



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 4, 2021

Sabres face the Islanders on 4-game losing streak

Associated Press

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Buffalo Sabres (6-11-3, eighth in the East Division) vs. New York Islanders (12-6-4, second in the East Division)

Uniondale, New York; Thursday, 7 p.m. EST

BOTTOM LINE: Buffalo aims to end its four-game slide with a victory over New York.

The Islanders are 12-6-4 against East Division teams. New York has converted on 24.6% of power-play opportunities, scoring 15 power-play goals.

The Sabres are 6-11-3 against the rest of their division. Buffalo serves 5.3 penalty minutes per game, the fewest in the NHL. Jacob Bryson leads them averaging 1.0.

In their last meeting on Feb. 22, New York won 3-2.

TOP PERFORMERS: Mathew Barzal has 19 total points for the Islanders, eight goals and 11 assists. Jean-Gabriel Pageau has seven goals and two assists over the last 10 games for New York.

Victor Olofsson leads the Sabres with 16 points, scoring seven goals and collecting nine assists. Sam Reinhart has five goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

LAST 10 GAMES: Islanders: 7-2-1, averaging three goals, 5.2 assists, three penalties and 7.9 penalty minutes while giving up 1.8 goals per game with a .935 save percentage.

Sabres: 2-7-1, averaging 1.6 goals, three assists, 2.3 penalties and 5.1 penalty minutes while giving up 2.7 goals per game with a .910 save percentage.

INJURIES: Islanders: Cal Clutterbuck: day to day (undisclosed).

Sabres: Will Borgen: out (upper body), Linus Ullmark: out (lower body).

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Erik Brady: Take a trip in Sabres history with 'Hockey Time Machine'

By Erik Brady

The Buffalo News

March 4, 2021

Tired of watching the Buffalo Sabres as presently constituted? Well, tonight you can watch them as they were 50 years ago.

The early years of the Sabres – from their Bisons prehistory to Punch Imlach to the French Connection – will be the topic at 7 p.m. on “Hockey Time Machine.” You can watch on its YouTube channel – or watch the Sabres at the New York Islanders, also at 7, and go back to see the archived episode of Time Machine later.

Among the guests expected for this live event: Seymour Knox IV and Don Luce. The relaxed conversational nature of these shows all but guarantees entertaining, rarely told stories.

As it happens, the story of how “Hockey Time Machine” came to be is a good one. The show was born of the shutdown caused by the global Covid-19 pandemic, and by now, its growing roster of recordings constitutes a valuable, ongoing oral history of hockey.

Paul Patskou teamed with Lora Evans to get it started last spring before it had the jazzy name. They are Torontonians: he a hockey researcher and video archivist, she a professional photographer. They were longtime attendees of the Original Six Alumni Lunch, a gathering of old-time NHLers in Toronto on the first Monday of every month, which was halted a year ago because of Covid-19 concerns.

“A lot of the guys are older, in their 70s and 80s,” Patskou says, “and when you get together for so many years, you want to keep the group together. So we tried a Zoom call to keep everybody up to date and seeing each other. We didn’t want them to feel isolated at home.”

Evans had the idea of keeping the spirit of the lunches alive in those Zoom calls. Patskou expanded the idea to include a wider audience, and it quickly became popular among the hockey-history crowd. That includes George Kuhn, from Buffalo.

Kuhn had met Patskou a few years earlier and they reconnected when Patskou invited him to gatherings at the Toronto home of Mike Wilson, whose basement was a veritable hockey museum. (Wilson has since sold much of it to the Museum of History in Ottawa.)

When the border closed a year ago this month, Kuhn could no longer go to Toronto. And the old-timers couldn’t meet for their Original Six lunches. Not long after, Patskou and Evans began their Zoomcasts, but they could admit no more than 100 guests. And as hockey buffs Zoomed in from outposts in North America and Europe, demand soon surpassed capacity. So, a couple of months ago, they renamed the chats “Hockey Time Machine” and made them available on YouTube and Facebook. Now capacity is unlimited and, as ever, free.

The panelists who Zoom in for different topics each week make up a Who’s Who of hockey history. Scotty Bowman is a frequent guest from his home in East Amherst. Former Sabres players who have been panelists include Luce, Gerry Meehan, Danny Gare and Grant Fuhr.

“Buffalo has a tremendous hockey history,” Patskou says. “The Buffalo crowd needs to know” about the Zoomcasts.

