



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*February 28, 2021*

## **Elliott stops 23 shots in Flyers' 3-0 win over Sabres**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Brian Elliott stopped 23 shots to shut out the Buffalo Sabres for a second time this season in leading the Philadelphia Flyers to a 3-0 win on Saturday.

The Flyers were spurred by a replenished lineup in which four players returned after spending two weeks in the NHL's COVID-19 protocol. They included Scott Laughton, who scored a breakaway goal to make it 3-0 late in the second period.

Sean Couturier had a goal and assist to extend his points streak to five games, in which he has four goals and five assists, and Shayne Gostisbehere also scored. Philadelphia improved to 3-2-2 in its past seven, and won consecutive games for the first time since a five-game winning streak to close January.

Elliott improved to 5-1 this season and upped his career record to 15-2-2 with four shutouts against the Sabres, including a 40-save outing in a 3-0 win on Jan. 19.

Elliott chalked up his dominance to opening his career with Ottawa, Buffalo's traditional Atlantic Division rival.

"I have a good feeling obviously when I come in this rink. I wanted to keep that going," said the 14th-year player now in his fourth season in Philadelphia.

He also noted the jump the Flyers showed in having a near fully healthy lineup.

"You could feel the energy in the room the last couple of practices here. Everybody's raring to go," Elliott said. "It was a lot of tic-tac-toe plays, guys were really wanting the puck out there. That's good to see from my end."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger noticed the difference in both teams.

"You can see that pretty well through the night they just had a higher level of energy in battles, and we weren't able to defend the way we wanted to," said Krueger, whose Sabres were playing their fourth game in six days. "The heart seems to be in the right place but the energy just isn't there to match that."

The Sabres dropped to 2-6-1 in their past nine and played their second game without captain Jack Eichel, listed as day to day with a lower body injury.

Carter Hutton stopped 36 shots starting in place of Linus Ullmark, who will miss at least a month with a lower-body injury sustained in the first period of a 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey on Thursday.

Jeff Skinner's return to the lineup following a three-game benching didn't make a difference. The 11th-year forward in the second season of an eight-year, \$72 million contract has just one assist in 15 games this season, and now hasn't scored in 19 games dating to last year.

Couturier opened the scoring 14:22 in after teammate Travis Sanheim intercepted Henri Jokiharju's clearing attempt up the right boards. Sanheim stepped toward the middle and fed Couturier in the high slot from where his shot glanced off the glove of defender Brandon Montour and knuckled in over Hutton's left shoulder.

The Flyers then put the game on ice late in the second period when Gostisbehere, on a partial break up the left wing, and Laughton scored 4:21 apart.

Laughton was eager to return after experiencing body aches, headaches and fatigue, with the severest COVID-19 symptoms lasting for two days while he was in protocol.

"It was nervous excitement. Nice to have a 1 o'clock game. You wake up right away and you're right at it," Laughton said.

COVID-19 RETURNEES

Philadelphia's Jakub Voracek and Oskar Lindblom each had assists in their first game since landing in the COVID-19 protocol nearly three weeks ago. Justin Braun also returned to the lineup. That leaves Travis Konecny as the lone Flyer remaining on the COVID-19 list after the team had as many as seven players listed as recently as Feb. 17.

Buffalo welcomed back defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who missed seven games after dealing with a severe bout of COVID-19.

#### KRUEGER ON SKINNER

A day after citing accountability and team culture as a reason for benching Skinner, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger hoped the player could grow from the experience.

"Just build on the conversations we had this week, and on the hard work that he put in in a difficult position," Krueger said. "Hopefully, this proves to be a good little regroup to launch an excellent rest of the season for Jeff."

Skinner played on a line alongside Riley Sheahan and Casey Mittelstadt.

#### MILESTONES

Flyers captain Claude Giroux played in his 904th career game, moving one ahead of Bill Barber and into second place on the team list led by Bobby Clarke (1,144 games). ... Sabres forward Curtis Lazar played in his 300th career game.

#### UP NEXT:

Teams complete two-game series in Buffalo on Sunday.

## **Sabres G Ullmark to miss a month; Eichel out against Flyers**

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

February 27, 2021

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP)** — Sabres starting goalie Linus Ullmark will miss at least the next month with a lower-body injury, leaving Buffalo with one established netminder.

Captain Jack Eichel will also miss his second game but remains day to day with a lower body injury, coach Ralph Krueger said before Buffalo hosted the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.

Veteran backup Carter Hutton will take over and start both games of Buffalo's weekend series against the Flyers, with minor league callup Jonas Johansson serving as backup.

High-priced forward Jeff Skinner, however, is set to return after being a healthy scratch the past three games. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen will play 3 1/2 weeks after testing positive for COVID-19 and spent two weeks in the NHL's coronavirus protocol.

Forward Tobias Rieder will return after missing two games with an upper-body injury.

Krueger wouldn't reveal details of Ullmark's injury in calling it "a huge loss."

Ullmark was shaken six minutes into a 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey Devils on Thursday. He continued playing and stopped all 15 shots in the first period and did not return for the second period.

Ullmark has a 5-4-2 record and was coming off a 41-save outing in a 4-1 win at New Jersey on Tuesday.

Eichel was a late scratch after participating in pregame warmups on Thursday.

Skinner's return comes amid questions of whether he and Krueger see eye to eye while the 11th-year player and seven-time 20-goal-scorer is in the midst of a slump.

In the second season of an eight-year, \$72 million contract, Skinner has one assist in 14 games this season, and not scored in 18 games dating to last season.

"Hopefully, this proves to be a good little regroup to launch and excellent rest of the season for Jeff," Krueger said.

Ristolainen had a severe bout with COVID-19 in which he experienced chest pains and fatigue. He will bolster a blue-line group that lost Jake McCabe (right knee) and Will Borgen (broken right forearm) this past week.

## **Inside the NHL: Birth of Sabres featured as new book tells stories of jerseys, names**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
February 28, 2021

We got our first in-person look at the Sabres' "butter knives" reverse retro jerseys Thursday night. This corner's initial view when they were unveiled in November was a thumbs up. Give them two thumbs up now after seeing them on the ice.

The crossed swords chest logo from the 2000s-era red alternates is the main focus. Goat head shoulder patches are a nice touch as is "Buffalo" striped across the bottom. All within the current royal blue, white and gold color scheme.

They're a welcome look, not jarring at all. And a nice ode to the franchise's past. That's much the same feeling expressed by Chris Creamer, creator of Sportslogos.net. The Canadian-based website is considered the gold standard in the sports industry for news and views about logos and jerseys for all sports.

"I was surprised they went with that uniform because I almost forgot that existed, but it's a pleasant surprise," Creamer said in a recent phone interview from suburban Toronto. "Retro colors, crossed Sabres logo. Why not bring back from 20 years ago the modernized crossed Sabres logo? I think it looked good. A surprising decision but a good surprise.

"For a team that seems to keep struggling with throwing all the way back – it took them so long to finally go back to royal blue because it's clear they want to push forward and the fans clearly wanted to tug them back to the '70s – I feel this was a good compromise. Modern design, retro colors and fans almost automatically like throwback designs."

The history of the Sabres' uniforms, of course, is a complicated one. And it's one of several stories Creamer and co-author Todd Radom have tackled in their new book, "Fabric of the Game: The stories behind the NHL's Names, Logos and Uniforms."

The 254-page hardcover book is filled with photos and stories of teams past and present. You want the Quebec Athletics of 1919 or the Quebec Nordiques? You can get it. You want the July unveiling of the Seattle Kraken? The book waited for it to get its final chapter in on the NHL's newest team.

As for the Sabres, the seven-page section is full of information that the average fan might not know and includes a full-page picture of current broadcaster Martin Biron wearing the circa 2007 "slug" jersey with teammates Jochen Hecht and Daniel Briere.

Creamer said he had extensive conversations with Seymour Knox IV, son of the Sabres' late original owner, for the book. One nugget I never knew was that the Knoxes referred to the team's original colors as the "Aurora colors" because they were the colors used on their polo pinnies.

"I think it's great the East Aurora Polo Club is finally represented again," Creamer joked of the team's return to royal. "Its time had come. The fans clearly made it known that royal blue and gold were their colors and their Sabres. The fans had to live through the 'Buffslug' the yellow jerseys with the blue tape (the Ted Black 'turdburgers'). I feel for these fans. They made their wishes known and the team was ignoring them or telling them, 'No, no, no, you want this.'

"Well, people didn't. They wanted royal blue. Royal gives them a chance to own a color scheme in the NHL."

And what's in the name? Creamer's research showed St. Louis owner Sid Salomon Jr. suggested "Buffalo Buffs" to the Knoxes. Robert Sonnelitter Jr., the winner of the fan contest as one of four people who suggested "Sabres," had the alliterative "Buffalo Blades" as his first choice.

Creamer reiterated the story that it was Northrup Knox, Seymour's brother, who advocated changing the spelling of "Sabers" to "Sabres" to give fans from nearby Southern Ontario closer identification with the club.

"As a Canadian, that probably would not have affected our fandom in any way," Creamer said. "But kudos to the Knoxes for acknowledging the other side of the border when it comes to naming this team."

Other names the Knoxes considered: Flashes, Pumas, Hesters, Sky Hawks, Buzzing Bees and Cavaliers. One that surfaced in later years was Bandits, the name of the city's indoor lacrosse team.

"Sabres seems so random for a city in Upstate New York to be named after an old sword. That's what fueled me for this book," Creamer said. "I wanted to know these stories. Teams and leagues have a tendency to try to rewrite history to make stories more interesting and maybe more marketable. I wanted to research the actual origins."

The Reverse Retro look has been largely praised across the NHL, gaining huge notice with the Colorado Avalanche's tribute to the Quebec Nordiques worn in last weekend's outdoor game in Lake Tahoe.

"At first I thought it was a money grab," Creamer said. "Throwbacks normally see an old design on players of today that bring back memories. The idea that they would take that and change the colors and logos defeated the purpose, but then when I actually saw some of the designs, I couldn't deny a lot of them looked pretty good. It was a sort of alternate history if the NHL had them in the 1970s."

