



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 16, 2021*

## **New Jersey plays Buffalo on 11-game home skid**

Associated Press

March 16, 2021

Buffalo Sabres (6-17-4, eighth in the East Division) vs. New Jersey Devils (8-13-4, seventh in the East Division)

Newark, New Jersey; Tuesday, 7 p.m. EDT

**BOTTOM LINE:** New Jersey takes on Buffalo looking to end its 11-game home losing streak.

The Devils are 8-13-4 against East Division opponents. New Jersey has allowed 23 power-play goals, stopping 70.5% of opponent opportunities.

The Sabres are 6-17-4 against division opponents. Buffalo averages just 2.5 penalties per game, the fewest in the NHL. Rasmus Ristolainen leads the team averaging 0.4.

In their last meeting on Feb. 25, New Jersey won 4-3.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Miles Wood leads the Devils with eight goals and has 12 points. Travis Zajac has seven assists over the last 10 games for New Jersey.

Sam Reinhart leads the Sabres with 11 goals and has 19 points. Tage Thompson has one goal over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Devils: 1-7-2, averaging 2.1 goals, four assists, 3.2 penalties and 7.4 penalty minutes while giving up 3.5 goals per game with an .874 save percentage.

Sabres: 0-9-1, averaging 1.4 goals, 2.7 assists, 2.6 penalties and 6.6 penalty minutes while allowing 3.8 goals per game with an .881 save percentage.

**INJURIES:** Devils: None listed.

Sabres: Dylan Cozens: day to day (head), Jake McCabe: out (knee), Will Borgen: out (forearm), Jack Eichel: out (upper body), Linus Ullmark: out (lower body).

## **Ovechkin matches Esposito with 717th goal; Caps rout Sabres**

By Joe Yerdon

Associated Press

March 16, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Alexander Ovechkin's business in the NHL has always been scoring goals, and his climb up the NHL's career leaderboard has him on par with his coach's favorite player.

Ovechkin matched Phil Esposito for sixth on the NHL list with his 717th goal and the Washington Capitals beat the Buffalo Sabres 6-0 on Monday night.

"Obviously, it's nice to be in this company," Ovechkin said about tying Esposito. "I just do what I have to do. I try to use my chances and move on."

Ovechkin scored in the third period, helping send the Capitals to their fifth straight win with his 1,299th career point — one shy of becoming the 35th player to reach 1,300.

"There is something going on with Ovi just about every night right now with the postgame. Tonight, that is a big one," Laviolette said. "I grew up in Massachusetts watching Phil, so to be able to grow up and watch him and the player he was — and he also gave me my chance in hockey and in the organization — so I've known Phil for a long time and was an unbelievable player, unbelievable goal scorer.

"Now to get a chance to work with Ovi and have these two guys sitting here at the same number is pretty, pretty incredible so I am really happy for 'O.'"

Ovechkin scored from the slot off a pass from former Sabre Conor Sheary, who found him cutting toward the net. He snapped a quick shot past Carter Hutton, who was screened.

Vitek Vanecek stopped 23 shots for his first NHL shutout and improved to 4-0-1 against the Sabres. Evgeny Kuznetsov, Nicklas Backstrom, Richard Panik, Daniel Sprong and Garnet Hathaway also scored for Washington, which used three goals in the second period to move to within two points of the New York Islanders in the Eastern Division. The Capitals face the Islanders on Tuesday night.

"(The next game) is definitely on our mind, just as the game progressed here and took advantage of the bench and we understand it is a big game tomorrow and we will get home tonight, let the guys rest in the morning and be ready to go," Laviolette said.

After Kuznetsov gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead at 18:46 of the first period with his 400th NHL point, Backstrom made it 2-0 at 2:41 of the second. Backstrom's 11th goal of the season came in his 984th game with the Capitals, passing Calle Johansson for second-most games in franchise history.

Panik made it 3-0 at 5:59 with a one-timer after defenseman Dmitry Orlov stole the puck at center ice after a pass from Brandon Montour went long.

Sprong made it 4-0 when he came in on a breakaway in which his shot beat Hutton up high for his third goal in the past four games and sixth of the season at 15:07.

Hathaway gave the Capitals a 5-0 lead at 6:46 of the third period when he deflected a point shot from Justin Schultz past Hutton for his fourth of the year.

Hutton made 24 saves for Buffalo, which is 0-9-2 in its past 11 games, the third-longest skid in team history. The Sabres are 0-8-1 in their past nine home games, the second-longest winless streak in franchise history behind the 12-game slump when they went 0-6-1 with five ties between Jan. 10 to March 27, 1991.

"The score obviously is extreme," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "I don't feel quit out of anybody. It's for others to judge."

ELLER OUT

The Capitals were without center Lars Eller due to a lower-body injury he suffered in Saturday's 5-4 win against the Philadelphia Flyers. Eller has five goals and seven assists in 22 games this season.

#### EAKIN SCRATCHED

Sabres forward Cody Eakin was a healthy scratch for the first time this season. Eakin, in the first season of a \$4.5 million, two-year contract he signed with Buffalo in the offseason, has one goal and three assists in 26 games. He had five goals and 10 assists for the Winnipeg Jets and Vegas Golden Knights last season.

#### ROSTER MOVES

The Capitals went with 11 forwards and seven defensemen against the Sabres. Defenseman Trevor van Riemsdyk replaced Eller in the lineup and played in his first game since Feb. 7. Van Riemsdyk has one goal in eight games.

The Sabres recalled center Rasmus Asplund from the taxi squad and sent defenseman Brandon Davidson to the taxi squad. Asplund played in his first game since Feb. 25 and his fifth of the season. Asplund replaced Eakin in the lineup.

