Finn three of the last four contests.

If Jokiharju plays, defenseman Matt Irwin would likely be scratched. Defenseman Will Borgen, who's on the taxi squad, also practiced with the Sabres today.

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The Sabres announced today they will be wearing their new Reverse Retro jersey on the following dates: Feb. 11 (home), Feb 13 (home), Feb. 20 (road), Feb. 22 (road) Feb. 26 (home) and March 11 (home).

Sabres send Jack Quinn to Amerks, recall two players to taxi squad

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO – The Sabres assigned rookie winger Jack Quinn to the Rochester Americans this morning and recalled forwards Jean-Sebastien Dea and C.J. Smith to the taxi squad.

Quinn, 19, spent the first few weeks of the season on the Sabres' taxi squad. He recently recovered from an upper-body injury, coach Ralph Krueger said last week.

The Sabres drafted Quinn eighth overall last year. In a normal year, he would likely be playing with his junior team, the Ontario Hockey League's Ottawa 67s. Junior-age players can play in the AHL because their leagues are paused right now because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Amerks begin their season Friday.

Dea and Smith, meanwhile, spent the last two weeks in Rochester's training camp. Both players have one-way contracts this season.

The Sabres waived Dea and assigned him to the Amerks in late December. He did not skate in Buffalo's camp.

Offseason program helping Casey Mittelstadt's game

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) — After signing a one-year contract in late December, Sabres forward Casey Mittelstadt is trying to prove his worth.

Surrounded by high expectations as the 8th overall selection in the 2017 NHL Draft, Mittelstadt hasn't done a whole lot at the NHL level. It's why this season is really important.

He's played in two games including the team's most recent on Sunday against New Jersey, and the coaches and players have liked what they've seen.

"He seems to know the play that he's gonna make before he gets the puck and when he gets it, he's really confident with it," Kyle Okposo said. "I've really liked what he's brought and he definitely seems to have taken steps which is great."

"He's strong on the puck and he's always been confident with it out there," Will Borgen added. "I've always thought he was a really good player."

Mittelstadt began the 2019-20 season with the Sabres, recording nine points in 31 games played [four goals, five assists], but was sent down to Rochester after the team's December 10th game against St. Louis.

He played the rest of the season with the Amerks, until COVID-19 canceled the remainder of the season and postseason. Mittelstadt wasted no time getting to work.

"No one wants to have that long of an off-season," Mittelstadt said. "But for me, being in the weight room to get quicker was good for me."

And his offseason program is paying off. The coaches and players have seen an increase in his foot speed, something coach Krueger says is crucial with the quickness of the NHL. He spent Monday's practice skating on the top line alongside Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson.

"He is definitely a future offensive threat, a play maker, and it was important to increase his foot speed and separate himself on the rush," Krueger said. "That was lacking last season and it was good to see somebody work on that in the off season."

"I've always tried to have a little more focus on speed and quickness in my workouts because it's such a big part of the game," Mittelstadt said. "I got some extra time to work on that this year. It was good to take time, take a deep breath, and look on things I'd like to fix."

Starting as a member on the taxi squad, Mittelstadt has recorded one assist in two games. He looks to keep improving as a player and earn more chances on the Sabres regular season roster.

"I like having him on the bench during games. He's a positive spirit and gives off good energy to his line mates and teammates," head coach Ralph Krueger said. "He is on the verge here and we're excited to see what's happening with him."

Devils' season paused for COVID-19 issues, day after back-to-back games against Sabres

By Julianne Pelusi

WGRZ

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Just one day after back-to-back games in Buffalo, the New Jersey Devils will have to pause their season, due to four additional players being added to the NHL's COVID Protocol Related Absence List on Monday, the league announced.

The Devils games will be postponed through at least Saturday, Feb. 6.

A Sabres spokesperson told 2 On Your Side's Adam Benigni the Sabres haven't been impacted at this point but are closely monitoring the situation.

The Sabres and Devils played afternoon games, both Saturday and Sunday.

The NHL said in a statement Monday on the Devils, "As an appropriate precaution, the team's training facilities have been closed to all players on the club's active roster, effective immediately, and will remain so until further notice. The league is in the process of reviewing and revising the Devils' regular season schedule.

"The Devils organization has, and will continue to follow, all recommended guidelines aimed at protecting the health and safety of its players, staff and community at large as set by the NHL, local, state and national agencies."

Sabres expect to play Tuesday night, despite flight delay to Long Island

By Julianne Pelusi

By WGRZ

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres will not make the trip to the eastern side of New York Monday, ahead of their scheduled 6 p.m. game Tuesday against the Islanders at Nassau Coliseum, with a winter storm ripping through the northeast.