Ted Nolan, the two-term Sabres coach, was among the panelists on a moving episode called “Indigenous Hockey.” Other guests that night included Theo Fleury, Reg Leach, and Fred Sasakamoose, who was one of the first First Nations players in NHL history. Sasakamoose died of complications from Covid-19 at age 86 only weeks after his appearance. This is the kind of thing that makes many episodes of “Hockey Time Machine” treasured time capsules.

Don Cherry and Dick Irvin appeared on a show devoted to “Hockey Night in Canada,” Paul Henderson on one about the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union, and Mike Keenan and Glenn Healy on an episode for the 1993-94 New York Rangers.

"Can I ask Mike a question I've never asked before?" Healy said at one point. He wanted to know about Keenan's psychological ploy of showing footage of the New York Mets and their 1969 World Series win – and the tickertape parade that followed – to the Rangers before the season that ended with them as Stanley Cup champs for the first time since 1940. Keenan answered that it was all about visualization of what could be when you win in New York. Moments like that are what make these shows so much fun to watch, as though you were eavesdropping on the makers of hockey history talking among themselves.

Kevin Shea, of the Hockey Hall of Fame in Toronto, was the skilled moderator for the show for most of its run. Glenn Dreyfuss, a retired TV producer, is the host now. He'll be in charge of tonight's Buffalo show.

Kuhn was the only American in the group at first and has since served as a bridge – a Peace Bridge, as it were – to getting more Buffalonians in the loop. Kuhn helped to recruit tonight's speakers and says he will be especially happy to hear from Knox IV, whose late father and uncle were founding owners of the Sabres.

"I read books about it," Kuhn says. "Seymour lived it."

And, tonight, Sabres fans can relive it.

Stuck at no goals, Sabres winger Kyle Okposo still waiting for breakthrough

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 3, 2021

NEW YORK – The stat sheet still says no goals and one point in 15 games. There's no way Kyle Okposo can get around the numbers.

A training camp leg injury torpedoed the start of the veteran winger's season, keeping him out of the Buffalo Sabres' first five games and rendering him useless for the next six when he got back into the lineup. He had one shot on goal combined in those six games. One.

"I know when I'm not playing well and my first five games I did not play well. And then I feel like since the break (the team's two-week Covid shutdown), I've been playing better, but the results just aren't coming," Okposo said after a 3-2 loss Tuesday to the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden. "As a competitor, as somebody that's relied on, that's a difficult thing."

The breakdown of Okposo's game has been hard to watch for fans, knowing how his seven-year, \$42 million contract signed in 2016 has become a hard one for this organization to stomach. At \$6 million per season, it has to be about numbers. Okposo had just nine goals last season and has now gone over a year without scoring.

It's 22 games and counting for Okposo since he scored both goals in the Sabres' 2-1 win over Winnipeg on Feb. 23, 2020.

Okposo said last week he's gone outside the box looking for opinions on his game. Although not specifying, the likelihood is personal trainers and old mentors from his college and high school days in Minnesota are chiming in.

They must have seen the same as all of us. The lack of speed, the lack of grind along the wall and in front of the net. Some of that has returned in recent games as Okposo has spent the last couple on a line with Taylor Hall and Eric Staal.

Okposo has 14 shots on goal in the last five games. But again, no goals and only an assist Feb. 23 at New Jersey. Even that lone point is largely meaningless, coming on a buzzer-beating empty-net goal from Cody Eakin to cap a 4-1 win.

Okposo had perhaps his best chance of the season to score Tuesday night but was robbed in tight by New York goalie Igor Shesterkin. Okposo and similarly goal-less Jeff Skinner both failed to score on great chances to get their first of the season; Skinner had nine shot attempts in the game.

"We had a lot of good things going on," Okposo said. "I thought Jeff played his best game of the year. We had a lot of guys contributing, a lot of guys playing the right way. And unfortunately, we didn't get rewarded."

Okposo said he's doing his best to manage his frustration. His line was on the ice for the Rangers' first two goals – although they can easily be dropped at the feet of defensemen Rasmus Dahlin and Brandon Montour, respectively – but started to carry play later in the game.

"I thought we pushed, we had some opportunities," he said. "We've just got to find a way to put the puck in the net. That's it. That's what it comes down to. This is a results-based business. And I understand that playing good gets you nowhere in this industry if the results aren't there."

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger liked the line's play in the second half of the game Tuesday and understands its frustration.