#### WHAT'S NEXT

Capitals: Face the Islanders on Tuesday night to start a six-game homestand.

Sabres: Visit the Devils on Tuesday night before returning home for a two-game set against the Boston Bruins on Thursday and Saturday that will be the first games with fans in attendance in Buffalo. Thursday's game will have 700 frontline workers.

## **Observations: 'Essentially everybody' on Sabres' roster struggling to score**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

Jeff Skinner received the puck in the slot with only one defender standing in his way and right where the former 40-goal scorer could uncork a shot or distribute to one of his two teammates darting toward the goal.

The \$9 million-a-year left wing didn't even have the puck long enough to take a shot. Skinner immediately misfired a pass back to Casey Mittelstadt to spoil the 3-on-1 rush with the Buffalo Sabres trailing by three goals in the second period Monday night.

Skinner and the Sabres weren't done there. On a rare 3 on 0 in the third period, Skinner chose to take a shot instead of pass. He missed the net.

The blunders were emblematic of the confidence issue that's stricken a dressing room that includes an accomplished former Stanley Cup champion, two players drafted first overall and a forward who won the Hart Trophy only three years ago.

Sam Reinhart and Kyle Okposo, two of the team's highest paid forwards, could not put into words the emotions that have overcome the Sabres amid a winless streak that reached 11 games with a 6-0 drubbing at the hands of the Washington Capitals in KeyBank Center.

"I've never seen it through 27 games like the way it's gone with essentially everybody," Okposo said. "It's just unfortunate. It's tough. It's tough right now."

"It's tough to find energy right now, to be honest, when you're kind of battling and things aren't going your way," Reinhart said. "We just have to dig deeper, get our legs under us and find any sort of energy. Nothing is changing this except for us."

The Sabres (6-17-4) are sitting at the bottom of the National Hockey League with 16 points through 27 games. Their 34 goals in 5-on-5 situations are the fewest in the league, and they have been shut out four times while compiling a 2-13-2 record since returning from a two-week Covid-19 pause on Feb. 15. Buffalo has only two points – an 0-9-2 record – during the winless streak.

This offense is historically bad. The 2014-15 Sabres, a team management wanted to fail, averaged 1.5 goals during its 14-game losing streak. This talented group under Krueger is averaging 1.3 goals across the past 11 games.

Of the Sabres' 12 shot attempts in the first period Monday, only two were on net. The second period wasn't much better, as Buffalo managed only seven shots on Capitals rookie goalie Vitek Vanecek. Twelve of the Sabres' attempts missed the net and they finished with fewer than 30 shots on goal for a 10th consecutive game.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger pointed to lack of confidence and fatigue as factors in this collapse. The truncated schedule has left Krueger with little practice time to make corrections. Many teams are dealing with similar circumstances, though.

The same goes for injuries, but Krueger was quick to note that the absences need to be considered when evaluating Buffalo's place in the standings. The Sabres are currently without Jack Eichel, Dylan Cozens, Linus Ullmark, Jake McCabe, Will Borgen and Zemgus Girgensons.

Still, the challenges of this season don't explain how Okposo, Skinner, Taylor Hall and Eric Staal have combined for six goals while counting a combined \$23.45 million against the salary cap. Cody Eakin, one of the Sabres' top free-agent acquisitions in October, was a healthy scratch Monday. Their potential generational talent on defense, Rasmus Dahlin, has a minus-27 rating in 27 games.

"We are in a definitely negative funk right now, and I only know one thing and that's to fight," Krueger said. "The adversity that we sit in is not that which we get judged by. It's how we react and how we grow and learn out of

this. ... It feels like we're in a very deep, dark place right now, and the only way we get into any light is keeping the fight into the team and sticking together."

Here are other observations from the game Monday night:

1. Make a move: To borrow a phrase from fans who once begged former general manager Darcy Regier to make a trade: "Do something, Kevyn." It's time for Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams to change the dynamic of the Sabres' dressing room, whether it's with the coaching staff or roster.

No general manager should sit back and watch this unfold. Adams is handcuffed by the Rochester Americans' pause, but he has three significant pending unrestricted free agents that will fetch valuable assets: Staal, Hall and Brandon Montour. Make a trade like the one that brought Dominik Kahun to Buffalo at the deadline last February.

"It's not easy right now," said Okposo. "It's not easy. This is not an easy situation. Guys care, it's just not happening right now. I don't know how else to put it. It's just, it's tough. We're in a really tough spot here. Guys are trying and it's just not working. I don't know what else to say."

2. Save Dahlin: Adams also needs to take a long look at the regression we've seen from Dahlin and Henri Jokiharju. These are two players who should be building blocks on the blue line, particularly Dahlin, who had historic production across his first two seasons in the NHL.

Jokiharju can't crack the lineup after appearing in 69 games last season. Dahlin seems to be playing with no confidence and the mistakes on defense are leaking into his game with the puck. Is this coaching or the system?

3. This isn't about goaltending: Don't point the finger at Carter Hutton for the early deficit. The veteran goalie made a pair of significant saves in the first period, both on T.J. Oshie. Hutton stopped Oshie on a breakaway and on a one-timer from the slot during a power play.

Yes, Hutton should not have gotten beat short side on that Evgeny Kuznetsov shot at 18:46 into the first period for a 1-0 Capitals lead, but you can't expect to win if you're not challenging the opposing goalie.

"Hutts keeps us in it in the first," Reinhart said. "They get a tough one (after the power play). After he's making stuff, five or six Grade A scoring opportunities against, he's keeping us in that game, so probably start of the second (is when it fell apart)."

4. Not surprised: We don't see the Sabres practice often. When they are on the ice preparing, whether it's a team practice or morning skate, it's clear why they're at the bottom of the standings.

