



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres injuries mount; Skinner's status remains uncertain

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres enter the weekend dealing with injuries to two key players and uncertainty as to whether coach Ralph Krueger is going to end the benching of high-priced forward Jeff Skinner.

Starting goalie Linus Ullmark will miss at least both games of Buffalo's weekend series against the Philadelphia Flyers due to a lower body injury. Captain Jack Eichel is considered day to day after a lower-body injury made him a last-minute scratch before Buffalo's 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey on Thursday.

And Krueger still wasn't ready on Friday to say whether Skinner will resume playing after a three-game benching, while noting the reasoning behind his decision was related to team culture.

"We are an environment of accountability and you need to earn your keep here on this group every single game and every single practice," Krueger said. "It's about different ways of growing people in different positions, and that's what this is about, is working together with Jeff to make him a better Jeff Skinner for the game today."

Skinner skated on the Sabres' fourth line in practice Friday, which was a promotion after he worked out with the team's taxi squad members a day earlier. Krueger would only say Skinner would be available to play Saturday.

Skinner said he isn't sure what lesson he was supposed to learn from missing games.

"I think that's a tricky one, because ... I've watched a lot of hockey games obviously, I've played in a lot of hockey games, and I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there," Skinner said. "I try to focus on what's important, and what's important is moving forward."

Some two weeks since returning following a two-week COVID-19-forced pause to their schedule, the Sabres are moving from one crisis to another while in the midst of a 2-5-1 skid.

Krueger listed Eichel questionable to play against the Flyers on Saturday.

As for Ullmark, Krueger said the goalie is still being evaluated to determine the severity of the injury he sustained in the first period against the Devils. Ullmark appeared to be hurt six minutes in, but continued playing in stopping all 15 shots he faced before not returning for the start of the second period.

The injuries to Eichel and Ullmark add to a growing list, with Buffalo already missing three defensemen, including Rasmus Ristolainen, who is still recovering from a two-week bout with COVID-19.

Concerns over Skinner's status have been brewing all week since being held out of the lineup starting with a 3-2 loss at the New York Islanders on Monday.

He's been limited to one assist in 14 games while in the second year of an eight-year, \$72 million contract that makes him the team's second highest-paid player. In his 11th NHL season, the seven-time 20-goal scorer hasn't scored in 18 consecutive games dating to last season.

That's a considerable drop-off after Skinner scored a career-high 40 goals in his first season in Buffalo after being acquired in a trade with Carolina in August 2018.

In saying it's not a disciplinary issue, Krueger acknowledged his decision to bench Skinner would raise eyebrows.

"The culture has to drive what we do here, and it can't be about short-term popularity," Krueger said. "The noise that was going to happen in this decision was clear, but it doesn't allow us to compromise on the process."

The Sabres have few options with Skinner. Aside from him having a no-trade clause in his contract, the value of the deal makes it difficult for Buffalo to move him or buy him out.

Skinner isn't interested in being traded, by saying: "I love being a Sabre. I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case."

Skinner said he's had discussions with Krueger but declined to share what the two talked about because he doesn't believe that would be constructive. And yet, Skinner referred to the reasoning behind his benching as being "vague."

"This situation is maybe not that straightforward in the fact that lessons being learned is maybe more of a vague concept," he said. "In that sense, it's tough when it's so vague to come to a concrete answer."

As to whether he and Krueger see eye to eye, Skinner said: "I don't know. He has 23 other guys to worry about. He has a team to coach. I just have to play hockey."

Sabres' Jack Eichel 'day to day,' goalie Linus Ullmark out vs. Flyers

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 26, 2021

Ralph Krueger could be without his star center and starting goaltender when the Buffalo Sabres host the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.

Eichel, the Sabres' 24-year-old captain, is considered "day to day," according to Krueger, with a lower-body injury that prevented him from playing Thursday night against the New Jersey Devils. Ullmark, on the other hand, is not expected to be in the lineup Saturday or Sunday against the Flyers.

Ullmark, 27, underwent testing Friday to determine the severity of the lower-body injury that forced him to miss the final two periods of the 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey. He was evaluated by a trainer on the ice after making a highlight-reel glove save on Devils center Nico Hischier.

Ullmark finished the first period, stopping each of the 15 shots he faced, before he was replaced by Carter Hutton. With Ullmark unavailable Friday, the Sabres practiced with three goalies: Hutton, Jonas Johansson and Dustin Tokarski.

Good news finally arrived for the Sabres on Friday in the form of defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen successfully completing another on-ice workout. The 26-year-old has not appeared in a game since Jan. 31, and he spent 14 days on the Covid protocol list. Ristolainen experienced a wide range of symptoms after testing positive for Covid-19, including chest pain and fatigue.

A look back at red carpet arrivals from the 2020 Golden Globes

Although Krueger declined to say who will be in his lineup Saturday, Ristolainen is nearing a return and could possibly return this weekend. Winger Tobias Rieder has also been cleared to return.