"When you do stuff like this, you see some interesting designs. Nordiques, Whalers silver, Kings in Gretzky-era jerseys with Marcel Dionne colors. Overall, I love the idea."

Equipment managers rue lots of jersey combinations because of the need for matching pants, socks and gloves. But the NHL has been taking the plunge more in recent seasons.

"It was time the NHL sort of caught up to the rest of the 21st century here," Creamer said. "Baseball has done five or six jerseys for some teams for 30 years, it seems. You watch an NBA game and you have no idea who you're seeing half the time. I understand why the NHL took so long. I'm glad most teams stayed in their same color family."

A personal favorite of this corner is the Wild's green and gold ode to the Minnesota North Stars. Not every one is a hit, of course. The Maple Leafs' gray on blue with large logo has been widely panned. There are others that don't resonate as well.

"The Red Wings didn't look like they even tried (with an all-white design) and the same goes for the Islanders (who mimicked their 1970s jerseys)," Creamer said. "That's Lou Lamoriello saying, 'No, I'm not having fun.' If it becomes an annual thing like the NBA 'City' jerseys their hands will be tied and they'll have to go to the 2000s-era 'Fisherman' jersey sooner or later."

Creamer said he started the book project in 2017 and held on just long enough to include a chapter with the info behind the naming and logo of Seattle Kraken that were unveiled in July.

"I literally called the publisher and yelled, 'Stop the presses.' I always wanted to do that and I got to do it for real," Creamer said. "I said, 'Stop it, stop it. Make sure you're not printing anything yet. Seattle is coming out with their name and they have to be in the book. Everybody is going to want to know about it.' "

Creamer's book sold out in a first printing and is now again available at Amazon and other sites. More info on the book and ordering is also available at [Fabricofthegamebook.com](http://Fabricofthegamebook.com)

Price not right for new Habs coach

Montreal GM Marc Bergevin moved all his cards to the middle of the table when he fired Claude Julien last week with his team in the middle of a 2-4-2 rut. The first game for new coach Dominique Ducharme wasn't much better, as a 3-1 lead against Winnipeg turned into a 6-3 loss.

Bergevin is clearly in the crosshairs now in Montreal, and he won't escape the attention if he doesn't start getting saves from Carey Price.

The loss in Winnipeg was another rough night for Price, who fell to 1-4-1 in his last six games – with a 3.49 goals-against average and .870 save percentage in that stretch. He's going to get extra time with goaltending coach Stephane Waite.

"Carey will have the time to practice, to work with Stephane over the coming days, before playing again," Ducharme said after practice Friday, announcing that Jake Allen will be his starter for now.

Price has a 3.13 GAA and .888 save percentage for the season.

"Maybe I'm overthinking things," Price said after Thursday's game. "That's all I've got for you,"

Group howls for Coyotes comebacks

Arizona became the eighth team in NHL history to overcome a three-goal deficit in consecutive games, doing so Monday and Wednesday to Anaheim.

The last team to do it? The Sabres, who roared back from 3-0 deficits to beat Pittsburgh (4-3) and Atlanta (4-3 OT) on Dec. 29, 2009, and Jan. 1, 2010.

The Coyotes, by the way, became the first team to do that against the same opponent since Quebec stunned Hartford in 1983. The rally in Thursday's game prevented Ryan Miller from winning his 389th game and tying Dominik Hasek for 14th on the all-time list.

Around the boards

- Chicago's Jeremy Colliton is going to rate plenty of coach of the year votes at this rate. The Hawks entered the weekend 11-3-4 after an 0-3 start and with a better points percentage than teams such as St. Louis, Dallas and Pittsburgh.
- If Auston Matthews has been dealing with a wrist injury all season, just imagine how he would be playing if he were healthy. The Leafs' sniper entered the weekend with 18 goals and 31 points in 20 games. We should all be so injury-riddled.
- Pretty amazing job by the NHL to get the Covid protocol list down to four players. Entering the weekend, Philadelphia's Travis Konecny, Ottawa's Ryan Dzingel, San Jose's Tomas Hertl and Kaapo Kakko of the New York Rangers were the only players listed.

The league acted quickly with Hertl's situation, shutting down the Sharks' facility and postponing a game with Vegas. There has been a lot of new thinking since the Sabres/Devils fiasco.

- The Stars had the start to their season delayed by Covid and then had four consecutive games canceled last week by the winter storm that sparked the power crisis in Texas. It's left them with 43 games in 76 days, including an incredible 10 back-to-backs. Dallas and New Jersey entered Friday having played an NHL-low 15 games. Eighteen teams had played at least 19 games, and eight teams had played 21 or more.

Said Dallas coach Rick Bowness: "Hockey is not meant to be played four [games] in six [nights], let alone what we're going to do. I've never seen anything like this. I hope I never see it again. This is going to be incredibly taxing on our players. ... When you look at that schedule, I see injuries written all over it."

- Old friend Lindy Ruff, when asked by New Jersey reporters if the compressed schedules of his Devils and the Sabres are fair: "My dad used to tell me fair is something you go to in the summertime and get on a ride. So I'll leave it at that."

## **Mike Harrington: 'As the Sabres Turn' is a recurring show that just won't stop**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 27, 2021

Greeting the local hockey heroes with "Sabre Dance" when they take the ice doesn't really fit the bill anymore.

We need some calliope music like you hear in the old big tops. Because right now, this team is just one giant circus.

As you sit and try to process the events of the last week or so – easily one of the most bizarre stretches in franchise history – it feels like a soap opera.

Welcome to As the Sabres Turn. Watching them play, they're far from Bold. Or Beautiful. Like sands through the hourglass of another season slipping away, the days of our lives continue to be mired in mediocre hockey.

The players can't be happy. The GM can't be happy. The coach isn't happy. The cardboard cutouts want to go home and not be locked in this building to watch this anymore.

And hey, that countdown to March 20 is on. Get your tickets – and your Covid tests – to come on down and actually watch this show. If you dare.

Here's what's going through my mind after Saturday's snoozer against Philadelphia:

The coach: This has been an off-the-wall few days for Ralph Krueger. Coaches talk to the media so much, often twice a day, that it's impossible to not screw up once in a while. Krueger does his best to pacify reporters with player updates but has become much tighter with his info this year on lineup choices.

But he wasn't nearly transparent enough on the scratches of Jeff Skinner, sticking to his "principles" buzzword when he simply should have come out and said something like "Jeff doesn't have any goals and isn't doing things properly defensively and away from the puck to stay in the lineup. We're going to work with him and sharpen his game in those areas." Going nebulous about a veteran who has played 700+ games wasn't a good look.

Neither was Krueger's WGR Radio interview where he intimated there were attitude issues, a session that infuriated Skinner's camp. On Friday, Krueger said he had no idea about Skinner's agent being upset and speaking to GM Kevyn Adams until I asked for his response on the matter. That seems impossible to believe.

Especially after Saturday morning's session, when Krueger emphasized unprompted that in response to some things he's heard, there are no communication issues between him and the GM and they speak multiple times a day. So Krueger didn't know the agent of a \$9 million player was upset about being benched but he knew what was being said about his relationship with the GM on talk radio? Bizarre.

Skinner: Where this went off the rails was on Thursday. For a veteran player, a two-game scratch followed by a day off was sufficient to send the message Krueger had every right to send. Skinner has no goals. Save all your analytics on this one. Curtis Lazar has four goals. For \$9 million, Jeff Skinner can find a way to put the puck in the net.

Did you know Monday will mark one full year since Skinner's last goal? Did Krueger's scratch do anything for him? Skinner played 14:03 and didn't have a shot on goal. That's 18 goals in his last 99 games. This isn't a small sample size. Skinner might be James Neal or Matt Moulson, guys who used to score goals and just can't do it anymore.

Still, sending Skinner to take the morning skate with the taxi squad, ostensibly so he didn't have to talk to the media, and scratching him for a third time Thursday night was going overboard. It came off as petty and disrespectful. Adams should have stepped in here. Heck, Terry Pegula probably should have stepped in here to remind the coach this player was getting \$9 million of his money.

The GM: The rookie GM has still not talked to the media on this issue and that's a mistake. Memo to Adams: Be available in times of crisis. In good times, people only want to hear from the players anyway. When you cover the



Yankees, you never hear from Brian Cashman. When they were imploding during a September trip to Buffalo, that's when Cashman called the media together via Zoom for a chat.

Toronto CEO Mark Shapiro used to do the same thing when he was the general manager in Cleveland. So did previous Blue Jays GM Alex Anthopoulos. Adams needs to practice the-buck-stops-here approach and be accountable.

No security blanket: Linus Ullmark is hurt and will be out at least a month. Can't blame Carter Hutton for the latest loss. Made 36 saves. The first goal deflected in off Brandon Montour's glove. Goals 2-3 were breakaways. He got no offensive support again. He's no Ullmark but not much he can do at this rate.

What do they do now about judging Ullmark going forward? He's a UFA. This is two straight years he'll have an injury. A tough spot for Adams.

No offense: It's unfathomable this team has an NHL-low 21 goals at 5-on-5 in 18 games but is a behemoth on the power play, tied for the league lead with Chicago entering Saturday night. People say it's the coach and I say it's the players because Krueger can't score for Skinner, get Jack Eichel to stop hitting the post or Taylor Hall to score on a breakaway.

The reality is it's everybody. Make better lines, Ralph. Cody Eakin between Tobias Rieder and Kyle Okposo doesn't work. Do something else.

M\*A\*S\*H unit: Jake McCabe shreds his knee, Will Borgen plays two periods with a fractured forearm, Eichel does something to himself in the pregame warmup (in the warmup!) and Ullmark overstretches a hamstring making the save of the season on New Jersey's Nico Hischier. Not to mention the NHL's worst Covid case knocking Rasmus Ristolainen out of the lineup in the midst of his most dominant season.

Injuries are an excuse but can we at least agree that taking the No. 1 goalie, the No. 1 center and the top defense pair out of any team in hockey would be crippling? It's hard to believe all that happened to the Sabres in the last week in addition to the Covid outbreak.

All this happened the week of the 10th anniversary of Pegula's purchase. Back when fans had actual hope for this sorry franchise. Are the hockey gods still pounding the Sabres for their tank six years ago? Stand down.