The effort is there. The execution is not. Passes aren't on the tape. Shots are fired wide. Players can skate offside during drills. This may seem like innocuous details, but it's become a trend since the team returned from a Covid-19 pause. Several players missed the net – and not by a small margin – on basic rushes Monday morning.

## **Mike Harrington: From top to bottom, it appears Sabres have no shame**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

Shame on you, Terry and Kim Pegula.

You have run your hockey team into the ground. That your football team was one win shy of a Super Bowl doesn't excuse your inaction.

Shame on you, Kevyn Adams.

Do you want to be taken seriously as an NHL general manager? Then how can you tell us you're angry, use the word "unacceptable" about 27 times and then do nothing while another season goes up in flames? The way this is going, your first season in the chair should be your last.

You know what Adams should do? Park his butt behind the bench and coach this disaster for the final 29 games, just so he gets an up-close look at what he wrought.

Shame on you, Ralph Krueger.

You just never adapted your system to your players and the results are mind-boggling. They quit on you. You should be furious with them. But you know how this goes: It's your fault. Your career as an NHL coach should have been over two weeks ago. It's hard to fathom you still behind the bench.

Shame on you, every guy in Blue and Gold who took part in the 6-0 no-show Monday against the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center.

The two tank teams – the ones management wanted to lose – put out better efforts than this.

Remember what Steve Valiquette said on MSG a couple of weeks ago? He said you should be wearing ski masks twice a month because you're thieves. And he's right. You're stealing money.

Sam Reinhart, one of the few guys to earn his money this season, was brutal with a minus-4 rating and a direct giveaway that led to the Caps' fourth goal. When I asked him to provide any shred of evidence this team hasn't quit, especially on the coach, there wasn't much for him to offer.

"I don't know what you want me to say. It's not a good result tonight," Reinhart said. "I don't know what you want me to say about that. I love the group of guys, love the coach. The result isn't good enough."

The kind of hockey we've seen the last three weeks sure is a funny way to show love. Krueger should not have even been allowed on the plane to New Jersey late Monday night. That's 11 losses and counting, an 0-9-2 run that's three games shy of equaling the franchise record for a winless streak.

Can you imagine if they lose Tuesday night to the Devils, who have dropped 11 in a row at home and have already fallen to Buffalo three times this year? When does this end?

"I don't feel quit of anybody. It's for others to judge," Krueger insisted.

Sorry, Ralph.

The players have quit on you. The GM is frozen in place and the owners are either too cheap, too ignorant or too arrogant to bring anyone into this organization who has a shred of knowledge on how to succeed in the NHL.

The calamity-a-day Sabres reached new lows in this one, just a few hours after the scope of a Covid-19 outbreak in Rochester started to bubble to the surface. We all want change, but they can't even call up any guys to give this club a fresh look because their farm club is the only one in pro hockey currently in quarantine.

This was one of the worst Sabres games I have ever seen. I'm thankful none of you had the misfortune to pay to watch it. The lack of any semblance of compete level was astonishing.

One thing the Sabres have gotten lucky about this year is the fact there are no fans. A half-empty building and one full of boos would have added urgency to everyone's plate.

The Sabres play like they practice. Remember, the media gets to watch all practices and morning skates. We were there Monday morning, so the way the game went was no surprise to us.

Simple passes were in guys' feet the entire hour. There was no pizzazz to the workout whatsoever. You could feel this one coming.

Krueger never stops practice to bark at his players for their laziness or make them do a drill again. And they play that way. That's on him.

After the game, Krueger had lost all his bravado. He slipped into excuse mode. Injuries, the division, fatigue, lack of practice time. He went through them all. Just stop.

Rasmus Dahlin, at minus-27 and doing a good job blowing up every draft manual from 2018 that said he was the Sabres' turnaround player, joined Colin Miller and Eric Staal in saying ole to T.J. Oshie on one second-period play that resulted in Nicklas Backstrom's rebound goal.

And that came after Alex Ovechkin turned Dahlin utterly inside out on a first-period rush, only to be stopped by Carter Hutton.

Jeff Skinner, the \$9 million man with one goal on the season, butchered a 3-on-1 in the same frame with a terrible pass to Casey Mittelstadt and did likewise in the third on a 3-on-0 (!) by firing wide. Unreal.

Kyle Okposo, still stuck on no goals for his \$6 million, was ashen-faced after this one.

"We've lost a lot of games in a row and it's going to shake anybody," Okposo said. "The whole year has not been ideal in any sense of normalcy. And it's just not happening right now with everybody. It's not five or six guys. It's a lot.

"Guys do care, but it's just not going our way right now."

That's for sure. The Sabres had two shots on goal in the first period and nine through 40 minutes. They continue to turn Washington rookie Vitek Vanecsek into Vitek Vezina. He's 4-0-1, 1.55/.947 against the Sabres. Against the rest of the division? He's 8-5-2, 3.14/.895

"It feels like we're in a very deep, dark place right now," Krueger said. "And the only way we get into any light is keeping the fight in the team and sticking together. We're not going to get any outside help or pity."

After the morning skate, Rasmus Ristolainen was philosophical on how things have been going. Asked how he's dealing with the latest round of losing, he said, "Personally, when it's your eighth year and it's been almost identical, similar than the years in the past ... at least I have a very thick skin."

Ristolainen then slipped into cliches before acknowledging, "You can't lose your bleep after a few losses."

Ristolainen is wrong there. Frankly, it's long past time for somebody – anybody – in this organization to lose their bleep at what's going on here.



## **The Wraparound: Sabres' second-period collapse pushes winless streak to 11**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

Carter Hutton hung his head as the bright red goal light glared behind him.