"What we are happy about is his amazing physical foundation that he had coming into his battle with Covid is helping to expedite his return," Krueger said of Ristolainen following practice Friday. "Like, you can just see the athlete, the work ethic. All of that just pays off for athletes when they come off of this. So, we're really pleased with what's he's shown yesterday and today, and hopefully we'll see that again tomorrow morning so we can put him back in the lineup. It's not a given yet, but it's a high possibility."

Eichel experienced discomfort during warmups before puck drop and was replaced in the lineup by winger Tage Thompson. Riley Sheahan was moved to the top line and scored a goal on a backhanded shot at 6:28 into the first period.

However, it appears Curtis Lazar will be in line to skate with Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart if Eichel can't go. Lazar, 26, has four goals in 14 games.

It's been a difficult road for Eichel the past two months. He missed the start of training camp with an upper-body injury and told the media following the two-week Covid-19 pause that he studied footage of himself from last season in pursuit of a solution to his early offensive struggles.

Eichel has gone eight consecutive games without a goal and has two goals with 12 assists in 16 games this season.

Ullmark's injury, no matter the length of his absence, is a blow to the Sabres. He has totaled a .923 save percentage across his past nine games. Hutton, who stopped 21 of 25 shots against the Devils, will likely be in goal Saturday.

Jeff Skinner says he doesn't want to be traded by Sabres after benching

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 26, 2021

The disconnect between Ralph Krueger and Jeff Skinner became apparent this week when the \$9 million-a-year left wing was scratched in three consecutive games.

Krueger, amid his second season as the Buffalo Sabres' coach, has been coy when asked why the team's second-highest paid player wasn't in the lineup. He didn't soften his stance Friday after Skinner practiced with the Sabres in KeyBank Center ahead of a weekend back-to-back against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"We are an environment of accountability and you need to earn your keep here on this group every single game and every practice," said Krueger. "What I'm telling you doesn't only apply to Jeff. It applies to every player on our team and if somebody slips there are different ways to deal with it.

"In the end, the goal is to find out what the potential of the player is for us now and get that player to that potential."

Don Meehan, Skinner's agent, had a lengthy phone conversation with Sabres General Manager Kevyn Adams on Wednesday. Meehan, one of hockey's most prominent powerbrokers, expressed his and Skinner's concerns. Skinner was scratched again Thursday night against the New Jersey Devils.

It wasn't until after practice Friday that Skinner spoke to the media about his frustrations and what appears from the outside to be a contentious relationship with Krueger. While Krueger would not say who will be in the Sabres' lineup Saturday against the Flyers, Skinner made his intentions clear: He has no interest in a trade out of Buffalo.

"No. I love being a Sabre," said Skinner, who has zero goals and one assist in 14 games this season. "I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case. That answer is simple: no."

Skinner did not skate with his teammates Thursday morning ahead of the 4-3 overtime loss to the Devils. Instead, one of the NHL's most accomplished goal scorers across the past decade was told to work out with the taxi squad, a group that includes defensemen Brandon Davidson and Casey Fitzgerald, and goalie Dustin Tokarski.

Krueger chose to have Tage Thompson skate with the Sabres in pregame warmups. Thompson had two shots on goal in 7:57 of ice time after he was forced into the lineup when center Jack Eichel sat out with a lower-body injury. With Eichel questionable to play this weekend, Skinner returned to practice Friday and skated on a forward line with Casey Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan.

Krueger would only say he wants to hold any player accountable who does not adhere to his "principles."

"The goal is not to punish anybody or to cause headlines that you can all focus on," said Krueger. "It's more the goal of getting the most of the Buffalo Sabres and the group that we have. ... And it's about different ways of growing people in different positions and that's what this is about, is working together with Jeff to make him a better Jeff Skinner for the game today. ... I feel that he's embraced it and that he'll come out of it a better player."

The Sabres, now last in the East Division with a 6-8-3 record, could use Skinner's goal-scoring prowess. Since the start of his rookie season in 2010-11, Skinner ranks seventh in the NHL in even-strength goals (205), trailing only Alex Ovechkin, Patrick Kane, John Tavares, Steven Stamkos, Brad Marchand and Max Pacioretty.

Yet, only three games following a two-week-long Covid-19 pause, Skinner was scratched in favor of Mittelstadt.

Skinner, a 28-year-old two-time all-star, had spent most of the first 14 games on the Sabres' fourth line with Sheahan and Curtis Lazar. Skinner is also averaging a career-low 12:04 of even-strength ice time per game.

Every advanced metric, both offensively and defensively, showed Skinner was consistently creating scoring chances, drawing penalties and helping his linemates shutdown the opposition. For example, Skinner leads all Sabres forwards in on-ice shot quality against in 5-on-5 situations, according to Evolving-Hockey.com.

"I mean, I think in this league there's a lot of ups and downs," said Skinner. "A lot of times I think the best way to cope with that is such a cliché, but take it a day at a time. And for me, this last little while, obviously you want to be out there battling with your teammates. ...

"The situation as a whole is something that sort of I think obviously, there's a lot of emotions involved. You try and take time to digest that and stuff like that, because I think in any situation like that, that's the best thing to do."