## **Sabres Observations: Offensive woes continue with Jack Eichel out, Jeff Skinner in**

By Lance Lysowski  
The Buffalo News  
February 27, 2021

Ralph Krueger's quest to fix what's ailing the Buffalo Sabres continued this week with the decision to scratch Jeff Skinner, a \$9 million-a-year left winger.

Skinner's benching for three consecutive games caused a stir among the fan base and raised questions about the plan to coax more offense out of a team that's generated the fewest even-strength goals in the NHL. The struggles were exacerbated after Jack Eichel suffered a lower-body injury during warmups Thursday.

With the star center out of the lineup, Krueger changed the forward lines, experimented with different personnel and, finally, reinserted Skinner into the lineup Saturday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

The search for answers will continue following a 3-0 loss to the Flyers in KeyBank Center. The Sabres, now 6-9-3 and last in the East Division, have gone 2-5-1 since returning from a two-week Covid-19 pause Feb. 15.

Krueger is optimistic Eichel can return to the lineup Sunday, but there's little time to dissect why the Sabres were outplayed in almost every facet Saturday.

"We need to stay optimistic and positive about us being able to recover (Sunday), and it's the only way we can get ourselves back into this quickly," said Krueger. "But it is certainly one of the bigger challenges I've seen as a coach, because the heart seems to be in the right place, but the energy just isn't there to match that. We got to make sure that frustration doesn't come into our game and that fight comes out early in the game."

Eichel missed his second consecutive game and his replacement on the top line, Curtis Lazar, did not fare well in a prominent role. The only notable performances came from goalie Carter Hutton and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who played a team-high 22:18 in his first game back after recovering from Covid-19.

The Sabres were outshot 39-23 and four prominent players did not register a shot on net: Skinner, Victor Olofsson, Eric Staal and Dylan Cozens. The problem began in their own end, as defensemen misfired passes because Sabres forwards exited the defensive zone too quickly on the breakout.

Turnovers led to sustained pressure by the Flyers (10-4-3), who took a 1-0 lead with Sean Couturier's shot from the slot at 14:22 into the game. Buffalo never threatened to tie the score and Philadelphia added two goals in the second period.

Krueger changed his forward lines in the second period, swapping Lazar with Staal and Olofsson with Hall. The Sabres looked tired, potentially the product of playing eight games in 13 days. In search of "new energy," Krueger plans to make lineup changes Sunday – the latest attempt to fix what's gone wrong.

"For whatever reason, it seems like we're just pedaling really hard uphill," said Staal. "When you're struggling with confidence and you're struggling offensively, I feel like a lot of times with a lot of guys you're guilty of maybe doing too much and just not executing on the smaller details. Swimming hard, but just not all in the right direction. It kind of feels that way right now. It's frustrating, it's frustrating for everybody."

Here are other observations from the Sabres' game Saturday:

1. Olofsson demoted: It's time for the Sabres to reconsider how Olofsson is deployed in 5-on-5 situations. Olofsson is an elite forward on the power play. Since making his debut in March 2019, Olofsson's 19 power-play goals rank third in the NHL during that span. He has six on the man advantage in 18 games this season.

But Olofsson hasn't contributed much at even-strength. He misfired passes in the first two periods against the Flyers, leading to a change of possession and, eventually, a demotion from the top line. According to Evolving-Hockey.com, among Sabres forwards Olofsson has the fifth-worst expected goals against per 60 minutes, which measures a player's ability to limit an opponent's shot quality.

Olofsson has also posted the fourth worst on-ice shot quality among forwards despite spending most of his even-strength ice time with Eichel.

"Almost all their grade-A scoring chances came off the rush," noted Krueger. "We started forcing it a little bit in the second period, we gave up opportunities on that to try and pressure for that goal that we so desperately needed and then it ended up going back in our end and we just couldn't recover energy-wise. But I would say management of the puck in our end is going to be critical."

2. Problem down the middle: The Sabres still lack the necessary depth at center. Cozens is too green to be moved into the middle and disrupting the 20-year-old's confidence makes little sense at this point in the season.

Casey Mittelstadt was asked to play center Saturday, a move that backfired in some ways because he won only 33% of his faceoffs. The team won only 38% of its draws.

The Sabres should have recalled Arttu Ruotsalainen from Rochester. The 23-year-old prospect has gone consecutive Amerks games without a point, but he's the best option to fill-in during Eichel's absence and this team needs someone with a blend of offensive upside and recent experience at center.

3. Skinner silent in return: Skinner registered only one shot attempt in 14:03 of ice time for the Sabres, spending much of the game on a forward line with Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan. Skinner was also on the second power-play unit with Mittelstadt, Ristolainen, Cozens and Colin Miller.

Skinner blocked a shot and forced a turnover, but it's unclear if he showed Krueger enough to remain in the lineup. Skinner's line had little zone time because of faceoff losses and misfired breakout passes.

4. Bright spot: Krueger called Ristolainen the Sabres' "best" defenseman Saturday, noting how it was impressive that the 26-year-old played so well after experiencing a wide-range of Covid-19 symptoms, including fatigue.

Ristolainen thought his play dipped in the third period when he wasn't receiving as much ice time.

"The third period was probably the toughest one getting into a rhythm," said Ristolainen. "I feel like the ice time was lower, so it was just surviving the third."

5. Special teams: The Sabres' penalty kill had a much better showing after allowing at least one goal in five of its previous seven games. Buoyed by the returns of Ristolainen and Tobias Rieder, Buffalo killed three penalties. Hutton had to make seven shorthanded saves, most of which were shots from the perimeter.

The Sabres' power play, which ranked first in the NHL and had scored in 11 of its previous 12 games, struggled without Eichel. Buffalo had only two shots on goal in three failed power-play opportunities.

## **The Wraparound: Carter Hutton receives little help in Sabres' loss to Flyers**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 27, 2021

The short-term fate of the Buffalo Sabres now partially rests on the shoulders of Carter Hutton.

Hutton, the Sabres' 35-year-old goalie, will be tasked with holding down the starting job after the team received news that Linus Ullmark will miss at least a month with a lower-body injury, a development that coach Ralph Krueger called a "heavy hit."

Hutton's performance wasn't the Sabres' problem Saturday in KeyBank Center.

With Jack Eichel out of the lineup because of a lower-body injury, the Sabres struggled to create quality scoring chances and Shayne Gostisbehere's second-period goal provided the Philadelphia Flyers with enough cushion in a 3-0 win over Buffalo.

The Sabres, now 6-9-3, remain last in the East Division and were thoroughly outplayed by the Flyers (10-4-3).

Ullmark's injury occurred in the first period of a 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey on Thursday night, when Ullmark slid to his left to make a highlight-reel glove save on Devils center Nico Hischier. Ullmark stayed in the game for the remainder of the first period before he was replaced by Hutton at the intermission.

Ullmark, a 27-year-old amid the final season of his contract, posted a .944 save percentage in his past four games and again solidified himself as the Sabres' starter in net. Buffalo has 17 games scheduled in March.

"I think he's been our best player all year," Hutton said of Ullmark. "He's been a big-time difference maker. It's frustrating. A guy I've been with for three years, you see him kind of come into his own and he's worked hard on and off the rink. ... But for Linus, the future's bright, for sure."

Hutton stopped 36 of 39 shots Saturday against the Flyers, including a pad save on a Claude Giroux one-timer from the slot in the second period. His first goal against, another shot from the slot by Sean Couturier, went off a teammate and in. Philadelphia pushed its lead to 2-0 when Gostisbehere received the puck during a 2-on-1 rush and uncorked a shot that went under Hutton's glove.

Scott Laughton also scored on a breakaway late in the second period. This was the third time this season the Sabres were shut out, including the second against Flyers backup goalie Brian Elliott.

Early deficit: The trend of allowing the first goal continued with Couturier giving the Flyers a 1-0 lead at 14:22 into the first period. Philadelphia defenseman Travis Sanheim beat Eric Staal to a loose puck along the left wall, skated into the circle to spread out the Sabres' defensive-zone coverage and passed to Couturier in the slot.

Couturier's shot went off Brandon Montour's glove and over Hutton's shoulder.

Ugly statistic: The Sabres have scored the first goal in only seven of 18 games this season. Entering Saturday, Buffalo had a 2-7-1 when its opponent scored first. The Flyers, on the other hand, had a 6-1-2 record when scoring first.

Slow start: The Sabres had six shots on goal in the first period, none of high quality. Taylor Hall had one power-play shot on goal from the perimeter and Cody Eakin received the puck in the slot without an open lane.

Buffalo spent much of the period in its own end and without the puck, as the Sabres won only 32 percent of their faceoffs.

More of the same: The Sabres had only 14 shots on goal through two periods. Their play away from the puck was worse. Gostisbehere scored on a 2-on-1 at 14:33 into the second period when Rasmus Dahlin was caught pinching. Laughton's breakaway occurred when Rasmus Ristolainen pinched, and Oskar Lindblom sent a perfect outlet pass through the neutral zone.

Returns: The Flyers had four players return to the lineup after a stay on the Covid protocol list: Laughton, Lindblom, Jakub Voracek and Justin Braun.

Jeff Skinner, Tobias Rieder and Rasmus Ristolainen returned to the Sabres' lineup.

Scratches: Winger Tage Thompson and defenseman Matt Irwin were healthy scratches for Buffalo. Thompson had three shots on goal Thursday after replacing Eichel in the lineup, and Irwin had played in nine of the previous 11 games.

Roster move: Prior to puck drop Saturday, the Sabres assigned forward Rasmus Asplund to the taxi squad and elevated goalie Jonas Johansson to the active roster.

Milestone: Lazar appeared in his 300th career NHL game, 54 of which have been with the Sabres across the past two seasons. The 26-year-old played most of the 2018-19 season with the Calgary Flames' top minor-league affiliate.

Letters: With Eichel and Jake McCabe (knee) out, Ristolainen and Reinhart served as alternate captains with winger Kyle Okposo.

Next: The Sabres host the Flyers on Sunday with puck drop scheduled for 3 p.m., Eastern. It's the fourth of eight meetings between the two teams this season.

## **Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark out at least one month with a lower-body injury**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

February 21, 2021

Another significant blow was delivered to the Buffalo Sabres with the news Saturday that goalie Linus Ullmark will miss at least one month with a lower-body injury.