The Sabres goalie had fended off a barrage of shots from the Washington Capitals, only to watch the puck fly over his shoulder for the game's first goal late in the first period Monday night.

Hutton's teammates didn't come to his rescue. Neither did the arena staff, which had trouble shutting off the goal light after Richard Panik's rocket one-timer pushed the lead to three goals.

The Sabres' latest collapse included three goals allowed in the second period and ended with a 6-0 loss to the Capitals inside KeyBank Center.

Buffalo's winless streak, which began Feb. 25, reached 11 games – the longest run of futility since the franchise's 14-game skid in 2014-15. The Sabres, now 6-17-4, remain last in the National Hockey League with 16 points through 27 games and are on track to miss the playoffs for a 10th consecutive season.

The Sabres were shut out in consecutive games for the second time during this 0-9-2 skid, and they've been held scoreless as many times (6) as they have wins.

Evgeny Kuznetsov, Nicklas Backstrom, Daniel Sprong, Garnet Hathaway and Alex Ovechkin also scored for Washington (18-6-4), which was 8-1-1 in its previous 10 games and two points behind the East Division's first-place Islanders.

With his third-period goal, Ovechkin moved into a tie with Phil Esposito for sixth on the all-time goals list (717).

Hutton, 35, stopped 24 of 30 shots while making his second consecutive start. Buffalo finished with 23 shots on goal, 14 of which came in the third period.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel missed a fourth consecutive game with an upper-body injury, and rookie forward Dylan Cozens remains day to day with an upper-body injury suffered Thursday against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Bail-out saves: Hutton kept the Sabres in the game when their offense could not generate scoring chances in the first period. He stopped a T.J. Oshie breakaway after Jacob Bryson could not prevent a seam pass up the middle of the ice. Hutton also stopped an Oshie one-timer from the slot on a late power play.

Opening salvo: Kuznetsov's goal at 18:46 into the first period gave the Capitals a 1-0 lead and occurred moments after the Washington power play ended. Hutton was unable to stop the shot from near the right wall.

Slow starts: The Sabres have scored only 14 goals in the first period of 27 games this season. They have scored first only eight times and entered Monday with a 2-14-2 record when allowing the first goal.

Of Buffalo's 12 shot attempts in the first period, only two were on net. Matt Irwin and Jeff Skinner had the Sabres' only shots on goal. The Capitals, meanwhile, had 13 shots, including three apiece by Oshie and Ovechkin.

Herculean effort: Oshie avoided a check from Rasmus Dahlin, stickhandled his way past Colin Miller and skated around Eric Staal before firing a backhanded shot from the slot. Backstrom was left uncovered to score on the rebound at 2:41 into the second period.

Another mistake: Capitals defenseman Dmitry Orlov intercepted a breakout attempt by Brandon Montour, skated down the left wing into the offensive zone and passed to the high slot, where Panik one-timed a shot for a 3-0 lead with 14:01 remaining in the second period.

Puck management: Another turnover led to a Capitals goal at 15:07 into the second period, as Sam Reinhart lost the puck at the opposing blue line and Sprong scored on a breakaway for a 4-0 lead.

Close call: Sabres center Curtis Lazar missed the latter portion of the second period after he was struck in the face by Zdeno Chara's skate. Chara was initially called for high sticking, but replay review showed the laceration on Lazar's face occurred because Chara inadvertently swung his right leg up while falling to the ice at 11:57 into the second period. Lazar returned for the third period.

Pouring on: Washington added to its lead in the third period with Hathaway tipping Schultz's right-point shot past Hutton at 6:46. Ovechkin made it 6-0 at 16:20.

Lineup: Prior to puck drop, the Sabres assigned defenseman Brandon Davidson to the taxi squad and added forward Rasmus Asplund to the active roster. Center Cody Eakin was a healthy scratch for the first time since signing a two-year, \$4.5 million contract with the Sabres in October.

Capitals center Lars Eller was out of the lineup with a lower-body injury. Eller has totaled five goals with seven assists for 12 points in 22 games.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to play the Devils (8-13-4) at Prudential Center in Newark, N.J., on Tuesday at 7 p.m. Jonas Johansson (0-4-1, .883 save percentage) is expected to start in goal for Buffalo, which is 3-1-1 against New Jersey this season.

## **Recalls to Sabres on hold as Covid-19 pauses Rochester Americans' season**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

Covid-19 cases inside the Rochester Americans will prevent the Buffalo Sabres from calling on reinforcements from their only active minor-league affiliate until further notice.

The Amerks canceled practice Monday and had a third game postponed because of the American Hockey League's Covid-19 protocols. Sources told The Buffalo News that there are multiple confirmed positive Covid-19 cases on the Amerks' roster.

Contact tracing was conducted over the weekend to determine the source. The Amerks have not played since a 3-2 shootout loss at Utica on March 10, and their next scheduled game is Friday at Utica.

Rochester was supposed to host Syracuse on Wednesday, but the AHL announced Monday that the game was postponed. The game originally scheduled for March 13 was rescheduled for Monday, May 3 at Blue Cross Arena.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger told reporters Friday that Amerks players were in quarantine. Krueger, though, told the media following the morning skate Monday that he did not have any further details other than the Sabres won't be able to recall anyone from Rochester until further notice.

"That definitely puts any movement on hold and I was only just informed that the practice was canceled, just like you were only just informed," Krueger said. "So, I do not know the details of what is happening there. But clearly we will not be able to move any players until we have a clarity on that."

The Sabres entered Monday with three skaters – including two forwards – and one goalie on their taxi squad. This will provide them with a layer of protection in the event of an injury during the Amerks' pause. Any of those taxi-squad players can be recalled on a game day before 5 p.m.