Krueger again declined to reveal what specific areas of Skinner's game need to improve and mentioned that the former 40-goal scorer will benefit by watching teammates from a different perspective. Skinner, on the other hand, does not think he can improve by not playing.

The situation raised significant questions about the Sabres' plan for Skinner and how comfortable Adams would be with the benching of a high-priced player.

Skinner has six years remaining on the \$72 million contract he signed with the Sabres in June 2019. The contract included a no-movement clause, which prevents Buffalo from waiving Skinner and he must approve any trade. He also has the power to prevent the Sabres from exposing him to Seattle in the expansion draft this summer.

Even if Skinner wanted out, a trade would be difficult considering his goal scoring under Krueger. After totaling a career-high 40 goals under former coach Phil Housley in 2018-19, Skinner had only 14 goals in 59 games last season. He has just three goals in his last 45 games dating back to Dec. 5, 2019.

However, Skinner led the Sabres in 5-on-5 goals per 60 minutes last season. He currently leads the team in individual shot quality in 5-on-5 situations, while ranking second in penalties drawn and high-danger scoring chances. Krueger said he did not know about Meehan expressing concerns to Adams and added that his bosses, specifically owners Terry and Kim Pegula, understand that there will be difficult situations such as the one with Skinner.

"Any noise coming from the outside, Kevyn and ownership has been amazing at understanding the space that I need as a head coach to be able to work properly to have the energy I need," Krueger said when asked about the ramifications of benching a player of Skinner's status. "So, my answer to you is I didn't even know that happened, the complaint, until you just told me. But what I do understand is the complexity of this situation for the reasons that you mentioned. I've just had nothing but support on the obsession I have in driving in the culture here in Buffalo that gives us a chance not only short- but long-term to be successful."

When asked if he is doing everything asked by coaches, Skinner deferred to Krueger and said: "For obvious reasons, I can't read his mind." Skinner also respectfully declined to say how long or often he has spoken to Krueger since first being scratched Monday against the New York Islanders.

Skinner repeated that his focus is simple: helping the Sabres win hockey games. His ability to do so, though, is partially controlled by Krueger.

"For me, that's my number one focus is trying to help the team win," Skinner said, "and that's what I'm going to continue to do as much as I can."

Skinner may return to Sabres lineup on Saturday

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 26, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Jeff Skinner was, once again, total class when talking about his three-game benching from the Buffalo Sabres on Friday. At Friday's practice, he was lined up at left wing with Casey Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan, so it looks like he may get back to playing Saturday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

That might be a pretty good line, if Mittelstadt keeps progressing the way he has lately. Skinner said following practice he's holding up just fine.

"The best way to cope with this, I take it a day at a time. For me, I'd like to be out there battling with my teammates, but today is a new day and you try to move forward and keep getting better."

Skinner is human, so, of course, he's upset he's been benched.

"There are a lot of emotions involved and you take time to digest that, but the more important thing is to keep moving forward," Krueger said.

You hear coaches say that players can watch from up top and learn from what they're seeing. Skinner said after 700 games in the NHL, he doesn't get anything out of that.

"I've watched a lot of hockey games, I've played in a lot of hockey games. I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there."

Skinner has been consistent throughout his career about revealing what's said in the locker room. He said what's said between him and Krueger will remain behind closed doors.

"I don't feel it's constructive. I don't think it's respectful to get into details about what we've talked about or how long we've talked or any of those details."

Many think Skinner's agent Don Meehan called Kevyn Adams and asked for a trade. When asked if he'd like to move on, Skinner emphatically said no.

"I love being a Sabre. I love the city of Buffalo, and I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case, so that answer is simple."

Ralph Krueger claims that he had no idea that Adams and Meehan had talked. He, of course, had his say on the matter too.

"It's always good when a player has an opportunity to step out of the bubble we're in to process the game and his teammates and the way we're playing," Krueger said. "I feel that Jeff has managed this extremely well, very professional."

Many have been asking what does Skinner have to do to get back into the lineup?

"It's the principles that we expect everybody to execute, and if principles are off here and there, sometimes they don't embrace certain things and if they do, they'll be rewarded with minutes played, with roles," Krueger said.

"We are an environment with accountability, and you need to earn your keep every single game and every single practice. This doesn't only apply to Jeff, it applies to every player on our team."

Jack Eichel and Linus Ullmark both missed practice on Friday. Both are dealing with lower-body injuries.

"Jack remains day-to-day," Krueger said. "With Linus, we're not expecting him to be available over this weekend, but we are hoping it becomes a day-to-day [situation] after the weekend."

Krueger didn't rule Eichel out to play on Saturday, saying he's questionable, day-to-day.

Rasmus Ristolainen appears poised to make his return after missing seven games due to COVID-19.

"Hopefully what we've seen from him, we'll see tomorrow morning and we'll put him back in the lineup. So it's a high possibility that he plays," Krueger said.

Tobi Rieder will also be healthy enough to return on Saturday.