Ullmark, 27, again solidified himself as the Sabres' starting goalie this season, posting a .919 save percentage and 2.44 goals-against average in 12 games. The injury occurred in the first period of a 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey on Thursday night, when Ullmark slid to his left to make a highlight-reel glove save on Devils center Nico Hischier.

Additionally, center Jack Eichel missed a second consecutive game Saturday with a lower-body injury.

Ullmark remained in the game after being examined on the ice by a team trainer, stopping all 15 shots he faced before being replaced by Carter Hutton at the first intermission. With Ullmark out, Hutton will take over as the Sabres' primary goalie and Jonas Johansson will be elevated from the taxi squad to a backup role for the weekend back-to-back series against the Philadelphia Flyers in KeyBank Center.

Krueger told the media before puck drop Saturday that he and General Manager Kevyn Adams will reevaluate the goaltending situation after the weekend.

"It's a hard hit. It's a heavy hit," said Krueger. "In the best case we'll get him back in a month. A huge loss at this point in our season, especially coming off the tail end of that New Jersey game which was clearly his strongest performance of the season. To see him get a lower-body injury that will take him out for a minimum one month is a hard hit. We're still digesting that and we're going to work with Linus to get him up to speed as quick as possible, but it's a long-term injury."

It's been a difficult two months for Ullmark. He missed the start of Sabres training camp because of an immigration issue and his father died in Sweden last month. The team allowed Ullmark to take a step back from hockey after the personal loss, and he has been outstanding since returning to the lineup.

The former sixth-round draft pick had a .944 save percentage across his past four starts, including a 41-save performance Tuesday in a 4-1 win over the Devils in New Jersey. The injury came at a bad time for the Sabres and Ullmark, who is scheduled to be an unrestricted free agent this summer. He signed a one-year, \$2.6 million contract in October to avoid salary arbitration.

Hutton was in goal for the Sabres on Saturday, his first start in 11 days and sixth of the season. He entered the game with an .889 save percentage and is also in the final year of his contract.

Johansson, 25, has appeared in only one game for Buffalo this season, a relief appearance in which he stopped eight of nine shots after Hutton was elbowed by Flyers defenseman Ivan Provorov in Philadelphia on Jan. 19. Johansson has been on the taxi squad for much of this season and has appeared in only 41 career games with the American Hockey League's Rochester Americans.

It's unlikely the Sabres will call on Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen anytime soon. The top prospect has an .890 save percentage in four games with the Amerks and has only played 15 career AHL games. He allowed five goals in the third period of a 7-2 loss to Utica on Friday night.

## **OPINION: Sabres were listless in loss to Philadelphia**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 27, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres scored six goals in their first game against the Philadelphia Flyers back on Jan. 18. Since then, they've played two games, both against Brian Elliott, and they haven't scored since.

Buffalo has lost five straight games at home, and six out of seven overall after a 3-0 loss to the Flyers on Saturday afternoon.

Elliott made 23 saves for the shutout, but it may have been the easiest game he's ever had in the NHL. The Sabres rarely tested him and were very disconnected in their offensive attack.

Sure, Buffalo missed Jack Eichel, but they had trouble putting two good passes together and very rarely got set up in the offensive zone.

In the third period, Elliott did make a nice save on Casey Mittelstadt from the slot, and then Mittelstadt hit the post.

Jeff Skinner was back in the lineup and had a real good chance early in the second period when Mittelstadt sent him in, but his backhand shot went wide. It was pretty much the only time I noticed Skinner.

What really reared its ugly head in this game was a complete lack of awareness by the Sabres. There were Flyers left wide-open, and the Sabres defenders seemed to have no idea they were there.

On the first goal by Sean Couturier, Henri Jokiharju gave the puck away twice along the wall. Taylor Hall came down to cover Travis Sanheim, but let him go.

Eric Staal circled and Sanheim was allowed to come off from the wall and find Couturier in the high slot.

On the second goal, Rasmus Dahlin got caught out of position, forcing Colin Miller to have to slide over. Shayne Gostisbehere saw the wide-open lane and skated in, open down the left side for a goal.

On the third goal, Jacob Bryson had no idea that Scott Laughton had snuck behind him and it was another breakaway goal to put the Sabres away.

The whole game saw the Sabres very disjointed in their attack. Ralph Krueger thought his team didn't have a lot of energy and was hesitant when it came to puck management.

There was no cohesiveness in their attack, there was very little passion in their play and the awareness on many plays was horrendous.

The Flyers give up a lot of goals, and the Sabres do have one game this year where they netted six. The fact that they haven't scored in two games against this team is more than a hot goalie that always plays well against them. Too many guys have no contributions to the offensive whatsoever, and it's the main reason why the Sabres are pretty much out of the race for a playoff spot just over a month into the season.

## **OPINION: Three observations: Sabres fall flat in matinee with Flyers**

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

February 27, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres came in to Saturday afternoon's matchup with the Philadelphia Flyers finding out captain Jack Eichel would not be able to go for a second-straight game with a lower-body injury. The team also found out goaltender Linus Ullmark will miss, at least, a month of action with a lower-body injury suffered Thursday night against the New Jersey Devils.

Their absence was felt on Saturday in a 3-0 loss to the Flyers at KeyBank Center.

Let's take a look at three of our observations from Saturday afternoon's game:

### 1.) Offense, schmoffense

The Sabres played like a team missing one of their biggest offensive pieces in Eichel. While the Sabres captain hasn't been scoring goals, his play typically was leading to opportunities for Buffalo to put the puck in the net.

Even their league-leading power play unit was held off the score sheet on Saturday.

Buffalo has struggled for the past few seasons to generate offense away from their captain. The line of Taylor Hall, Eric Staal and Dylan Cozens has emerged as the Sabres' best chance at generating offense without Eichel on the ice, but even with a decent showing on Saturday, nothing would go in for anyone.

### 2.) Hutton peppered with shots in the loss

Sabres goalie Carter Hutton faced the bulk of the game's shots, with the Flyers outshooting Buffalo, 39-23. Hutton made 36 saves in the loss.

A couple of breakaways did not go the veteran goaltender's way, including the second goal, which Shayne Gostisbehere took advantage of a quick opportunity where he got behind Colin Miller and took a snapshot that snuck right through Hutton.

Hutton will be seeing a lot more time in the crease in the Sabres' upcoming schedule with Ullmark recovering from his lower-body injury.

Jonas Johansson could also see some time in net, as he is the goalie being carried on the roster, while Dustin Tokarski practices with the taxi squad.

### 3.) Skinner silent in his return to the lineup

Sabres forward Jeff Skinner returned to the lineup on Saturday, but much like the rest of his teammates, it was a quiet game.

Skinner had the sixth-most time on ice of all forwards with 14:03 played. He was on the ice for a high-danger chance-for and a high-danger chance-against, and he took a hooking penalty late in the game in the offensive zone.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger has consistently said that Skinner needs to play within the Sabres' principles. We will see how Skinner's first outing fared in the eyes of his coach after being a healthy scratch for three-straight games.

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Buffalo gets a little less than 24 hours before they have to, once again, lace up the skates and take on the Flyers for the second time in as many afternoons.



We'll have Brian Koziol kick off Sunday afternoon's broadcast at 2 p.m. EST with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show. Puck drop is slated for just after 3 p.m. EST at KeyBank Center, where you can hear all the action on the radio flagship of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **Sabres blanked by Philadelphia**

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

February 27, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres were shut out by the Philadelphia Flyers, 3-0, on Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center. Brian Elliott made 23 saves to blank Buffalo for his second shut out in as many games against the team this season.

Both teams had an early power play opportunity that they could not capitalize on in the opening period. Sam Reinhart was called for holding, but Buffalo killed off the minor. However, the Sabres had just one shot on goal when they went on the man advantage just minutes later.

Philadelphia scored first in the later parts of the opening stanza, as Sean Couturier was credited with his fourth goal of the season after the puck hit Brandon Montour and changed directions on Carter Hutton. Travis Sanheim recorded the lone assist on the game's first goal.

Buffalo was able to kill off their second penalty of the game after Jacob Bryson was penalized for high sticking.

Hutton made 10 saves in the first period, including five shots for the Flyers on the power play. The Sabres recorded six shots on goal in the first period as well.

Philadelphia was successful in killing off their second penalty of the game, keeping the Sabres without a shot on goal during the man advantage. James van Riemsdyk was penalized for tripping halfway through the second period, but the Flyers were able to preserve their 1-0 lead.

The Sabres' deficit doubled to two after Shayne Gostisbehere scored his second goal of the season. van Riemsdyk and Couturier assisted on the goal that made it 2-0 in favor of Philadelphia. Then Scott Laughton's fifth goal of the season came with just over a minute remaining in the period to extend the lead to 3-0 over Buffalo.

The Sabres had one late power play chance with less than a minute remaining in regulation, and failed to score with the opportunity. Buffalo was credited with nine shots on goal in the final period, but could not beat Elliott on any of their chances.

The Flyers outshot Buffalo in all three periods, totaling a 39-23 advantage in the victory.

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### GAME SUMMARY

Goal Summary:

First Period:

BUF: NONE

PHI: 14:22 - Sean Couturier (4) (Travis Sanheim)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

PHI: 14:33 - Shayne Gostisbehere (2) (James van Riemsdyk, Sean Courturier); 18:54 - Scott Laughton (5) (Oscar Lindblom, Jakub Voracek)

Third Period

BUF: NONE

PHI: NONE

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Penalty Summary:

First Period:

BUF: 3:08 - Sam Reinhart (Holding - 2 min.); 15:06 - Jacob Bryson (High sticking - 2 min.)  
PHI: 6:29 - Joel Farabee (Slashing - 2 min.)

Second Period:

BUF: NONE  
PHI: 10:53 - James van Riemsdyk (Tripping - 2 min.)

Third Period:

BUF: 10:31 - Jeff Skinner (Hooking - 2 min.)  
PHI: 19:26 - Robert Hagg (Holding - 2 min.)