"We see pucks going through the goalie's legs and out the other side," Krueger said. "And it's really tough right now for them to get confidence out of a good game."

"I thought they recovered, they competed hard and tried to make a difference. ... They had the opportunity on the table. And if I knew an easy solution, I would tell it to you but the only thing I know right now is to roll up the sleeves and push them to go back to work."

Last trip to Long Island

The Sabres had a CBA-mandated day off Wednesday and start a three-game series against the New York Islanders on Thursday in Nassau Coliseum. It's the first three-game set against an opponent in franchise history and was put together in the wake of the Feb. 2 and 4 postponements.

The series against the Islanders will have personal meaning for Okposo, as it will be the Sabres' final three games in the Coliseum, where he spent the first eight years of his career. It's also where the Islanders clinched a six-game semifinal series victory over Buffalo in 1980 en route to the first of four straight Stanley Cups early in that decade.

The Islanders are moving next year to UBS Arena adjacent to the famed Belmont Park racetrack. It's a state-of-the-art facility and gets them closer to New York City but not too far away from their Long Island base, which was a key problem when they played at Barclays Center in Brooklyn.

"It's gonna be tough to see, see the old barn go," Okposo said last month prior to the Sabres' initially postponed visit. "Nassau was a pretty cool arena, a lot of history there. But I'm sure that the new site at Belmont is going to be phenomenal. And I know they've been trying to do it for a long time. There was a lot of talk about them moving. I'm sure that the fan base is extremely happy that they're going to have some stability in the new space, a space to call home."

Sabres' Kyle Okposo knows he must start scoring: 'A results-based business'

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 3, 2021

Buffalo Sabres winger Kyle Okposo knows he can't take much solace in feeling he played a good game. Through 15 outings this year, the veteran has scored zero goals.

"This is a results-based business, and I understand that playing good gets you nowhere in this industry if the results aren't there," a frustrated Okposo said on a Zoom call following Tuesday's 3-2 road loss to the New York Rangers.

Okposo, 32, nearly scored his first goal early in Tuesday's contest. But after Sabres winger Taylor Hall adroitly fed him in the slot, goalie Igor Shesterkin stymied his two point-blank chances.

At least Okposo, whose Sabres play a road game Thursday against the New York Islanders, has started generating opportunities. He also had a prime scoring chance Sunday afternoon, nearly beating Philadelphia Flyers goalie Carter Hart in close.

Okposo's Corsi For on Tuesday – the percentage of shot attempts by the team while a player is on the ice five-on-five – was 64.7%, according to NaturalStatTrick.com.

After spending all season on the third line beside center Cody Eakin, Okposo has played the last two games on the second trio with Hall and Eric Staal.

Okposo, of course, acknowledged his scoring struggles are "frustrating." Still, he feels he has started rebuilding his game following a wretched start.

The lower-body injury he suffered in the final training camp scrimmage sidelined him the first five games. He was also dealing with an undisclosed ailment, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said.

The injuries, combined with the 10-month layoff for the COVID-19 pandemic, made Okposo invisible when he returned. He recorded just one shot in his first six contests.

But Okposo, who's often critical of his own play, refuses to let his scoring woes overwhelm him.

"It's something that I've just been trying to reset every game and bring my best every game," said Okposo, who has mustered just one assist this season. "I mean, it's one thing if I feel like I'm not playing well; I know when I'm not playing well, and the first five games I did not play well. And I feel like since the (COVID-19 pause last month) I've been playing better but the results just aren't coming.

"As a competitor, as somebody that's relied on, that's a difficult thing. It's not easy, but it's not like I'm going to give up and it's not like I'm not going to give it my best. I know that this is going to turn, it has to. I just got to keep my head down and keep doing the right things and trust that it will turn."

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Sabres winger Jeff Skinner, who was a healthy scratch three times last week, enjoyed perhaps his best game this season Tuesday, generating a splendid 87.5% Corsi For.

Despite his struggles – zero goals in 17 games – Skinner has showcased some strong chemistry at times on the fourth line beside center Curtis Lazar and Riley Sheahan.

The line had a 90.9% Corsi For on Tuesday.

Krueger said the trio exploited the Rangers' the second- and third-pair defensemen.

"Jeff had some grade-As today that will certainly give him confidence, although he's frustrated that he didn't finish," Krueger said of the scoring chances. "But, again, he's got to get the chances first. It all stems from the compete he showed, the battles he won and the fight for the inside position. (He) wanted to be first on pucks.