Friday's lines:

Rieder – Eakin – Okposo

Hall – Staal – Cozens

Skinner – Mittelstadt – Sheahan

Olofsson – Lazar – Reinhart

Fitzgerald – Asplund – Thompson

Defense:

Dahlin – Miller

Bryson – Ristolainen

Jokiharju – Montour

Davidson – Irwin

Brian Koziol will have Saturday's pregame coverage starting at 12 p.m. EST on WGR, where he'll be joined by Krueger, Skinner and Mittelstadt.

Jeff Skinner could be nearing return, wants to stay with Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 27, 2021

BUFFALO – A day after getting jettisoned to the taxi squad, winger Jeff Skinner practiced in his regular fourth-line spot with the Sabres' main group Friday, a sign his three-game benching could end this afternoon.

"I just want to underline again that we are not going to reveal any lines or roster until tomorrow morning," coach Ralph Krueger said on a Zoom call after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's game against the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center.

Skinner, 28, has endured the toughest week of his 11-year career, becoming a healthy scratch for the first time ever.

Sitting one game, of course, was a huge deal. Skinner is in the second season of an eight-year, \$72 million contract.

Watching three contests and getting dumped to the taxi squad for a day might've done lasting damaged to the player-coach relationship.

Still, Skinner doesn't want to be traded.

"I love being a Sabre," Skinner said. "I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case. That answer is simple: no."

Skinner and Krueger still don't appear to be on the same page. They've remained tight-lipped about what has transpired behind the scenes, choosing their words carefully.

"We have talked," acknowledged Skinner, who has scored zero goals in 14 games this season. "Again, I don't feel like it's constructive, I don't think it's respectful to get into details on what we've talked about or long we talked or any of those details."

Krueger hasn't offered many specifics into his expectations for Skinner, who has mustered just three goals in his last 45 outings. Instead, Krueger usually responds to questions about Skinner by talking about the team as a whole.

"You need to look at everything I've spoken about over the last year and a half," Krueger replied when asked what Skinner must show him. "The principles we expect everybody to do their best at executing. If principles are off here and there, sometimes the player might have an injury or fatigue or other reasons. Sometimes they just don't embrace and if they do they will be rewarded with minutes played, goals.

"We are an environment of accountability and you need to earn your keep here on this group every single game and every practice. What I'm telling you doesn't only apply to Jeff. It applies to every player on our team and if somebody slips there are different ways to deal with it."

Krueger said he believes "growth can never stop."

"This is a growth opportunity for Jeff," he said. "I feel that he's embraced it and that he'll come out of it a better player."

But Skinner hardly sounded like he used the last three games as an opportunity to study the action.

"I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there," he said. "I mean, but obviously, this situation is maybe not that straightforward in the fact that lessons being learned is maybe more of a vague concept. In that sense, it's tough when it's so vague to come to a concrete answer."

Skinner, who scored a career-high 40 goals in 2018-19 under former Sabres coach Phil Housley, couldn't say if he sees eye-to-eye with Krueger.

"I don't know," he said. "He has 23 other guys to worry about. He has a team to coach. I just have to play hockey. That's just all I want to do is play hockey, help my teammates try to win the game and that's as simple as it is. To me, it's not relevant, really, whether we agree in everything in our lives or everything about hockey."

"I think it's human nature. No one agrees on everything and everyone is different. Everyone sees the game, sees life through their own lens and makes their own judgments and makes their own decisions. At the end of the day, it's about winning hockey games and just trying to be a part of that."

Krueger acknowledged earlier this week that benching Skinner would be a big deal. He knows the noise likely won't stop until Skinner plays again.

Skinner's agent, Don Meehan, told The Buffalo News he had a long talk earlier this week with Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams.

But Krueger has the backing of Adams and Sabres owners Terry and Kim Pegula to run coach his team the way he wants.

"I've just had nothing but support on the obsession I have in driving in the culture here in Buffalo that gives us a chance not only short- but long-term to be successful," Krueger said.

Krueger said Adams and ownership understand there will be "some bumps and bruises and confrontations and adversity" along the way.

"It's going to continue to be painful at times, and the results are what I, as a head coach, are measured on," he said. "I understand that and I'm not afraid of that. But I trust that the process and that the culture has to drive what we do here, and it can't be about short-term popularity, it can't be about short-term decisions. ..."

"The noise that was going to happen in this decision was clear, but it doesn't allow us to compromise on the process. And if we don't compromise, we won't have any regrets, we will have truly done what we believe we needed to do on a given day to get the most out of this group and will continue to do that with passion moving forward."

Jack Eichel questionable for weekend; Sabres could have reinforcements

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 26, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark will likely miss this weekend's two-game series against the Philadelphia Flyers, coach Ralph Krueger said. Meanwhile, captain Jack Eichel is questionable for the home contests.

Both players have lower-body injuries and did not practice today inside KeyBank Center.

Ullmark, the Sabres' No. 1 goalie, left Thursday's 4-3 overtime loss to the New Jersey Devils after the first period. Krueger said Ullmark was having X-rays done this afternoon.