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STATS OF THE GAME:

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Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) Sean Couturier - PHI
- 2.) Shayne Gostisbehere - PHI
- 3.) Scott Laughton - PHI

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What's Next:

These same two teams will meet at KeyBank Center on Sunday afternoon. Buffalo and the Flyers will drop the puck just after 3 p.m. EST on the flagship home of the Sabres Radio Network - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **Linus Ullmark out a month with lower-body injury**

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

February 27, 2021

The injury news for the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday was not good as goalie Linus Ullmark is going to be out of the lineup for, at least, a month with a lower-body injury, according to head coach Ralph Krueger.

According to Lance Lysowski from The Buffalo News, Ullmark is dealing with a hamstring injury suffered in the first period of Thursday night's 4-3 overtime loss to the New Jersey Devils at KeyBank Center.

The 27-year-old netminder was starting to put together a nice stretch of games leading up to the injury, going 2-3-0 in six games coming out of the team's COVID-19 break earlier in the month of February. In his six games, Ullmark posted a .924 save percentage, as well as a 2.29 goals-against average.

In 12 games played this season, Ullmark has posted a 5-4-2 record with a 2.44 goals-against average and a .919 save percentage.

Carter Hutton will get the start for the Sabres on Saturday afternoon against the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center. It is likely that Hutton will start Sunday's matchup with the Flyers, as well, while Jonas Johansson will serve as the backup.

The 35-year-old goalie has struggled in production this season for the Sabres, posting a 1-4-1 record in six games played with a 3.24 goals-against average and a .889 save percentage.

The Sabres are also going to be without captain Jack Eichel on Saturday as he's also dealing with a lower-body injury suffered during the pregame warmup on Thursday.

The good news for Buffalo is three players will return to the lineup against the Flyers in Tobias Rieder, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jeff Skinner. Rieder has missed most of the last three games with an upper-body injury, while Ristolainen has not played since Jan. 31 after testing positive for COVID-19 and dealing with severe symptoms from the virus.

As for Skinner, he returns to the lineup after being a healthy scratch for the past three games. He will skate on a line with Casey Mittelstadt at center and Riley Sheahan on the right wing.

Faceoff at KeyBank Center on Saturday is set for 1 p.m. EST on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **Jeff Skinner returns to shift work for Sabres, but results are lacking**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Jeff Skinner returned to the Sabres' lineup. He didn't do a heck of a lot.

Of course, neither did anyone else.

Buffalo went for a leisurely skate around KeyBank Center on Saturday, dropping a 3-0 decision to Philadelphia. The game was as lopsided as the score indicates, leaving no doubt why the Sabres fell to 2-6-1 in their past nine games and remain in the basement of the East Division.

"I don't think anyone's satisfied with that stat," Skinner said of the slide. "It's been a tough stretch."

That extends to Skinner, of course. He watched the previous three games as a healthy scratch before finally dressing against the Flyers. The stat line: no points, no shots, one attempt, a hooking penalty and a goal against in 14:03.

"Personally and as a team, we would have liked to have had a better game and better result," Skinner said.

The teams have a rematch Sunday, and it's assumed Skinner will be in the lineup. But who knows at this point? No one in the blue-and-gold reverse retro jerseys excelled, and Skinner blended right in.

Here's a look at his 20 shifts, most of which were spent with center Casey Mittelstadt and right wing Riley Sheahan.

### First period

Shift No. 1: With the puck in the Sabres' zone, Skinner circled along the top, covering the point men. He pinched down to the right wall, pushing the puck up to help Buffalo finally leave the zone. The Flyers stole the puck from him when he crossed their blue line.

No. 2: Skinner stationed himself at the top of the Flyers' crease during Buffalo's power play, but the team had no scoring chances.

No. 3: After a commercial break, Skinner came on for a neutral-zone faceoff. After the Flyers gained control in their zone, Skinner backpedaled to center ice, then moved up to the blue line in a missed attempt to force a turnover.

No. 4: Mittelstadt blindly turned over the puck, forcing the Sabres to play defense. Again, Skinner circled the top, covering the point men. He blew the zone early at one point, but he drew the Flyers defensemen with him. Skinner was in the middle of the ice when the Sabres tried to clear the puck along the left boards, which was his area.

No. 5: Skinner touched the puck twice but didn't want it. The first time, he chipped it forward as soon as it came to him. The second time, he slowly skated to center ice while looking behind him before dropping the puck to Colin Miller for a dump-in.

No. 6: After a neutral-zone faceoff, Skinner got the puck to Mittelstadt, who chipped it into the Flyers' zone. That was about it.

Period summary: No shots in 3:57 of ice time. The Flyers had a 3-1 edge in shot attempts.

### Second period

No. 7: The shift featured two offensive-zone faceoffs and a neutral-zone draw. Skinner jostled with Nolan Patrick, then couldn't control a pass from Rasmus Ristolainen, which kept the Flyers in Buffalo's zone. Though Skinner eventually got the puck out, Patrick beat him back into the zone, eliminating Skinner as an outlet option for Buffalo defender Jacob Bryson.

No. 8: Skinner switched to right wing for the offensive zone draw as Taylor Hall replaced Sheahan. Not much happened.

No. 9: Skinner's highlight of the day came midway through the second period. After a defensive-zone faceoff, Mittelstadt found a streaking Skinner with an outlet pass at center ice. The winger's only shot attempt of the day went wide.

No. 10: It was another power-play shift for Skinner, but the Flyers intercepted his pass from the corner intended for Ristolainen. He also took a long outlet pass from goalie Carter Hutton at the Philly blue line but quickly gave the puck to Mittelstadt.

No. 11: Hall again joined Skinner and Mittelstadt for an offensive-zone draw. The Flyers exited and scored.

No. 12: Skinner deflected a shot by Flyers defenseman Justin Braun. He then chased a puck into the Flyers' end with Braun and Philly's Travis Sanheim but didn't come up with it.

Period summary: No shots in 5:18 of ice time. The Flyers had a 6-1 edge in shot attempts and scored once.

Third period

No. 13: Not much happened after the offensive-zone draw.

No. 14: Mittelstadt's shot hit the iron, keeping the line from putting Buffalo on the scoreboard.

No. 15: The line moved to Philly's end after a defensive-zone faceoff but couldn't stay there. Connor Bunnaman beat Skinner back to Buffalo's zone, but the left winger disrupted the Flyers forward just enough to stop a scoring chance.

No. 16: Skinner went to the penalty box for hooking after pressuring defenseman Ivan Provorov behind the Philadelphia net.

No. 17: The winger stepped out of the box, passed the puck to Rasmus Dahlin to clear the zone and went to the bench.

No. 18: Skinner skated offside with the whistle leading to a commercial break and a 28-second shift.

No. 19: Not much happened after the offensive-zone draw.

No. 20: Skinner absorbed a face rub from Jakub Voracek's glove and yapped with the Flyers forward. Skinner set up Mittelstadt for a chance, but the shot was high.

Period summary: No shots in 4:48 of ice time. The Sabres had a 5-0 edge in shot attempts with Skinner on the ice. He finished the day in a 9-7 hole.

Overall, the Flyers outshot the Sabres 39-23 and had a 59-44 lead in shot attempts. It wasn't pretty for anyone, including Skinner. Here's the report card, based on the Game Score by The Athletic's Dom Luszczyszyn.

Fine

Carter Hutton: The goalie made just his sixth start of the season, but many more could be ahead. No. 1 goalie Linus Ullmark is out for a minimum of one month with a lower-body injury. Coach Ralph Krueger strongly suggested an even longer absence and said the team could acquire a netminder.

"It's a heavy hit," Krueger said.

"It sucks," Hutton said. "He's been our best player all year."

Ullmark is 5-4-2 with a .919 save percentage. Hutton fell to 1-5-1 with an .896 percentage despite 36 saves. The goalie didn't get a lot of help.

"It's fragile times right now," Hutton said, "but we'll find a way through this."

Poor

Kyle Okposo, Tobias Rieder and Cody Eakin: The linemates were the only Sabres with a positive Corsi at 60.0, but they were minus-1 in even-strength goals.

Curtis Lazar: The center skated on the top line in place of Jack Eichel, who missed his second consecutive game with a lower-body injury.

"He remains day to day," Krueger said.

Sam Reinhart: The right winger had the worst Corsi during the matinee as Philly had a 14-5 lead in shot attempts with Reinhart on the ice.

Bad

Rasmus Ristolainen: The defenseman played for the first time since going into COVID-19 protocols Feb. 2. He paced the Sabres in ice time at 22:18 but said he tailed off during the final period.

"It was just surviving through the third," Ristolainen said. "I felt like every shift was a bad one. ... Overall, I felt better than I expected, actually."

Taylor Hall and Eric Staal: Hall had two shots as his scoring skid reached 17 games. Staal had no shots and lost 10 of his 12 faceoffs.

"It seems like we're pedaling really hard uphill," Staal said. "Swimming hard, but just not all together in the right direction."

Actually, the Sabres are moving in the same direction: toward the basement of the NHL.

"It is a mental fight to continue to keep consistent with our game," Krueger said. "We need to stay optimistic and positive about us being able to recover."

## **Sabres get blanked by Flyers; Ralph Krueger says lineup changes coming**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 27, 2021

**BUFFALO** – The Sabres' grueling schedule doesn't let up for weeks. Fresh off Saturday afternoon's ugly 3-0 loss to Philadelphia, they play the Flyers again Sunday, their ninth game in 14 days since their COVID-19 pause ended.

The Sabres, incredibly, don't have two consecutive days off until the first week of April. They have four more games next week. The jam-packed slate doesn't offer them an opportunity to reset and enjoy any quality practice time.

Clearly, the dizzying stretch has drained the Sabres mentally and physically. They looked downright awful Saturday against the Flyers inside KeyBank Center, generating little offense and showcasing wretched puck management.

So expect the Sabres to inject some fresh bodies into the lineup. Captain Jack Eichel, who's day to day with a lower-body injury, could return Sunday after a two-game absence. They could also recall some players and start a different goalie.

On Saturday, backup Carter Hutton subbed for No. 1 goalie Linus Ullmark, whose lower-body injury will sideline him a month, coach Ralph Krueger said prior to the Sabres' sixth loss in nine games (2-6-1).