However, this is another disappointing development in a challenging year for the Sabres. Jack Quinn, the Sabres' most recent first-round draft pick, is among the prominent prospects missing valuable practice days and games during the Amerks' pause.

Unlike the National Hockey League, the AHL does not disclose which players have been deemed unavailable because of positive tests or close contacts.

The Amerks have compiled a 6-3-1 record in Seth Appert's first season as coach.

Eakin scratched

Krueger made another significant personnel change Monday to address the Sabres' lack of secondary scoring, scratching veteran center Cody Eakin in favor of Rasmus Asplund.

Eakin, 29, has only one empty-net goal and three assists with a minus-7 rating while averaging 13:16 of ice time through his first 26 games with Buffalo. Eakin, who joined the Sabres on a two-year, \$4.5 million contract in October, has won 57.53% of his faceoffs and is a key cog on a penalty kill that entered Monday ranked 14th in the NHL.

According to Evolving-Hockey.com's Goals Above Replacement, a metric that assigns an overall value to a player based on performance in a number of situations, Eakin ranks 12th among 14 Sabres forwards.

Eakin was signed to provide more offense to the bottom six after he totaled 22 goals in 78 games with the Vegas Golden Knights in 2018-19.

"Certainly, his role with us is clear, that maybe not as much of late, but I would say through the first 20 games, multiple games, where he would be matched up against top lines of the other team, would've neutralized possibly some of his offensive risk and or attacking ability," Krueger said. "But he has been a good penalty killer for us. He has been a good faceoff man for us. He's a character player for us."

"I can only underline (Eakin's lack of offense) in that this little break here today we will be speaking to him more about that type of input. Moving forward, we do need depth scoring and he can be a very valuable source of that. So, we're looking at the different ways that we can bring into the game."

## Hockey Fights Cancer

The first fans allowed in KeyBank Center this season will be workers who were on the front lines during the Covid-19 global pandemic.

Seven hundred front-line workers will attend the Sabres' game Thursday night against the Boston Bruins for the NHL's Hockey Fights Cancer Night, the team announced Monday. The Sabres will honor front-line workers on the video board and fundraising efforts will be held throughout the night on the MSG broadcast and team social media accounts.

The general public's first game at KeyBank Center this season will be Saturday.

All proceeds from fundraising efforts will be donated to Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. Players will wear lavender-colored jerseys during warmups that will be auctioned off immediately after the game.

"Hockey Fights Cancer Night is an important night for our entire franchise and our community," said Sabres owner and president Kim Pegula. "It is a night where we all come together to support patients and their families in their fight against cancer and to remember those we have lost to the disease. This year, we are honored to welcome over 700 frontline workers and guests from Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center to the game in recognition of their contributions and dedication to our community."

Sabres broadcasters Martin Biron and Brian Duff welcomed cancer survivor and elementary school teacher Mary Guevara and her family to KeyBank Center for a ceremonial puck drop, which will be broadcast prior to the start of the game.

The Sabres are holding an online auction featuring autographed merchandise from Thursday at 7 p.m. through March 28 at 9 p.m.

## **700 front-line workers to attend Sabres' game Thursday against Boston**

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

The first fans allowed in KeyBank Center to watch a Buffalo Sabres game this season will be workers who were on the front lines during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Seven hundred front-line workers will attend the Sabres' game Thursday night against the Boston Bruins for the NHL's Hockey Fights Cancer Night, the team announced Monday. The Sabres will honor front-line workers on the video board, and fundraising efforts will be held throughout the night on the MSG broadcast and team social media accounts.

All proceeds from fundraising efforts will be donated to Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. Players will wear lavender-colored jerseys during warmups that will be auctioned off immediately after the game.

Additionally, for a donation of at least \$50, fans can receive an autographed mini Sabres helmet.

"Hockey Fights Cancer Night is an important night for our entire franchise and our community," Sabres co-owner and president Kim Pegula said in a statement. "It is a night where we all come together to support patients and their families in their fight against cancer and to remember those we have lost to the disease. This year we are honored to welcome over 700 frontline workers and guests from Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center to the game in recognition of their contributions and dedication to our community."

Sabres broadcasters Martin Biron and Brian Duff welcomed cancer survivor and elementary school teacher Mary Guevara and her family to KeyBank Center for a ceremonial puck drop, which will be broadcast prior to the start of the game.

The Sabres are holding an online auction featuring autographed merchandise from Thursday at 7 p.m., through March 28 at 9 p.m.

## **Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Islanders might present intriguing options to improve Sabres**

By Travis Yost  
The Buffalo News  
March 15, 2021

It might be time to stir up a little bit of trouble.

Kevyn Adams' panicked news conference was a long time coming, even for a guy with less than a year of experience in his current role. Adams' frustration with the organization, from top to bottom, was palpable. The roster is painfully limited on talent, and the few stars they do have are underperforming this season. Add some curious coaching decisions into the mix, and you have a team that's once again fighting to not finish in the league cellar.

The common theme around Adams' presser was improvement. We have talked a lot about how to squeeze more out of the active roster, but a lot of that is marginal and tends to focus on lineup optimization, team structure, and player usage. Ultimately, this team is going to rebound when the stars – and in particular the Jack Eichel line, though even that has been hampered due to injury – regress back toward historical performance, and when the swath of underperforming players are displaced on the active roster.

The latter part is easier said than done – convincing players to come to Buffalo isn't hard because it's a small market, it's hard because the team hasn't reached the postseason in a decade. They need not look further than the other team in town for how quickly that can turn around, though. Talent recruits talent, and most professionals value winning and compensation over everything else.