"We're not expecting him to be available over the weekend, but we are hoping it becomes a day-to-day after the weekend," Krueger said on a Zoom call.

Goalie Carter Hutton will likely start Saturday afternoon's game. Jonas Johansson should dress as his backup. Taxi-squad goalie Dustin Tokarski also practiced today.

Eichel suffered a lower-body injury during Thursday's pregame warm-up and was a late scratch.

In Eichel's spot today, Curtis Lazar centered Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart.

In other lineup news, defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who tested positive for COVID-19 earlier this month, could be close to playing. The Finn spent today's practice beside rookie Jacob Bryson. Nine defensemen participated in the session.

The virus weakened the 6-foot-4, 221-pound Ristolainen so much he had trouble walking up the stairs in his home, he told a Finnish newspaper. He has missed the last seven games.

Krueger had been hesitant to put a timeline on Ristolainen's return.

"We had no idea on the pathway," he said. "What we are happy about is his amazing physical foundation that he had coming into his battle with COVID is helping to expedite his return. You can just see the athlete. The work ethic, all of that pays off for athletes when they come off of this.

"So we're really pleased with what he's shown yesterday and today and hopefully we'll see that again tomorrow morning so we can put him back in the lineup. It's not a given yet, but it's a high possibility."

Meanwhile, winger Tobias Rieder has recovered from the upper-body injury that sidelined him the last two games. Krueger said Rieder is "definitely available."

Rieder practiced at left wing beside center Cody Eakin and Kyle Okposo.

Casey Mittelstadt, a fourth-line left winger throughout this week, moved over to center Jeff Skinner and Riley Sheahan because Lazar moved up.

Skinner adamant he wants to remain with Sabres despite recent struggles

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 26, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. [WKBW] — Jeff Skinner had made his point clear.

On Friday afternoon he was asked point-blank by Mike Harrington of The Buffalo News: Would you prefer to be somewhere else? Would you prefer to be with a different team or a different coach?

Skinner, without hesitation, responded.

"No. I love being a Sabre. I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't case, so that answer is simple."

Skinner, despite his \$9 million per season cap hit, has found himself watching the last three Sabres games as a healthy scratch. For the first time since sitting, Skinner spoke with reporters on Friday following Sabres practice.

"The most important thing is to keep moving forward and having a positive attitude, and working hard while trying to get better," Skinner said. "I've watched a lot of hockey games and played in a lot of hockey games, obviously, and I don't think you can learn anything extra by not being out there. But obviously, this situation is maybe not that straightforward in the fact that lessons being learned is maybe more of a vague concept."

Buffalo Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger, the man who decided to sit Skinner, wouldn't say for sure if the Sabres forward will be back in the lineup this weekend. Based on the line combinations from practice, it would appear to be a safe bet Skinner would return to the lineup. But as we've learned time and time again, it's not safe to assume anything.

"I feel that Jeff has managed this time period extremely well, very professional," Krueger said Friday afternoon.

Krueger wouldn't get into the specifics of what he was looking for from Skinner but said all players need to adhere to the principles they expect the team to follow. Skinner, who has been held without a goal in 14 games and has only one assist said all he can do now is focusing on helping the team win games.

"All I know is, for me, I'm trying to help the team win as much as I can," Skinner added. "That's my main focus. Obviously the coach is trying to win games too and I think we can agree on that. For me, that's my number one focus, which is helping the team win and that's what I'm going to continue to do as much as I can."

Krueger: Skinner benching is about 'principles'

By Adam Benigni

WGRZ

February 26, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The coach wants things done a certain way.

Jeff Skinner doesn't quite see it that way.

With neither getting specific, that seems to be what is at the root of Krueger's decision to sit Skinner for the last three games.

Krueger says the concept applies to Skinner and every other player.

"The principles that we expect everybody to do their best at executing. If principles are off here and there... sometimes they just don't embrace certain things and if they do, they'll be rewarded with minutes played, with roles. We are an environment of accountability," said Krueger.

Skinner wouldn't get specific when asked if he was doing everything the coaching staff was asking him to do, but did acknowledge that there are things he and Krueger don't agree on.

"To me it's not relevant really whether we agree on everything in our lives... everything about hockey. I think that it's just human nature, nobody agrees on everything," said Skinner. Everyone sees the game through their own lens and makes their own judgements. At the end of the day it's about winning hockey games and just trying to be a part of that."

Skinner earns \$9-million per year and has just one assist in 14-games this season. He did practice with the regulars as they prepare for home games Saturday and Sunday against the Philadelphia Flyers. Krueger would not answer questions about playing status for the weekend. He said he would wait until revealing his lineup Saturday morning.

Skinner said he does not want to be traded. "I love being a Sabre. I love the City of Buffalo... that answer is a simple no."

EICHEL STILL DAY TO DAY

Captain Jack Eichel sat out Thursday night's 4-3 overtime loss to the Devils after suffering a lower body injury during warm-ups. Krueger said he was questionable in terms of his status for the weekend.