"We might make a couple of changes where we can add some energy," Krueger said on a Zoom call. "We haven't made a final decision yet on the goalie. So I think injecting some new energy is almost necessary in this situation. We need to stay optimistic and positive about us being able to recover tomorrow, and it's the only way we can get ourselves back into this quickly.

"But it is certainly one of the bigger challenges I've seen as a coach, because the heart seems to be in the right place, but the energy just isn't there to match that. We got to make sure that frustration doesn't come into our game and that fight comes out early in the game. We need some success offensively."

After the Sabres scored seven goals in two games, an offensive bonanza by their standards, they were shut out for the second time this season by Flyers goalie Brian Elliott, who made 23 saves Saturday.

"They were better in every zone," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said of the Flyers.

Incredibly, Elliott, who also blanked the Sabres on Jan. 19, improved to 15-2-2 in his career against Buffalo. He has shut out the Sabres four times.

Carter Hart, a goalie the Sabres chased from their 6-1 win Jan. 18 in Philadelphia, will start for the Flyers on Sunday afternoon, coach Alain Vigneault said.

The Sabres have scored just one goal or been shut out four times since their COVID-19 pause ended. In their first two games back, the New York Islanders limited them to one total goal.

"Guys are competing," Sabres center Eric Staal said. "For whatever reason, it seems like we're just pedaling really hard uphill. When you're struggling with confidence and you're struggling offensively, I feel like a lot of times with a lot of guys you're guilty of maybe doing too much and just not executing on the smaller details."

Krueger wants to keep everything small. The Sabres have a daunting challenge ahead to climb up the stacked East Division and move into the playoff chase.

"Picture small, real small, and anything else is just too destructive," Krueger said. "Again, we knew we were up for a battle coming out of the COVID break and adding players one at a time through all of this. It was there for us to have a better entry into this phase.



"We all know of about those two Islanders games that went awry, and now it is fight time. But big picture for how many games in how many days or whatever, we have no time for that kind of conversation at the moment. Maybe on Monday we can do a little regroup."

After a day off Monday, the Sabres begin a five-game road trip Tuesday against the New York Rangers. Following that game, they play the Islanders three straight games.

Hutton could see the bulk of the upcoming action. He had a strong outing Saturday, making 36 saves.

Sean Couturier opened the scoring 14:22 into the game. When Shayne Gostisbehere scored 2-0 14:33 into the second period, it felt like the Flyers had a five-goal lead. Scott Laughton breakaway goal at 18:54 into the second sealed the game.

Notes: The Sabres scratched defenseman Matt Irwin and winger Tage Thompson to make room for Ristolainen (COVID-19, seven games) and winger Jeff Skinner (healthy, three games). ... With Eichel and defenseman Jake McCabe injured, Ristolainen and wingers Kyle Okposo and Sam Reinhart all served as alternate captains. ... Curtis Lazar, who played his 300th NHL game, subbed for Eichel between Reinhart and Victor Olofsson most of the game.

## **Sabres' Rasmus Ristolainen looks impressive in return, logs big minutes**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 27, 2021

**BUFFALO** – Instead of easing defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen into the lineup, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger threw him into the fray Saturday afternoon, skating him a game-high 8 minutes, 22 seconds in the first period.

Ristolainen, 26, showcased remarkable energy considering he had missed seven games while recovering from a nasty battle with COVID-19.

The 6-foot-4, 221-pound Ristolainen played a team-high 22 minutes, 17 seconds in the Sabres' 3-0 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers. The Finn hadn't played a game since Jan. 31.

"I thought he was our best D here tonight," Krueger said on a Zoom call. "Amazing, amazing how he's come off of more than three weeks of a break. ... Just shows the character and the fight that he has in him. He'll be able to take it even a higher level tomorrow."

Late in the first period, Ristolainen leveled Michael Raffl, knocking him to the ice.

"I felt way better early," Ristolainen said. "I felt like I got more ice time. The third period was probably the toughest one getting into a rhythm. I feel like the ice time was lower, so it was just surviving the third. I felt like every shift was a bad one."

Still, Ristolainen, who mostly skated with rookie Jacob Bryson, said he felt better than he expected overall.

"In the third, when you lost the rhythm, you don't get out there that much, your body, your legs get cold," said Ristolainen, whose ice time dipped about a minute in the third period. "So that means when you get out there, you get tired easily, you get lactic acid easier than what you get in the rhythm."

The Sabres host the Flyers again Sunday afternoon at KeyBank Center.

## **Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark out at least one month; Jeff Skinner set to return**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

February 27, 2021

**BUFFALO** – A lower-body injury will sideline Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark at least one month, coach Ralph Krueger said.

Ullmark, who has started 12 of the Sabres' 17 games, left Thursday's 4-3 overtime loss to the New Jersey Devils after the first period.

"It's a hard hit, it's heavy hit," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said on a Zoom call this morning. "The best case we'll get him back in a month. So a huge loss at this point in our season, especially coming off the tail end of that New Jersey game, which was clearly his strongest performance of the season."

Carter Hutton will start this afternoon against the Philadelphia Flyers at KeyBank Center. The Sabres recalled Jonas Johansson from the taxi squad this afternoon to back him up.

Ullmark has compiled a 5-4-2 record with this with a 2.44 goals-against average and a .919 save percentage. The Swede made 41 saves in Tuesday's 4-1 win in New Jersey.

Could the Sabres start looking for another goalie?

Johansson, a strong prospect, has played one period in the last 50 weeks. Taxi-squad goalie Dustin Tokarski, a decorated AHL goalie, has played two games with the Rochester Americans this season. He hasn't played an NHL contest since 2016-17.

"The solutions off of Linus' injury, right now it's get through this weekend, it's step back and analyze, and then move forward with a strategy," Krueger said. "Right now, we're looking forward to a good weekend with Carter Hutton. He had some strong games against Philadelphia back-to-back earlier in the season when we needed them, and that's our full focus and we'll come back to you with the strategic side of things after the weekend."

In other lineup news, Krueger said winger Jeff Skinner will play this afternoon, ending his three-game benching. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, who has missed seven games after battling COVID-19, and winger Tobias Rieder will also return against the Flyers.

Krueger said captain Jack Eichel is still day to day with a lower-body injury.

The Sabres have also sent winger Rasmus Asplund back to the taxi squad.

## **Flyers shut out Sabres 3-0 in Ristolainen, Skinner's return to lineup**

By Paul Ross

WKBW

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers began their two game series at KeyBank Center on Friday with the Flyers shutting out the Sabres 3-0.

The first period started with both teams taking penalties early on with both teams having successful penalty kills.

With about five minutes to go in the first period, Flyers center Sean Couturier had a shot deflect off Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour's hand and past Sabres goalie Carter Hutton to give the Flyers a 1-0 lead.

The Sabres were able to kill off another penalty and the Flyers went into the first intermission with a 1-0 lead, outshooting the Sabres 11-6.

In the second period, the Flyers had a breakaway with defenseman Shayne Gostisbehere putting one past Hutton off a pass to give the Flyers a 2-0 lead with about five minutes to go in the second period.

With about a minute to go in the second, Flyers forward Scott Laughton broke loose to backhand the puck past Hutton to give the Flyers a 3-0 lead heading into the final frame.

The Flyers also outshot the Sabres 26-14 after two periods.

Both teams took a penalty each in the third period which were killed off by both teams.

The Sabres and Flyers didn't score in the third period with the Flyers outshooting the Sabres 39-23.

## **Linus Ullmark out at least one month with injury; Jonas Johansson recalled from taxi squad**

By Paul Ross

WKBW

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres will be without their starting goalie for at least one month.

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark got hurt early in Thursday night's game against the New Jersey Devils.

In a corresponding move, the Sabres recalled goalie Jonas Johansson from the taxi squad to serve as the team's backup while Ullmark recovers from injury.

Carter Hutton will start on Saturday against the Philadelphia Flyers.

With Johansson getting called up, the Sabres placed forward Rasmus Asplund on the taxi squad.

## **Ristolainen, Skinner, Rieder to play against Flyers; Eichel, Ullmark out**

By Paul Ross

WKBW

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — Buffalo Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen is set to play his first game on Saturday against the Philadelphia Flyers since recovering from COVID-19.

The Sabres will also see forward Jeff Skinner return to the lineup after being healthy scratched for the last three games.

Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger also announced that forward Tobias Rieder will play on Saturday.

Captain Jack Eichel will miss his second straight game and is listed as out day-to-day.

Krueger announced goalie Linus Ullmark is out at least one month, and Carter Hutton will start against the Flyers.

## **Sabres struggle on all sides in 3-0 loss to Philadelphia**

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – It was a rough day on all fronts for the Buffalo Sabres. They were shutout, they turned the puck over in their own zone and they got into odd man rush situations. Meanwhile the Flyers capitalized, leading to a 3-0 win for Philadelphia.

"They were better in every zone and I feel like we gave them too many scoring chances, I would say "A" chances," Rasmus Ristolainen said. "Whatever, close to the net, way too many odd man rushes. That was the difference tonight."

Buffalo had their chances offensively, including a one-on-one opportunity for Jeff Skinner, but couldn't put the puck in the back of the net. Confidence seems to be the biggest problem for the team offensively.

"I just don't think the confidence is very high at all," Eric Staal said. "We had some pretty grade-A opportunities to score and we didn't score and when you're feeling it, when you're feeling pressure to score and be difference makers in that regard, when it doesn't happen, it's difficult. I think that's what you saw."

Puck mismanagement was also a major key in the defensive zone. It's something Ralph Krueger believes they need to improve if they want to get back on track.

"It's frustrating for us to mismanage the puck that way..." Krueger said, "...and if we want to recover here tomorrow it's going to be about that. I don't find that the defensive effort was catastrophic. We didn't really give up the inside that much, but I would say management of the puck in our end is going to be critical."

Buffalo falls to 6-9-3 and meet Philadelphia again Sunday at 3 p.m.

## **Goaltender Linus Ullmark to miss at least one month**

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

February 27, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Injuries continue to plague the Buffalo Sabres. Saturday morning the team announced goaltender Linus Ullmark will miss at least one month with a lower body injury.

Ullmark left Thursday's game against New Jersey after the first period and did not return. The team wanted to wait until they could completely diagnose him before making an announcement.