Sabres Head Coach Ralph Krueger does not expect the game to be delayed after the flight change.

"We aren't concerned at all," Krueger said about Tuesday's game still being played.

"We would have not touched the ice today... we will just leave out the pregame skate tomorrow. We went for a good 20 to 25 minutes today... We're trying to make this a positive the guys can spend an afternoon at home, and we do a same day trip, it'll be with that early arrivals so we'll have time to activate in the hotel which is right by the arena."

"Sometimes a shake up or a mix up kind of brings a refreshing entry into a road game so we've, we've definitely embraced this situation now," Krueger said.

The Sabres are scheduled to play Tuesday and Thursday on Long Island, and Krueger said forward Sam Reinhart - who had been playing on the top line with Jack Eichel and Taylor Hall, before missing two games this weekend with an upper body injury - will be making the trip, and they hope to have him available on Tuesday.

The Sabres are coming off of a split weekend series with the New Jersey Devils at home, losing 5-3 on Sunday after a 4-3 shootout win over the Devils the previous day.

Mittelstadt Practices on Sabres Top Line After Offseason Improvements

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

February 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — An extended offseason might be just what Casey Mittelstadt needed to get his body into NHL-condition.

What You Need To Know

- Despite only playing in two of the Sabres' 10 games this year, Casey Mittelstadt practiced on the top line Monday
- Mittelstadt, the Sabres' 8th overall pick in the 2017 Draft, skated with Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson
- Ralph Krueger credited Mittelstadt's offseason workout program with helping him add speed and strength

"I've always needed to get in the weight room. This gave me a little extra time to do that," he says. "Catch up, in a sort of sense. I think that's the focus for everyone every year. You can't be quick enough. For me, just being in the weight room having some time to do that."

After splitting the previous season between the Sabres and Rochester, Mittelstadt's teammates have noticed the improvements in his game.

"I really like what he's brought in when he's gotten in the lineup. He's good on the power play," says Kyle Okposo. "I really like what he's brought. He definitely seems to have taken some steps, which is great."

Ralph Krueger was complimentary of Mittelstadt's offseason work after Monday's practice, and rewarded the young forward with time as the team's extra attacker Sunday in the final minutes.

"You don't think about it much during the game - you just go in and try to do your job," says Mittelstadt.

"Looking back on it, you don't want to be in that situation where you have to go 6-on-5, but it was good for me. I was happy to be out there. I was comfortable out there. I've been in plenty of situations like that in my life."

Practice lines can get jumbled by the day, so it's not a guarantee that Mittelstadt plays with Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson. That being said, if Sam Reinhart (upper-body injury) can't play Tuesday, this could be a big opportunity for Mittelstadt to cement his place in the Sabres starting lineup.

Reinhart to travel to Long Island, could play Tuesday

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 1, 2021

Sam Reinhart will travel with the Sabres to Long Island and could be available for their game against the New York Islanders on Tuesday, coach Ralph Krueger said.

Reinhart did not participate in practice on Monday after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury. He has three goals and six points in eight games this season.

"We're just still evaluating, but we're hoping that he'll be available tomorrow," Krueger said.

Casey Mittelstadt practiced alongside Jack Eichel and Victor Olofsson in Reinhart's absence. Mittelstadt played his second game of the season on Sunday, skating 10:40 and earning a shift as an extra attacker when the Sabres attempted a 6-on-5 push to tie the game late during the third period.

Krueger has spoken highly of Mittelstadt since the beginning of training camp, reiterating that the organization saw Mittelstadt as Rochester's highest performing forward when the 2019-20 season ended. Mittelstadt had been sent to the Amerks to round out his two-way game and then used the elongated offseason to add strength and speed.

"I think his offseason program has helped increase his foot speed," Krueger said. "He looks lighter on his skates and has not at all sacrificed in the skill set that he has. So, what's important is he is definitely a future offensive threat, a power-play player, a playmaker with a scoring ability."

Whether or not Mittelstadt plays Tuesday could depend on Reinhart's availability, but Krueger said the Sabres do expect to give him another look in the near future.

"Obviously no one wants to have that long of an offseason but to some degree it was good for me," Mittelstadt said. "Just because I've always needed to get in the weight room and it gave me a little extra time to do that and kind of catch up in some sense."

Flight delay

The Sabres will depart for Long Island on Tuesday morning rather than Monday afternoon due to the winter storm currently hitting New York City. Krueger said the team is looking to take advantage of the extra time at home before a long road trip.