ULLMARK STILL UNDER EVALUATION

Goaltender Linus Ullmark suffered a lower body injury in the first period of Thursday night's game. Krueger was still unsure of how long he would be out.

"Linus is actually getting pictures taken right at this moment. We're not expecting him to be available over this weekend but we are hoping it becomes a day to day."

The Sabres host the Flyers Saturday at 1:00pm and Sunday at 3:00pm.

Jeff Skinner, Ralph Krueger Disagree on Star's Benching

By Ted Goldberg

Spectrum News

February 26, 2021

BUFFALO N.Y. — Some Sabres fans were pretty steamed to see Jeff Skinner held out of three games this week. Head Coach Ralph Krueger explained his curious decision by avoiding specifics, instead saying that other players did a better job of following his principles.

What You Need To Know

- Jeff Skinner returned to Sabres practice Friday after being relegated to practicing with the team's practice squad Thursday
- Skinner has been a healthy scratch for three straight games after recording one assist and zero goals in 14 games this year
- Skinner says he would've learned more from playing than from sitting in the press box during games

"Sometimes they just don't embrace certain things. If they do, they'll be rewarded with minutes played," he says. "We are in an environment of accountability. You need to earn your keep here every single game, every single practice."

Skinner says he's had conversations with Krueger about his play, but chose to keep those details behind closed doors. While Krueger explained that the benching would give Skinner a different perspective, the two-time All Star disagrees.

"I watched a lot of hockey games, obviously. Played in a lot of hockey games," he says. "I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there."

Skinner says he's happy to be back after practicing with the taxi squad Thursday — and that it's not a huge concern that he and Krueger had different ideas of how to handle this.

"No one agrees on everything," he says. "Everyone is different. Everyone sees the game, sees life through their own lens. Makes their own judgments and makes their own decisions."

"It's about different ways of growing people in different positions," says Krueger. "That's what this is about. Working together with Jeff to make him a better Jeff Skinner."

And when Skinner was asked if he wants out?

"I love being a Sabre. I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case," he said.

It's a good thing Skinner loves being a Sabre, since his contract makes him a difficult player to move. Skinner carries a cap hit of \$9 million for each of the next six seasons.

Skinner wants to stay with Sabres after scratches

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

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BUFFALO -- Jeff Skinner said Friday he has no interest leaving the Buffalo Sabres despite being scratched the past three games.

"I love being a Sabre," the forward said. "I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't the case. That answer is simple: No."

But the 28-year-old said he isn't sure what was accomplished by being benched.

"I've played in a lot of hockey games and I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there," Skinner said. "This situation is maybe not that straightforward in the fact that lessons being learned is maybe more of a vague concept. In that sense, it's tough when it's so vague to come to a concrete answer. I know this is kind of a confusing way of answering the question, but it's almost like it's not a significant part of the situation in my view. I try and focus on what's important, and what's important is moving forward. And that for me is sort of keeping things simple and trying to work hard and get better in practice, get better in the gym, to try and eventually help the team win."

Skinner could be back in the lineup when the Sabres host the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday (1 p.m. ET; ESPN+, SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, NBCSP, NHL.TV). He practiced Friday on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan.

Coach Ralph Krueger wouldn't confirm any lineup decisions, only saying that Skinner will be available.

"We are an environment of accountability, and you need to earn your keep here on this group every single game and every practice," Krueger said. "What I'm telling you doesn't only apply to Jeff. It applies to every player on our team, and if somebody slips there are different ways to deal with it. In the end, the goal is to find out what the potential of the player is for us now and get that player to that potential."

Skinner, who is in the second season of an eight-year, \$72 million contract (\$9 million average annual value) he signed before becoming a free agent, has one assist in 14 games two seasons after scoring an NHL career-high 40 goals.

Skinner said he has talked with Krueger but that he felt it wouldn't be respectful to get into details of the conversation.

"If he's satisfied it's a judgment he has to make," Skinner said. "All I know is for me I try to help the team win as much as I can and that's my main focus. Obviously the coach is trying to win games too, and I think we can agree on that."

Buffalo (6-8-3) is tied with the New York Rangers for seventh place in the eight-team MassMutual East Division. The top four teams will qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"In this league there's a lot of ups and downs," Skinner said. "A lot of times I think the best way to cope with that is, such a cliché, but take it a day at a time. And for me, this last little while, obviously you want to be out there battling with your teammates."

"The situation as a whole is something that, obviously, there's a lot of emotions involved. You try and take time to digest that and stuff like that because I think in any situation like that, that's the best thing to do. But the more important thing is to keep moving forward and to keep having a positive attitude and working hard and trying to get better."

Skinner: 'I don't think you learn anything' by not playing

By Matt Teague

The Score

February 26, 2021

BUFFALO, NY - FEBRUARY 16: Jeff Skinner #53 of the Buffalo Sabres warms up before an NHL game against the New York Islanders on February 16, 2021 at KeyBank Center in Buffalo, New York.