One of the interesting opportunities the Sabres do have? A wealth of relative cap space heading into next year, something that's increasingly valuable in light of Gary Bettman's recent remarks. That offers opportunities to buy into assets – draft picks and prospects alike – to take on dead contracts, something the Sabres should always be considering. It also offers up opportunities to acquire talent through other means.

About five hours away, the New York Islanders are in an interesting situation. The Islanders have historically been reticent about spending to the top of the salary cap, but because of their organizational turnaround, they have crept in that direction, with two big contracts (Anders Lee and Johnny Boychuk) still on long-term injured reserve. And this offseason, they have to address extensions for five restricted free agents, three of whom are considerable names:

I included current goals above replacement contributions for a quick reference point. Players such as Bellows and Dal Colle still have relatively limited roles. But at least three of these players – Beauvillier, Pelech and Sorokin – are part of the broader Islanders core. If the Islanders had it their way, all of them would stay put. And it's still quite possible for the Islanders to create enough flexibility to do just that.

On the other hand, there are factors working against the Islanders here. We spoke about the obvious one concerning the cap; there's also the downline effect of teams preparing to squeeze their own restricted free agents harder over the next couple of years to free up more space for the market, which should create more interest in the trade and offer sheet world. And this is before we get into what the NHL will look like next season. Will realignment stay put? Will taxi squads and their cap effect remain? And so on.

For the sake of this piece, we will focus on how the Sabres can go after Pelech and Sorokin, though there's a case to be made for Beauvillier as well.

Let's start with Pelech, who is in the midst of a career year. The Islanders are outscoring teams 32 to 21 (plus-11) with him on the ice, playing primarily alongside the very capable Ryan Pullock. If that on-ice goal advantage holds, it will be the fourth consecutive year that Pelech has played big minutes and driven favorable goal differentials. He's a big, physical defender, and one who actually gets results in the process. Getting to the front of the net against Pelech is quite the accomplishment:

A very strong defender with limited offensive upside can find a role in the NHL for many moons, and it's also a void the Sabres have been trying to fill for some time.

Meanwhile, Sorokin (90.6 save percentage; plus-1.5 goals saved above expected) is caught in a platoon with Semyon Varlamov at the moment, the veteran outplaying the 25-year-old so far this season. But Sorokin is arguably the most important prospect-turned-player in the system after Barzal, an all-world athlete who figures to be a starter for a long time in the NHL. And the Sabres goaltending situation is dire. Carter Hutton and Linus Ullmark are on expiring contracts with little else to offer in the system in the short term. Free agency has a number of alternative goaltending options, but most of these would be short-term fixes at best due to age.

So how can the Sabres make a pitch? Submit offer sheets to Pelech and Varlamov at the same time. Since the Sabres own all their 2022 NHL draft picks, they can sign both players into different compensation ranges without violating the collective bargaining agreement (10.4). Assuming the offer sheet compensation will mirror what it did last summer, it might look something like this:

The Sabres could offer Pelech a multiyear contract up to \$4.3 million annually, and simultaneously offer Sorokin a multiyear contract up to \$6.5 million annually. The point is to squeeze the outer limits of the compensation range and force a team like the Islanders to consider declining to match the offer sheet.

To that end, it's not a question of whether the Islanders love a player like Sorokin – they do. The question is whether they love him enough to decline a future first- and third-round pick, and avoid paying that same goaltender \$6 million annually. Depending on how bullish you are on Sorokin, even a high-end offer now could be on the low end of his true talent in the long term. But it would force the Islanders to consider their cap strategy and the opportunity costs that would come with matching multiple offer sheets. (In this case, they could tie up in excess of \$10 million in just two players.)

Alternatively, you can easily see a scenario in which the Islanders match a high-end offer for Sorokin and decline to meet the midrange offer for Pelech. Either way, the Sabres end the day with more talent, not less.

Offer sheets have become beta noire in the NHL, but I've always attributed that to how punitive the top end of the compensation range is, as well as the ability for general managers to engineer side trades in lieu of tendering. I expect that to continue. But if there was ever a time for teams to get creative in a multiyear flat-cap era, this is it.

## **Sabres game day: Caps' Ovechkin goes for some history on NHL goal chart**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2021

Matchup: Buffalo Sabres (6-16-4) vs. Washington Capitals (17-6-4)

Where: KeyBank Center

When: 7 p.m.

TV: MSG

Radio: WGR 550

The Buffalo Sabres are winless in 10 games (0-8-2) for the first time since 2015 and facing a red-hot opponent featuring a superstar looking to claim a piece of NHL history. Not the best pregame outlook.

But that's where the Sabres stand heading into their game against the Washington Capitals, who are again on Alex Ovechkin Watch. The Great Eight scored his 716th career goal Saturday in Philadelphia and needs one more to tie Phil Esposito at 717 for No. 6 on the all-time NHL list.

"If anyone knows where he is in the stats, how many goals he's behind, it's probably him," Nicklas Backstrom, Ovechkin's longtime center, said today. "When he wants to chase something, he does it right away. That's how he is as a player and a goal scorer. Hopefully it will be tonight."

Ovechkin is a point-a-game player in his career against the Sabres with 33 goals and 54 points in 53 games. He traditionally has heavy battles with Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen.

"I really enjoy playing against him and I think he feels like he enjoys it, too," Ristolainen said. "Play hard and clean and, we both like to hit each other and get hit. That fires up me and gets me in the game. So I always look forward to playing him."

The Buffalo lineup: Cody Eakin will sit out a game for the first time this season, in a move that's probably been overdue for a guy whose lone goal was a buzzer-beating empty netter Feb. 23 in New Jersey. Rasmus Asplund will come back into the lineup for the first time since Feb. 25.

Eakin, a 22-goal man two years ago in Vegas, has simply not produced any offense for the Sabres this season.