"It was really encouraging, what Jeff showed us today."

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The Sabres had Wednesday off.

NHL debate: Should struggling Buffalo Sabres trade franchise cornerstone Jack Eichel?

By Mike Brehm, Jace Evans and Jimmy Hascup

USA TODAY

March 4, 2021

As the Buffalo Sabres' slide continues, their frustration is mounting.

"It sucks. It's the worst part about hockey," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said Sunday after back-to-back shutout losses to the Philadelphia Flyers. "We have to turn this around."

The Sabres scored two goals in their next game but lost to the New York Rangers. Heading into Thursday's game at the New York Islanders, they're last in the East Division and rank 29th in goals per game despite having the third-best power play.

"If we had answers, we would be spitting them out," captain Jack Eichel said. "We're trying to figure it out as well. It's a really good group of guys in there, and we've stuck together, but it's definitely been tough the past little bit."

The Sabres had their season paused by COVID-19 protocol and nine players were on the list at one point. They've gone 2-7-1 since returning. Eichel missed two games with injury and \$9 million player Jeff Skinner was a healthy scratch for three games.

Buffalo Sabres center Jack Eichel has been the subject of trade rumors.

Amid all this, Eichel trade rumors have been growing since the summer, to the point that Rangers fans chanted, "We want Eichel." With the Sabres 10 points out of a playoff spot, should they trade their most marketable player before the April 12 deadline?

USA TODAY Sports hockey staffers weigh in.

Mike Brehm: No. Sabres fans had to deal with a lot of losing in 2015 to finish last overall but lost a shot at Connor McDavid when the Edmonton Oilers won the draft lottery. Eichel was a good consolation prize, and though he hasn't matched McDavid's production (and he wasn't supposed to), he has not been a problem in Buffalo. The Sabres could get assets for pending unrestricted free agents Taylor Hall and Eric Staal (if they waive no-trade clauses). They could buy out Skinner in the summer and again try to build around Eichel. This remains a long-term rebuild.

Jace Evans: Yes! Eichel is an exceptional player – and that could earn the Sabres an exceptional return on the trade market. Though he's still young at 24, this is his sixth season and the franchise has yet to build a team around him that can even compete for a playoff spot, much less compete for a championship. Based on their present circumstances, by the time the Sabres finally turn into a meaningful contender, Eichel will be in his late 20s at best and exiting his hockey prime. Though it's tough to admit the rebuild that got you Eichel in the first place has failed, hitting the reset button by trading the American star should net quite a haul – high-end prospects and multiple first-round picks are seemingly in the offing for a player like Eichel – that should help the Sabres form a stronger foundation around their next great star.

Jimmy Hascup: No. What are two positions teams seemingly are always searching for? No. 1 centers and No. 1 defensemen. Why give up one of the scarcest commodities when you have one that has been an asset? Eichel is only 24 years old with a track record of elite play. He is the type of player a team drafts and grooms and doesn't let depart. He can still be the lynchpin of a rebuild. Dysfunction in Buffalo is the only reason Eichel's name has entered the rumor mill. Perhaps this group should look harder at the real problems -- overpriced players such as Skinner at \$9 million for seven more years (including this one) and Kyle Okposo for three more at \$6 million. Tear it down around Eichel but don't let him leave.

NHL Rumour Roundup: Sabres trading Eichel before off-season may be tricky

Sportsnet

March 3, 2021

Who's a buyer and who's a seller?

It could be difficult to figure that out in the lead up to this year's deadline.

How many teams are really out of it already? Ottawa's set up to sell again, as is Detroit. Nashville is trending that way and Buffalo too. Maybe Anaheim.

And that's sort of it six weeks out from the trade deadline. Normally that might be plenty of time for more space to separate the standings and for teams to break off into their tiers. But there are a few different factors at play this season that could make that not so simple.

1. Since you only play within your division, it's not as hard to make up ground during a hot streak. In Canada, for instance, while the Calgary Flames struggle and face a host of questions to do with their core's identity, a need for change, and a lack of urgency, it's maybe not time to throw in the towel and become a hard seller yet.

They're just three points back of Montreal for fourth (granted, with two more games played), but the Habs are also going through hard times of their own. They play each other a couple of times next week and if the Flames can recover first, things may not look so bad again.