He becomes the third player in just the last two weeks to miss significant time with an injury. Defenseman Jake McCabe is out 6-8 months with injuries to his ACL, MCL and meniscus. Will Borgen will miss roughly 6-8 weeks with a broken forearm. That injury was suffered February 20th also against New Jersey.

Buffalo recalled goaltender Jonas Johansson to serve as a backup to Carter Hutton who will now be the team's top goalie in Hutton's absence.



## **Elliott's spell on Sabres again leaves them at ground zero**

By Bob Grotz

The Mercury

February 28, 2021

Flyers veteran backup goaltender Brian Elliott again played like a No. 1 guy Saturday, but it helped that the 3-0 road victory came against a team he owns, the Buffalo Sabres.

By now almost everybody knows that goalie Brian Elliott gives the Flyers their best chance to beat the Buffalo Sabres.

Elliott shut them out Saturday for the second time this season and the fourth time in his career, with three different Flyers scoring in a 3-0 victory at KeyBank Center in Buffalo.

The Sabres are 2-15-2 against Elliott. He dominates them the way Bernie Parent crushed the NHL during the Flyers' back to back Stanley Cup championships in 1974-75.

Instead of sticking with the terminator, Flyers coach Alain Vigneault is adamant about rolling out Carter Hart for the getaway game in Buffalo Sunday, which was the blueprint coming into the series.

Sure, Elliott turns 36 in a couple of months and back-to-backs are a challenge, but it would be huge to sweep the first series of the critical six-games-in-nine-days stretch facing the Flyers. And yet...

"I'm sticking with the plan," Vigneault said. "It's the same thing as forwards and defensemen. We've got to be able to spread the ice time to do this. We have two very good goaltenders. We're going to use both of them."

When Hart watches the replay of the shutout, he might want to pay attention to the way Elliott managed the rebounds. Communication is a big part of it.

Elliott stopped 23 shots, barely more than half of what he turned away to blank the Sabres, 3-0, earlier this season in Philadelphia. Elliott realized if he held the puck, Claude Giroux would win the accompanying faceoff. Giroux was 13-of-18 in the circle on the Saturday.

After three periods of that, the Sabres were in a trance. And they already were playing without starting goalie Linus Ullmark and captain Jack Eichel.

"I played with Ottawa," Elliott said. "And you know, I have kind of a good feeling when you come into this rink. I wanted to keep that going. The guys played a great game in front of me."

The way Elliott played, the Flyers could afford to be patient before scoring their first goal, Sean Couturier made it 1-0 with 5:37 left in the opening period, getting help as the puck redirected off the glove of Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour.

Elliott, code name 'Moose,' took over the second period, stuffing Sam Reinhart on a 3-on-2 and minutes later, an unchecked Jacob Bryson from short range. Elliott held on to the rebound after the latter rocket and again on another save that's bound for YouTube replays.

Tobias Reider blasted a shot that ricocheted off Elliott high into the air. It looked like a towering pop fly. Like an outfielder circling under it, Elliott stretched his arms out and gloved the rebound.

Elliott stopped eight shots in the period, and the Flyers counterattacked off some of those shots with backbreaking goals from Shayne Gostisbehere, who wristed the puck between goalie Carter Hutton's legs on a breakaway with 5:27 left in the period and Scott Laughton, who burst into the offensive zone on a breakaway and backhanded the puck home for a 3-0 bulge. It was Laughton's first goal since coming off the COVID list.

"It felt nice to contribute," Laughton said. "Moose was huge for us tonight. He made a huge save at the end to save the shutout. He was big for us all game. He's been big for us the last couple of years. When he's out there he's communicating and making it easier on our D. I think everyone knows what Hartsy brings. He's so good."

We've got a tough stretch coming up. It's going to be a challenge. We need everybody going, not only the goalies."

Elliott is 5-1 this season with a 2.33 goals against average. Hart is 5-3 with a goals against average of 3.68. Vigneault likes the way the Flyers have battled back to stay in the hunt in the East division.

"We mentioned a little bit prior to the COVID scenario that we were trending upwards," Vigneault said. "Our game was picking up both ways, defensively and offensively. And I think slowly but surely we've stuck with the process and our game is getting better. Today I thought we had some real good looks, and we were able to capitalize. We got the save at the right time, obviously. But for the most part in the game we didn't give up any second opportunities that are coming to my mind right now. So, it was a team effort, a team game and we need to get right back at it tomorrow. A couple of little adjustments I think we need to make, and we'll be better tomorrow."

The adjustment the Flyers don't need to make Sunday is in goal. But then again, who knows this team better than Vigneault?

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Vigneault's record in 18 NHL regular seasons, including two with the Flyers is 699-460-35. AV is the fifth-winningest active coach and ninth on the all-time NHL list, one win behind Mike Babcock (700).

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NOTES >> Defenseman Phil Myers was a healthy scratch. ... The Flyers carried a 1-0 lead into the second period thanks to Couturier's fourth goal of the season. They're now 7-0-1 in games where they've led entering the second period. ... Claude Giroux played in his 904th game with the Flyers, passing Hall of Famer Bill Barber on the all-time list.

## **Elliott makes 23 saves, Flyers shut out Sabres**

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

February 27, 2021

**BUFFALO** -- Brian Elliott made 23 saves in his second consecutive start, and the Philadelphia Flyers defeated the Buffalo Sabres 3-0 at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Elliott's shutout was his second this season, with each against Buffalo. He is 15-2-2 with four shutouts in his career against the Sabres.

"I don't know, I think earlier in my career we played down here a lot, playing with [the Ottawa Senators]," Elliott said. "I have a good feeling, obviously, when I come in this rink. I wanted to keep that going and the guys played a great game in front of me."

Sean Couturier had a goal and an assist for the Flyers (10-4-3), who have won two in a row. They had four games postponed earlier in month because of COVID-19 protocols.

"We had mentioned a little bit prior to the COVID scenario we were trending upwards," Philadelphia coach Alain Vigneault said. "Our game was picking up, our 5-on-5 play was picking up, both ways, defensively and offensively. I think slowly but surely we've stuck with the process and our game is getting better."

"Today I thought we had some real good looks, we were able to capitalize, got the saves at the right time, obviously. For the most part in the game we didn't give up any second opportunities that are coming to mind right now. It was a team effort, team game."

Carter Hutton made 36 saves for the Sabres (6-9-3), who lost their second game in a row without Jack Eichel. Jeff Skinner had no shots and was minus-1 in 14:03 of ice time after he was a healthy scratch the previous three games.

"You can see that pretty well right through the night they just had a higher level of energy in the battles," Buffalo coach Ralph Krueger said. "We weren't able to defend the way we wanted to, closing gaps the way we're capable of. And also with the puck, the management of it always seemed a little hesitant. The eight games in 13 days coming out of COVID is something we knew was coming at us. We got a game again here in 24 hours, but it is a mental fight to continue to keep consistent with our game."

Couturier gave the Flyers a 1-0 lead at 14:22 of the first period when his shot from the high slot hit Sabres defenseman Brandon Montour's glove and went over Hutton's left shoulder. Couturier has nine points (four goals, five assists) during a five-game point streak.

Shayne Gostisbehere made it 2-0 at 14:33 of the second period when he skated in alone and beat Hutton five-hole, and Oskar Lindblom sent Scott Laughton in on a breakaway to extend the lead to 3-0 at 18:54.

"Obviously a really good play," said Laughton, who had four shots and three hits in 14:19 in his first game since Feb. 7 after being removed from the NHL COVID-19 protocol list. "I think it got started with [Jakub Voracek] along the wall, and then Oskar made a great play. Always nice to contribute and nice to get back."

The teams play here again Sunday.

"Guys are competing. For whatever reason, it seems like we're just pedaling really hard uphill," Sabres forward Eric Staal said. "When you're struggling with confidence and you're struggling offensively, I feel like a lot of times with a lot of guys you're guilty of maybe doing too much and just not executing on the smaller details. Swimming hard, but just not all in the right direction. It kind of feels that way right now. It's frustrating, it's frustrating for everybody. But the only way you can get out of it is to get on the ice and we get a chance to do that tomorrow."

**NOTES:** Hutton started after Buffalo announced that goalie Linus Ullmark will be out at least one month because of a lower-body injury. ... Flyers captain Claude Giroux played his 904th NHL game, passing Bill Barber for second place in Philadelphia history. Bobby Clarke is first with 1,144. ... Lindblom, Voracek and defenseman Justin Braun each played his first game since Feb. 7 after being removed from the NHL COVID-19 protocol list. Lindblom had

one assist in 13:23, Voracek had one assist in 16:17, and Braun was plus-2 with two hits in 21:20. ... Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen had one shot and six hits in 22:18 in his first game since Jan. 31 after being removed from the protocol list.

## **Ullmark out at least one month for Sabres with lower-body injury**

NHL.com

February 27, 2021

Linus Ullmark will be out at least one month for the Buffalo Sabres because of a lower-body injury.

The goalie left after the first period of a 4-3 overtime loss to the New Jersey Devils on Thursday. He appeared to get injured making a save on Devils forward Nico Hischier 5:57 into the period and was on the ice for several minutes but remained in the game.

"It's a hard hit. It's a heavy hit," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said before a 3-0 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday. "In the best case we'll get him back in a month. A huge loss at this point in our season, especially coming off the tail end of that New Jersey game, which was clearly his strongest performance of the season (41 saves in a 4-1 win Tuesday). To see him get a lower-body injury that will take him out for a minimum one month is a hard hit. We're still digesting that and we're going to work with Linus to get him up to speed as quick as possible, but it's a long-term injury."

Ullmark was 5-4-2 with a 2.44 goals-against average and a .919 save percentage in 12 games this season.

Carter Hutton made 36 saves Saturday with Jonas Johansson the backup. Hutton could start against the Flyers on Sunday (3 p.m. ET; MSG-B, NBCSP, SN1, SN, ESPN+, NHL.TV); he started back-to-back games against them Jan. 18-19 and allowed two goals on 42 shots (1-1-0).

"It [stinks], obviously," Hutton said. "I think [Ullmark has] been our best player all year. He's been a big-time difference maker. It's frustrating. A guy I've been with for three years, you see him kind of come into his own and he's worked hard on and off the rink. It's obviously a tough time."