"We're trying to make this a positive," Krueger said. "The guys can spend an afternoon at home and we do a same-day trip. It'll be with early arrival, so we'll have time to activate in the hotel, which is right by the arena, walking distance away. ... We are fine with it. Sometimes a shakeup or a mix-up kind of brings a refreshing entry into a road game. So, we've definitely embraced this situation."

Reinforcements

The Sabres' four-game, seven-day road trip to Long Island and Boston will be its longest of the season thus far. The Sabres previously played four straight road games in Philadelphia and Washington but returned home for a day in between.

Teams are limited strictly to their traveling party (the active roster plus the taxi squad) while on the road this season, meaning no recalls from Rochester once the flight takes off. With that in mind, the Sabres added to the depth of their taxi squad by recalling forwards Jean-Sebastien Dea and C.J. Smith on Monday.

Jack Quinn, who has been recovering from an injury, was assigned from the taxi squad to Rochester in a corresponding move.

"They've had a really good camp here thus far with Seth Appert in Rochester and are both NHL experienced players we could inject at any time," Krueger said of Dea and Smith. "Both good skaters, energy players."

The additions should give the Sabres ample bodies for the trip. The active roster currently includes two extra forwards (assuming Reinhart is available) and an extra defenseman. The taxi squad now has two forwards (Dea and Smith), two defensemen (Will Borgen and Brandon Davidson), and goaltender Jonas Johansson.

"We will need to look at these back-to-backs even when there's a day in between," Krueger said. "What is the energy level of our players? How are guys performing? Would it be good to possibly give somebody a day off? Again, I want to underline that we do assess the roster every night and every morning before we make a final decision and these factors are coming in more and more."

Monday's practice

Here's how the Sabres lined up in Reinhart's absence:

37 Casey Mittelstadt - 9 Jack Eichel - 68 Victor Olofsson
4 Taylor Hall - 12 Eric Staal - 24 Dylan Cozens
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 21 Kyle Okposo
53 Jeff Skinner - 27 Curtis Lazar - 15 Riley Sheahan
72 Tage Thompson

19 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 62 Brandon Montour
33 Colin Miller - 10 Henri Jokiharju
44 Matt Irwin - 3 William Borgen

35 Linus Ullmark
40 Carter Hutton
34 Jonas Johansson

Sabres add Dea, Smith to taxi squad

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has reassigned forwards Jean-Sebastien Dea and C.J. Smith from Rochester (AHL) to the taxi squad and reassigned forward Jack Quinn from the taxi squad to Rochester.

Dea and Smith have been participating in Amerks training camp as Rochester prepares for its first game of the season this weekend.

Dea, 26, skated in three games for the Sabres last season and has seven points (5+2) in 32 career NHL games. He led the Amerks in scoring last year.

Smith posted 27 points (12+15) in 50 games for Rochester in 2019-20. His last NHL action came during the 2018-19 season when he recorded two goals and an assist in 11 games for Buffalo.

Quinn, drafted eighth overall by the Sabres in October, scored 52 goals for the Ottawa 67's of the OHL last year. He also recorded five points (1+4) in seven games for Canada in a silver-medal performance at this year's World Junior Championship. With no start date for the OHL season yet announced, the Sabres will look to have Quinn play some games for Rochester in the meantime.

The Amerks are set to open the 2020-21 campaign on Friday at home against Utica.

The Sabres will play their next four games on the road, starting tomorrow night against the Islanders. While the Sabres are traveling, their recalls are limited to players on the taxi squad.

Sabres to wear Reverse Retro jerseys 6 times during 2020-21 season

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres will wear their new Reverse Retro uniforms six times during the 2020-21 season.

The team will wear the new third jersey for the first time on Thursday, February 11 against the Washington Capitals.

The full third jersey schedule is as follows:

Thursday, February 11 vs. Washington

Saturday, February 13 vs. Washington

Saturday, February 20 at New Jersey

Monday, February 22 at New Jersey

Friday, February 26 vs. Philadelphia

Thursday, March 11 vs. Pittsburgh

The Reverse Retro jersey, modeled after the team's first third jersey that debuted during the 2000-01 season, features a crossed swords logo on the crest and the team's primary logo from 1996-2006 on the shoulders in an updated blue and gold color scheme.

Jerseys are available for sale now at ShopOneBuffalo.com.

The Reverse Retro program is an NHL-wide initiative in which all 31 teams will wear throwback jerseys with a remixed color scheme. Each team will wear the new jerseys multiple times during the season. The uniforms were unveiled in November.