2. Quarantine is a real issue that may force teams to make their trade calls earlier than usual. There will no doubt be some deadline day deals anyway, but especially for cross-border trading, the real deadline may actually fall earlier in March, so that an acquired player will be able to play more than a handful of games with his new team before playoffs.

3. Not many teams want to take on money these days. We've heard it countless times and the sheer number of capable depth players who are passing through waivers unclaimed (goalies aside) makes that clear. Teams aren't making the money they're used to, but the flat cap is also pinching everyone. Over half the league is using LTIR to be compliant and with no sign of the cap rising next season, adding a contract with term will also be tricky. Even money trades may be more popular than ever and termed deals may be easier to swap in the off-season, when teams can go 10 per cent over the cap and just generally have more wiggle room.

So will this year's trade deadline be a dud? We'll see. We'd still expect rental players to be shopped as they won't come with much salary commitment and nothing past this year. And we'd still expect the top teams to try and add bits around the edges.

It is possible, though, that we may not see as many trades on the day or overall in the lead up this season, and that trades occur further out from deadline day than usual.

BLUE JACKETS WANT A CENTRE

This wasn't supposed to be an issue for them this season. Pierre-Luc Dubois was their 1C. Max Domi was brought in to hopefully be a two and, if not, a three. Mikko Koivu was signed as veteran depth at the position.

Now Dubois is gone, Koivu retired, and Domi is back on the wing. Alexandre Texier has been good there at times, but is young and still learning the position. He's moved down the depth chart even as the Blue Jackets need centres. Jack Roslovic is the best of the bunch now, and he's new to the organization and played mostly wing in Winnipeg.

As the Blue Jackets slide down the standings, one possible reaction was to fire the coach. That's what you do after six years when a struggling team doesn't respond, right?

Not this time. Not for now, anyway. GM Jarmo Kekalainen committed to his coaching staff and supported their ability to get the players out of this in a conference call on Tuesday. While a coaching change is off the table for now, trying to acquire another centre is back on the agenda.

"It's a challenge because (centres are) just not available via trade so you usually have to draft and develop one and I think we did that very well with one player and now he's not here so we have to get back into our hunt finding a centreman through draft or trade," Kekalainen said Tuesday.

"There could be some available in the free agent market next summer, but I can assure you we understand the importance of the centre ice position and that's why we did a lot of the different moves we tried to do in the off-season to strengthen that position and it hasn't exactly gone as planned. We'll keep searching and doing our job and building the team.

"I think we have some very good potential centre icemen growing into that role within our team, but we're also going to look for ways to strengthen that position from the outside."

WHY MOVING JAKE VIRTANEN IS PROVING SO DIFFICULT FOR VANCOUVER

At some points on Saturday, it seemed like we might get a trade between Anaheim and Vancouver. The Canucks have been trying to move Jake Virtanen for a while and they were being attached to Danton Heinen of the Ducks. But, again, money is the core of this issue.

Virtanen is a player in need of a new start. He has just a single goal in 20 games this season and just hasn't been able to gain any momentum with the Canucks. He is still just 24 so usually there are takers for that sort of player.

But \$2.25 million for this season and next is too rich and too much of a termed commitment for that sort of player in this economy. And it's not just the cap hit, but Virtanen is due \$3.4 million in actual salary next season, which is not attractive at all. Heinen makes \$2.8 million, but is an RFA this summer.

"That second year is tough. That 3.4 next year is a real challenge," Elliotte Friedman said on Sportsnet 960 The FAN's Big Show. "One of the things that's going on right now is there aren't a lot of teams willing to take on money. It's a real buyer's market. There's a lot of sellers. There's a lot of teams that think they've got a chance or they want to move cash, but how many teams out there do you think want to take cash? Not very many."

From the Canucks' point of view, they would replace Virtanen with another struggling depth producer in the hopes he'll figure it out in a new destination. Notably, this would not be a typical seller's trade, recouping draft picks for the future. It'd be a push forward, with the allowance of salary relief this off-season if they so choose.

But it seems they'd need to think of some other way for the money to work more comfortably for the Ducks.

A CROWDED MARKET PLAYS IN FAVOUR OF THE BUYERS

So if there are going to be few motivated sellers and not many teams looking to take on money anyway, there just may not be enough chairs for every trade candidate to land in.

If a Filip Forsberg or a Jack Eichel or a Johnny Gaudreau became available, then all bets are off and we could get our second blockbuster of the season. Those deals could happen under any sort of conditions as long as the cap works.