"He has been a good penalty killer for us. He has been a good faceoff man for us," coach Ralph Krueger said today. "He's a character player in the room and I can only underline that this little break here today, we will be speaking to him more about that type of of input moving forward. We do need that scoring."

Jack Eichel and Dylan Cozens remain out with their upper-body injuries. Henri Jokiharju will stay on the taxi squad and join Eakin in watching this one.

In the nets: Carter Hutton (1-8-1, 3.15/.893) was the first goalie off the ice at the morning skate and would thus be expected to get the call for the Sabres, two nights after he stopped 31 of 32 shots against Pittsburgh. Meanwhile, Caps rookie Vitek Vanecsek (11-5-3, 2.88/.904) has been stellar against the Sabres this year at 3-0-1, 1.92/.938.

The Buffalo power play: The Sabres are No. 5 in the league but in an 0-for-15 slump the last nine games that's clearly been prompted by Eichel's absence on the half-wall. Krueger said Rasmus Dahlin has felt more pressure at the top of the power play without Eichel and needs to play a more relaxed game.

"We need him to calm down and and not feel the weight of the whole power play on his shoulders and share it with the others," Krueger said. "There have been some tactical adjustments that we made behind the scenes that we hope you see tonight."



Caps report: Washington has won four in a row and eight of its last nine. The Caps are 4-0-1 against the Sabres this year, with Buffalo's lone win coming Jan. 24 in a shootout. The Washington power play is a complete conundrum, standing first in the NHL at home at 45.2% – and 28th on the road at just 11.1% (4-36). It snapped an 0-for-18 road drought in Saturday's win at Philadelphia.

More Caps history: Backstrom leads the club in scoring this season (10-20-30) is expected to play in his 984th career game tonight, passing former Sabres defenseman Calle Johansson for the second-most games played in franchise history. Ovechkin is the leader, with tonight being No. 1,176.

## **OPINION: Sabres keep getting worse as winless streak hits 11 games**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 16, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – This Buffalo Sabres team just gets more-and-more pathetic every time they play.

This team is now winless in 11-straight games, going 0-9-2. According to the Elias Sports Bureau, the Sabres have been shutout four of their last five home games. The only other NHL team in the last 90 years to do that was the Calgary Flames in the 2013-14 season.

Buffalo had two whole shots in the first period. Carter Hutton had to stop Alex Ovechkin on a breakaway after he totally undressed Rasmus Dahlin, as well as T.J. Oshie when he got behind Jacob Bryson who had no idea he was there.

Hutton also robbed Oshie alone in the slot on the power play.

Hutton finally broke down at 18:46 when Evgeny Kuznetsov beat him from the right wing boards. Hutton had to make 12 saves, while Vitek Vanecek did what most goalies do against the Sabres - stand there and do nothing.

Vanecek is a rookie, who is feasting on the Sabres this season. He's 4-0-1 with a 1.55 goals-against average and a .947 save percentage against this lifeless bunch. Against the rest of the league, his goals-against average is 3.14 with a .895 save percentage.

During this losing stretch for the Sabres, they've scored 17 goals in the 11 games, while giving up 47. Somehow, Jason Botterill thought the Edmonton Oilers were wrong for firing Ralph Krueger after just one season of 48 games, despite being 3-9-0 in his final 12 games. In his last 34 games with the Sabres, Krueger has won just seven.

The first period was bad enough, but it leaked into the second, where Krueger thought they played better. If giving up three goals in the period for the third time in 10 days is better, than go for it. They got outscored 3-0 in the frame, and outshot 11-7.

Krueger was very impressed with the third period, even though they were outscored, 2-0, because they out shot Washington, 14-6. Krueger failed to take into account that Washington was in cruise control just waiting to hop on their plane to get out of town.

This game featured Jeff Skinner leading a 3-on-0 and 3-on-1 without getting a shot on net or a scoring chance. On the 3-on-0, the winger shot wide, and on the 3-on-1, he crossed up Casey Mittelstadt on, what should've been, an easy pass to a wide-open player.

Those two plays were nothing compared to Washington's second goal.

I have never and I mean never seen three defensive players play so disinterested as this goal. Oshie came down the right wing, now remember I said T.J. Oshie, not Wayne Gretzky, Mario Lemieux or Connor McDavid, anyway he easily blew by Dahlin who appeared to be in great position but hardly touched him. As Oshie cut through the faceoff circle, Colin Miller just stood there as Oshie faked him out of his jock and finally Eric Staal gave a half-hearted stick check as Oshie skated by him to the slot. Hutton made the save from right in front of him, but through the chaos, Nick Backstrom was left alone and scored on the rebound for his fifth goal and eighth point in six games against Buffalo.

I'm being totally honest, I would expect three players from Cincinnati Cyclones to play that better than that effort.

As the goals were going in, the team showed very little interest as Richard Panik had all sorts of room in the slot for a one-timer and Daniel Sprong was allowed to walk in clean on Hutton.

Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson were on the ice for four Washington goals while Dahlin, Staal and Brandon Montour were on the ice for three goals against.

The Sabres left right after the game for New Jersey where they collected their last win on Feb. 23. Something has to give because Lindy Ruff's Devils are winless in 11 straight games at home going 0-10-1. That includes two victories by Buffalo. New Jersey's last win at home was Jan. 24 against the New York Rangers. Overall the Devils have one win in their last 10 games.

## **OPINION: Three observations: Sabres lifeless in blowout loss to Capitals**

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

March 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres hit the ice on Monday night at KeyBank Center hoping for a change of fortune to snap a 10-game losing streak against the Washington Capitals.

That hope resulted in their 11th-straight loss, a 6-0 thumping at the hands of their opponent.