Buffalo Sabres forward Jeff Skinner was a healthy scratch for the third straight game Thursday night, but the 28-year-old doesn't think watching from the press box will help him break out of his lengthy slump.

"I don't think you learn anything extra by not being out there, but, obviously, this situation is maybe not that straightforward in the fact that 'lessons being learned' is maybe more of a vague concept," Skinner said Friday, according to The Athletic's John Vogl.

Skinner, who's in the second season of an eight-year, \$72-million contract, has yet to score and has just one assist through 14 games. He skated with the club's taxi squad during Thursday's practice.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger said Thursday that he doesn't have a doghouse and that he'll continue to work with Skinner to find his potential. The 5-foot-11 winger understands Krueger's decision and insists it hasn't impacted how he views his future with the club.

"I try and help the team win as much as I can," Skinner said. "That's my main focus. Obviously, the coach is trying to do that, too. ... He has 23 other guys to worry about. He has a team to coach. I just have to play hockey.

He added, "I love being a Sabre. I love the city of Buffalo. I wouldn't have chosen to stay here if that wasn't (the) case, so that answer is simple."

The Sabres could certainly use Skinner's offensive touch. Buffalo ranks 27th in scoring this season and sits last in the East Division through 17 games.

TRAIKOS: Next two weeks could decide Jeff Skinner's future in Buffalo

By Michael Traikos

National Post

February 26, 2021

A day after Jeff Skinner was made a healthy scratch for the third consecutive game, sources have indicated that the beleaguered forward has given the Buffalo Sabres two weeks to correct a situation that has been ongoing since Ralph Krueger was hired as the team's head coach.

Either put Skinner back in the lineup and back in a position to succeed, or find him a new home.

It's that simple. Yet, neither option is going to be easy to pull off for someone who has gone a year without scoring and who has six more seasons remaining on a cap hit that ranks among the top 25 in the league.

In other words, how do you find a solution to a \$9-million problem?

Skinner's agent, Don Meehan, confirmed to Postmedia on Friday that he had spoken privately with Sabres GM Kevyn Adams on Wednesday. Meehan would not discuss what was said, but it is believed that both sides are going to give this situation a little bit more time to resolve itself.

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The only fear is that with each day that passes, an ugly situation has a chance to become even uglier.

When asked on Friday if he wanted to be traded, Skinner said, "That answer is simple: No."

Krueger then commended Skinner's professionalism during an increasingly difficult period in the hockey player's career, and made it clear that his being a healthy scratch is nothing more than a hockey decision based on "accountability" and having "to earn your place" in the lineup.

But something is missing here. Something seems to have gone wrong between the coach and the player.

Something that is beyond a 14-game slump.

Two years ago, Skinner scored 40 goals while playing on a line with Jack Eichel and was rewarded with an eight-year contract that carries a \$9-million cap hit. But that was when Phil Housley was the head coach and Jason Botterill was the GM. Both are now gone. And it's clear that their successors do not value the 28-year-old winger in the same way.

Last season, when Skinner scored 14 goals in 59 games, he barely played with Eichel. Since Taylor Hall joined the Sabres as a free agent, Skinner and Eichel have seen even less of each other.

Instead, Buffalo's second-highest paid forward has been averaging the 10th-fewest minutes on the team — when he happens to be in the lineup, of course. With no goals and one assist in 14 games, Skinner recently went from playing on the fourth line to not playing at all.

On Thursday, not even an injury to Eichel could get him out of what Krueger was refusing to call his "dog house."

Eichel, Ullmark miss practice with lower-body injuries

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 26, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres practiced without captain Jack Eichel and goaltender Linus Ullmark on Friday as the two players nursed lower-body injuries.

Eichel, who was a late scratch against New Jersey on Thursday after participating in pregame warmups, is considered day-to-day. Ullmark was still being assessed following practice but is expected to miss Buffalo's back-to-back home games against Philadelphia on Saturday and Sunday.

"We're not expecting him to be available over the weekend, but we are hoping it becomes a day-to-day after the weekend," Krueger said regarding Ullmark.

Ullmark has started four straight games for the Sabres, including a 41-save outing in New Jersey on Tuesday. Carter Hutton is currently the only other goaltender on the active roster, with Jonas Johansson and Dustin Tokarski both on the taxi squad. Hutton, Johansson, and Tokarski all practiced Friday.

Curtis Lazar practiced on a line with Victor Olofsson and Sam Reinhart in Eichel's absence. Here's how the team lined up in full:

68 Victor Olofsson - 27 Curtis Lazar - 23 Sam Reinhart
4 Taylor Hall - 12 Eric Staal - 24 Dylan Cozens
13 Tobias Rieder - 20 Cody Eakin - 21 Kyle Okposo
53 Jeff Skinner - 37 Casey Mittelstadt - 15 Riley Sheahan
45 Casey Fitzgerald* - 74 Rasmus Asplund - 72 Tage Thompson

78 Jacob Bryson - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 Colin Miller
10 Henri Jokiharju - 62 Brandon Montour
88 Brandon Davidson - 44 Matt Irwin

Krueger stressed that the lineup at practice did not guarantee anything for Saturday's game. That said, here are some notes on the group:

- Rieder resumed his usual place alongside Eakin and Okposo after missing the past two games with an upper-body injury. Krueger said Rieder is available to play moving forward.
- Skinner skated alongside Casey Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan. The line provided a turn at center for Mittelstadt, who has two points in three games on the wing since returning to the lineup on Monday. Skinner has been a healthy scratch the past three games.
- Ristolainen skated with the team for the second straight day and could make his return to the lineup Saturday. The defenseman said Thursday that his conditioning was improving following a serious bout with COVID-19.