But outside of those big names, you could find a lot of players who do similar things become available. They'd all be sought after in some way by a team that wants to add depth and go for it, but those teams could be very particular about their decisions.

Let's go back to Vancouver again and take Brandon Sutter as an example. He's 32, a checking third- or fourth-liner at the valued centre position, and he's in the last year of his contract. There is no financial commitment to make to him beyond this season.

But how many players like him could be available? Sam Bennett has requested a trade from Calgary and has regularly stepped up his play in the post-season. Luke Glendening could be traded off by rebuilding Detroit. Erik Haula in Nashville, Artem Anisimov in Ottawa. There are a range of centres just on "white flag" teams and in the final year of their deals. More names will surely be added to this list of prospective trade targets.

It won't necessarily mean a lot of deals happen, or that all of them even move.

"The problem is how many Brandon Sutter-like players will be out there?" Friedman said. "So the teams that are actually taking on money they can afford to be picky and choosy and say 'we'll wait until either the perfect player we want or the least return we can give up.' "

WHY A JACK EICHEL TRADE IS LIKELY A SUMMER DEAL

If you're Buffalo, the last thing you want to do is rush into a Jack Eichel trade.

You certainly don't want to do it at an emotional time.

And it is emotional right now around the Sabres. The players and coach don't always seem to be on the same page. Healthy scratches to Jeff Skinner are becoming far too much of a focus for a guy making \$9 million another six seasons. Injuries are piling up, passion is sliding down, and this year's Sabres look like so many that have come in the past decade before it.

All of this has re-engaged Eichel's name in trade speculation. He has not asked out, he's signed long-term and he's still Buffalo's best player they need to try and build around to leave this stalled reconstruction period.

The Rangers and Kings have been linked, but during this season it's hard to see how many other teams could get involved and give the Sabres what they would need. Those aren't the kinds of conditions you want to be trading your best player in.

"If you do it now can you make your best deal, or are you smarter to wait until after the season when everybody knows what their contract statuses are, when teams are going to have the 10 per cent bonus cushion to use, all of that stuff?" Friedman asked. "I just think the biggest question is what does Buffalo want here? What do they think?"

Most of the bigger trades of note in recent years have come in the off-season. There was, of course, a huge trade between Columbus and Winnipeg already this season, but that involved players asking to be moved. It's not that bad in Buffalo yet, but it could get there.

It just seems to make a heck of a lot more sense to wait for the summer, when the market would be wider.

If trading Eichel is even what you really want to do.

Rangers analyst Steve Valiquette eviscerates ‘dreadful’ Sabres

By Mark Fischer

New York Post

March 3, 2021

MSG hockey analyst Steve Valiquette took several shots at the Sabres after Buffalo fell to the Rangers in a Tuesday night snoozefest.

“I think the Buffalo players should be wearing ski masks on the 15th and 30th of every month,” the former Rangers netminder said in reference to NHL paydays, “because there’s no way you can have that star power and then not have any pushback. I mean, they look like they’ve quit on their season.”

The Sabres, who also play their games on the MSG network, actually had more chances than the Rangers in the 3-2 loss, but mustered only five shots to New York’s three while down a goal in the third period.

“The Rangers packed it in in the third period but did Buffalo even make an effort to [get to high-scoring areas]? I think they’re very easy to play against,” Valiquette said. “I think that’s a dreadful hockey team. They should be embarrassed.”

It was the fourth straight loss for a Buffalo team that has often looked lackadaisical. At 6-11-3, the Sabres are last in the East division and well on their way to missing the playoffs for the 10th straight season.

Buffalo entered the pandemic-shortened 56-game season with reason for optimism after signing Taylor Hall, the 2018 league MVP, to a one-year, \$8 million contract, adding him to a talented core of forwards.

But Hall has scored just one goal, while captain and face of the franchise Jack Eichel and his \$10 million annual salary has two goals. Jeff Skinner, who is being paid \$9 million, hasn’t scored at all and has been benched a couple times this season for poor play. The Sabres are second-to-last in goals per game with 2.20.

The disappointment has led to rumblings that the Sabres could trade the 24-year-old Eichel — possibly to the center-needy 8-9-3 Rangers — which could set the lowly franchise back even further.

“It’s sad to see because Buffalo is one of my favorite cities,” said Valiquette, who grew up in nearby Ontario, Canada. “Unbelievable people there, hard-working people. They must have a hard time watching that team play hockey.”