## 5 takeaways | Sabres shut out by Elliott, Flyers

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 27, 2021

Playing without captain Jack Eichel, the Buffalo Sabres were unable to solve goaltender Brian Elliott for the second time this season in a 3-0 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday.

The loss dropped the Sabres to 2-5-1 since returning from a 15-day pause on Feb. 15.

"Guys are competing," forward Eric Staal said afterward. "For whatever reason, it seems like we're just pedaling really hard uphill. When you're struggling with confidence and you're struggling offensively, I feel like a lot of times with a lot of guys you're guilty of maybe doing too much and just not executing on the smaller details. Swimming hard, but just not all in the right direction.

"It kind of feels that way right now. It's frustrating, it's frustrating for everybody. But the only way you can get out of it is to get on the ice and we get a chance to do that tomorrow."

Here are five takeaways from the game, which opened up a back-to-back set against the Flyers at KeyBank Center.

### 1. Puck mismanagement costs Sabres

The Flyers outshot the Sabres, 39-23, pinning the Sabres in their own zone for long stretches of the game. Sean Couturier opened the scoring following a defensive-zone turnover by the Sabres with 5:38 remaining in the first period.

Philadelphia's next two goals, from Shayne Gostisbehere and Scott Laughton, both came on defensive lapses on the rush.

"A lot of it had to do with puck management," coach Ralph Krueger said. "We were close to exiting and/or players away from the puck were exiting too early and we knew they were going to come at us hard and try to take advantage of the few games they've had.

"I think they had four games in this stretch where we had eight and they were going to come at us. We expected that and it was frustrating for us to mismanage the puck that way. If we want to recover here tomorrow, it's going to be about that."

### 2. Hutton steps in for Ullmark

The Sabres announced prior to the game that goaltender Linus Ullmark would miss at least a month due to the lower-body injury he sustained against New Jersey on Thursday.

Carter Hutton made his first start since Feb. 16 in Ullmark's absence. He allowed three goals on 39 shots.

"It sucks, obviously," Hutton said regarding Ullmark's injury. "I think he's been our best player all year. He's been a big-time difference maker. It's frustrating. A guy I've been with for three years, you see him kind of come into his own and he's worked hard on and off the rink.

"It's obviously a tough time. Especially right now, him and I are both away from our families so we're here on our own. I think we do a lot of supporting each other. ... But for Linus, the future's bright, for sure."

### 3. Ristolainen returns

Rasmus Ristolainen skated a team-high 22:18 in his first game since testing positive for COVID-19 on Feb. 2. The defenseman was his usual imposing self with a game-high six hits, including one that sent Flyers forward Michael Raffl to the ice late in the first period.

Ristolainen said he felt good early but lost his rhythm as his ice time dipped in the third.

"I thought he was our best D here tonight," Krueger said. "Amazing how he's come off of more than three weeks of a break. I don't know the time exactly, but it's more than that. It just shows the character and the fight that he has in him. He'll be able to take it to even a higher level tomorrow."

Jeff Skinner and Tobias Rieder also returned to the lineup. Skinner, who sat out the past three games as a healthy scratch, skated 14:03. Rieder returned from a two-game absence stemming from an upper-body injury and tallied four shot attempts in 14:13.

#### 4. Power play cools off

The Sabres power play entered Saturday atop the league rankings thanks to a red-hot stretch over the past 12 games. The power play had scored in 11 of those contests, going 16-for-38 (42.1 percent).

It cooled with an 0-for-3 afternoon against a Flyers penalty kill that ranked 30th in the NHL. The Sabres generated one shot on goal over the two attempts.

#### 5. The big picture

The Sabres are now eight points back from the fourth-place Flyers going into their rematch on Sunday.

"Hopefully we can get Jack back in the lineup tomorrow," Krueger said. "We might make a couple of changes where we can add some energy. We haven't made a final decision yet on the goalie. I think injecting some new energy is probably really almost necessary in this situation and we need to stay optimistic and positive about us being able to recover tomorrow. It's the only way we can get ourselves back into this quickly.

"But it is certainly one of the bigger challenges I've seen as a coach because the heart seems to be in the right place but the energy just isn't there to match that. We've got to make sure frustration doesn't come into our game and that fight comes out early in the game. We need some success offensively which could create the energy we will need to get the right result tomorrow."

Coverage on Sunday begins at 2:30 p.m. on MSG. Puck drop is set for 3.

## **At The Final Horn: Flyers 3 - Sabres 0**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 27, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres were unable to solve a tenacious Philadelphia Flyers attack Saturday afternoon in their 3-0 loss at KeyBank Center.

Carter Hutton made 36 saves in net for Buffalo.

Sean Couturier, Shayne Gostisbehere and Scott Laughton scored for the Flyers while Brian Elliott made 23 saves to earn the shutout.

The Sabres are 2-5-1 since coming back from the two-week break they were forced to take after a COVID-19 outbreak.

### What happened

The Flyers jumped out to a 1-0 lead when Couturier scored with 5:38 remaining in the first period. Travis Sanheim intercepted a clearing attempt and dished the puck back to Couturier, who wristed one high and into the back of the net.

With 5:27 left in the second period, Gostisbehere skated in alone down the left wing and beat Hutton to make it 2-0.

Laughton scored on a breakaway with 1:06 left in the second to give the Flyers a 3-0 lead.

Buffalo's power play was 0-for-3 on the day.

### Worth mentioning

Captain Jack Eichel missed his second straight game with a lower-body injury. He remains day-to-day.

Rasmus Ristolainen, Tobias Rieder and Jeff Skinner returned to the lineup after multi-game absences.

Ristolainen was placed on the COVID-related absence list on February 2 and was released from protocol on February 16. However, he experienced severe symptoms and had to miss additional time to bolster his conditioning. He missed seven games and Saturday's game marked his first appearance since January 31.

He led the Sabres with 22:18 of ice time.

Rieder did not play in the last two games due to an upper-body injury. Skinner was a healthy scratch the last three games.

Goaltender Linus Ullmark will be out at least a month with a lower-body injury sustained in Thursday's game. Jonas Johansson was recalled from the taxi squad to back up Hutton.

### Coming up

The Sabres and Flyers will face each other again on Sunday at KeyBank Center. Faceoff is scheduled for 3 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with pregame coverage starting at 2:30 on MSG.



## **Johansson called up from taxi squad**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

February 27, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have recalled goaltender Jonas Johansson from the team's taxi squad, the team announced Saturday. Forward Rasmus Asplund has been assigned to the taxi squad.

Johansson, 25, made his season debut on January 19, stopping eight of nine shots in relief during the third period of that game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

In seven career games, Johansson is 1-3-1 with a 2.95 goals-against average and an .894 save percentage.

Carter Hutton is set to start in net as Buffalo hosts the Flyers at 1 p.m. at KeyBank Center. Both games will be broadcast on MSG and WGR 550 with pregame coverage on MSG starting at 12:30.

Linus Ullmark sustained a lower-body injury during Thursday's game against New Jersey and will be out at least a month. The Sabres also have Dustin Tokarski on the taxi squad.

## **Ristolainen, Skinner to return against Flyers with Eichel out**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

February 27, 2021

Rasmus Ristolainen, Tobias Rieder and Jeff Skinner will be back in the lineup for the Buffalo Sabres against the Philadelphia Flyers on Saturday afternoon.

Jack Eichel will miss a second straight game with a lower-body injury and remains day-to-day. Coach Ralph Krueger also announced that goaltender Linus Ullmark will miss a minimum of one month after sustaining a lower-body injury on Thursday.

Ullmark has started 12 of 17 games for the Sabres, including each of the past four.

"We're still digesting that," Krueger said of Ullmark. "We're going to work with Linus to get him up to speed as quick as possible, but it's a long-term injury."

Carter Hutton will get the start against the Flyers. Jonas Johansson will be recalled from the taxi squad to serve as the backup.

Ristolainen becomes the last of Buffalo's eight players who tested positive for COVID-19 to return to the lineup. He was among the first to enter protocol, along with forward Taylor Hall, on Feb. 2.

The defenseman detailed an arduous experience battling the virus with flaring symptoms that ranged from chest pains to intense fatigue. He was removed from the COVID-related absence list on Feb. 16 but stayed back from Buffalo's four-game road trip to recuperate his strength.

"The most important thing here is that Risto is patient in his game," Krueger said. "He had the most severe case of COVID symptoms of any player in the National Hockey League. So, we need to be really smart and manage him well. He's such a battler and such a character and we just want him to play a simple game here today."

Skinner has been a healthy scratch the past three games. He practiced on a line with Casey Mittelstadt and Riley Sheahan on Friday.

"Just build on the conversations we had this week and on the hard work that he put in in a difficult position," Krueger said of Skinner. "We look forward to having him back on the team and on the bench and hopefully this proves to be a good really regroup to launch an excellent rest of the season for Jeff."

### Scouting the Flyers

The Flyers, too, are returning to form following a COVID-19 outbreak. They dropped two straight games upon returning from a 10-day hiatus before beating the Rangers, 4-3, on Wednesday.

Philadelphia captain Claude Giroux returned for the win over New York and tallied three assists. Forwards Jakub Voracek, Scott Laughton, and Oskar Lindblom have come off the COVID-related absence list and returned to practice over the two days since.

Coach Alain Vigneault said following practice on Friday that he expected Voracek, Laughton, and Lindblom to be in the lineup against the Sabres.

"They all saw how [Giroux] did the other day and they all want to get out there," he said.

The Flyers will be without forward Travis Konecny, their lone remaining player on the COVID-related absence list. Brian Elliott will start in net.

### Players to watch

Buffalo - Sam Reinhart

The forward enters Saturday riding a five-game point streak, with four goals and three assists in that span. His average of .93 points per game this season represents the best mark of his career.

Philadelphia - James van Riemsdyk

Van Riemsdyk is like Reinhart in his reputation as a dangerous presence around opposing nets. He is also scoring at the best pace of his career (1.38 points per game), pacing the Flyers in both goals (9) and total points (22). His 13 assists are tied with Giroux for the team lead.

Tune in

Coverage on MSG begins at 12:30 p.m. You can also listen on WGR 550 with puck drop set for 1.