"We're really pleased with what he's shown yesterday and today and hopefully we'll see that again tomorrow morning so we can put him back in the lineup," Krueger said. "It's not a given yet, but it's a high possibility."

Let's play two

The Sabres will play their sixth of 12 sets of back-to-back games this season when they welcome the Flyers to KeyBank Center this weekend. The two teams previously split a two-game series in Philadelphia on Jan. 18 and 19.

The Flyers occupy fourth place in the East Division with 21 points, six ahead of the Sabres. They saw forwards Jakub Voracek, Scott Laughton, and Oskar Lindblom return from the COVID-related absence list on Friday. Captain Claude Giroux returned from the list with a three-assist outing in a victory over the Rangers on Thursday.

Philadelphia's lone remaining COVID-related absence is forward Travis Konecny, who has been in protocol since Feb. 14.

Sabres to promote discussions on racial justice through virtual course

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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Jesse Bridges can recall the moment she realized the power of intersecting sports and education.

Bridges, senior vice president of diversity, equity, and inclusion for EVERFI, was attending a "Hockey Scholars" event put on in partnership with an NHL club early in her career. She remembers being struck by the diversity of those involved.

"I saw students getting off of the bus, the diversity of the school districts that they were coming from, the way they were able to engage and interact with people who weren't a direct part of their community but finding a common interest of science - that's where, for me, the real power of breaking down walls and barriers and assumptions really came into play," Bridges said.

The Buffalo Sabres are working to promote conversations on identity, bias, power, privilege, and oppression by partnering with RISE and EVERFI to bring the Diversity Foundations for High School virtual course to high schools in Western New York.

The course was developed in partnership between RISE, a national nonprofit that uses sports as a vehicle for social change in part through educational workshops, and EVERFI, a digital learning platform that has partnered with the Sabres in the past through the NHL's Future Goals program.

Enrollment for the course is open now and educators can visit everfi.com/k-12/teachers to sign up free of charge.

The goal of the program - as the name suggests - is to provide foundational education on racial justice that can serve as a starting point for further dialogue and action.

"Sports, for us, represent a wonderful opportunity to have these dialogues because people already put aside their differences to support teams," said Dr. Andrew Mac Intosh, vice president of curriculum at RISE. "They already put aside their differences to back a player and to back sports. Hockey has fans from a lot of backgrounds in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, etc.

"Why not take this opportunity that people are already kind of suspending some of the other things that might be challenging in their lives to have some of the tougher, more difficult conversations - in our minds, necessary conversations - and to set them up in a way that they can be positive and they can be productive?"

The 60-minute course is broken into five modules, including segments on identities; power, privilege, and oppression; and creating a culture of respect. The interactive sessions track a student who is confronted by these concepts while navigating a college campus.

It is intended for Grades 9 through 12 and considered a natural curriculum fit for social studies and ELA, though there is room for a range of applications. One teacher from a technical high school, Bridges said, used the program to teach about health disparities in a health sciences class.

Bridges and Mac Intosh agree that the conversation is one students are ready for. Mac Intosh cited surveys conducted by RISE that were presented to a variety of stakeholders including educators, coaches, and youth ages 11 and up. He said nearly 75 percent of those surveyed indicated they wanted further education on the subject of racial justice.

"I think we often make an assumption that young people cannot have intelligent dialogue around these topics," he said. "They're too hard and they're too tough and we shield this generation. But I think that's a mistake.

"I think if we truly take a step back and look at those who have led us in 2019 and 2020 - and I just use those two years because they're the two most recent examples - we look at climate change, we look at Black Lives Matter, we look at just racial justice and social justice broadly, it has been young people who've been having conversations. It has been young people who are stepping up to the front lines and challenging all of us in society and saying, 'Hey, you have not gotten this right.'"

The Sabres will use their voice in the community to promote the program and lend to the dialogue. The team is already in conversations with RISE and EVERFI on how players and staff can actively engage with students through the program in an effort to maximize its impact and participation.

"The opportunity that the Sabres have, whether that's a player, someone in the front office or the back office, is to engage with students and stand up to be that role model," Bridges said. "Athletes are people who students admire, who they want to be like, and they're going to model that behavior.

"So, as much as the Sabres can engage with the lessons and be able to talk about it - to be able to show students that it's OK to feel uncomfortable but still be open to learning and growing - that's what creates this ripple effect where students can feel the permission to model that behavior and be an inclusive leaders in their own communities."