There seem to be no answers for this team in the middle of their mid-season tailspin. Let's take a look at three observations from the game:

### 1.) Hutton follows up strong performance with a dud

Sabres goaltender Carter Hutton performed admirably against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday night, and he was rewarded with his second-straight start against Washington two nights later.

Hutton turned aside eight of the nine shots he faced in the first period, allowing an ugly goal from a bad angle outside the circle close to the boards. Hutton had made three huge stops prior to allowing the goal, but he struggled with the angle the shot was taken.

In the second period, Hutton got blitzed. The Capitals attempted 16 shots in the period, with 11 of them registering a shot on goal and three of them going in.

The third period was not any kinder for Hutton, as he faced just six shots on goal, but allowed another two goals.

### 2.) Power play has frozen over

How many more games will the lack of power play goals end up being one of the observations?

Until the Sabres score with the man advantage, it will continue to be one of the more noticeable things from each game. Buffalo's lack of power play has totally taken them out of many games along this 11-game skid.

The Sabres' power play conversion rate has fallen to 26.8%, still a rather high amount that speaks to how well the power play was performing in the beginning of the season. Over the last 10 games, the Sabres have had 16 opportunities to score with the man advantage.

### 3.) Skinner noticeable for all the wrong reasons

Sabres forward Jeff Skinner was involved on three separate plays where the Sabres should have had a threatening chance to score.

The first play found Skinner on a 3-on-1 with Casey Mittelstadt and Curtis Lazar. Mittelstadt carried the puck in the zone and found Skinner in the slot. Skinner had the lane, but he decided to pass it back to Mittelstadt, who mishandled it and foiled the play.

Later in the game, Skinner found himself on a breakaway early in the third period. Sabres forward Casey Mittelstadt knocked the puck free in the neutral zone, which sprung Skinner in alone on Capitals goaltender Vitek Vanecek. The rookie netminder barely got a piece of the shot, which likely would have missed the net.

Even later in the third, Skinner, Mittelstadt and Lazar generated a 3-on-0 chance. This time, Skinner fired the puck, but he missed the net on the play.

Skinner continues to create opportunities for himself, but like many on this team, he simply can not figure out how to get one of his shots to just go in the net.

-----

The Sabres will get another chance to get the monkey off their back, as they travel to Newark, New Jersey to play the Devils at the Prudential Center on Tuesday night.

We'll get things started at 6 p.m. ET with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show hosted by Schopp and the Bulldog. Puck drop is schedule to take place just after 7 p.m. ET on the radio flagship of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## Winless streak hits 11 as Capitals drub Sabres

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

March 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres last victory still remains Tuesday, Feb. 23 against the New Jersey Devils. For the 11th-straight game, the blue and gold came out on the short end of the stick as they got throttled on Monday night to the tune of a 6-0 final against the visiting Washington Capitals inside KeyBank Center.

The visitors opened the scoring late in the first period when Capitals forward Evgeny Kuznetsov took a wrist shot from the right wing half wall that got in behind Carter Hutton.

Washington out-shot Buffalo, 13-2, in the opening 20 minutes.

The Capitals made it a 2-0 contest in the early goings of the middle stanza when T.J. Oshie danced through the entire Sabres defense before dishing off a pass to an unguarded Nicklas Backstrom, who was parked on the left goal post.

The goal was Backstrom's 11th of the season.

About three minutes later, Washington extended their lead to 3-0 when Richard Panik let loose a one-timer that found twine. It was the forward's third goal of the campaign.

Contextually, the Capitals' third goal of the night came at a time when the Sabres had three shots all game.

Washington kept pouring it on in the final minutes of the second, when the visitors broke up a Buffalo offensive zone possession at the blue line. Capitals defenseman Nick Jensen blocked a shot, before sending forward Daniel Sprong off to the races on a breakaway. Sprong fired his shot to the top corner of the net on a helpless Hutton.

The Sabres' deficit reached 5-0 in the third period when a Justin Schultz point shot was re-directed in front of Hutton by Capitals forward Garnet Hathaway.

Washington capped the scoring barrage at 6-0 when Alex Ovechkin scored his 717th career goal, moving him into a tie for sixth all-time with Boston Bruins legend Phil Esposito.

-----  
**GAME SUMMARY**

**Goal Summary:**

**First Period:**

BUF: NONE

WSH: 18:36 - Evgeny Kuznetsov (3) (Justin Schultz, Conor Sheary)

**Second Period:**

BUF: NONE

WSH: 2:41 - Nicklas Backstrom (11) (TJ Oshie, Nick Jensen); 5:59 - Richard Panik (3) (Dmitry Orlov); 15:07 - Daniel Sprong (6) (Nick Jensen)

**Third Period:**

BUF: NONE

WSH: 6:46 - Garnet Hathaway (4) (Justin Schultz, Carl Hagelin); 16:20 - Alexander Ovechkin (11) (Conor Sheary)

-----  
**Penalty Summary:**

**First Period:**

BUF: 16:43 - Rasmus Dahlin (Hooking - 2 min.)

WSH: NONE

Second Period:

BUF: NONE

WSH: NONE

Third Period:

BUF: 7:17 - Taylor Hall (Hooking - 2 min.)

WSH: 12:48 - Dmitry Orlov (Holding - 2 min.)

-----

#### STATS OF THE GAME

-----

Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

1.) TJ Oshie - WSH

2.) Justin Schultz - WSH

3.) Dmitry Orlov - WSH

-----

What's Next:

The blue and gold head to northern New Jersey for a quick road date with the Devils on Tuesday night. Puck drop at the Prudential Center is set for 7 p.m. ET with the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog starting at 6 p.m. ET on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

## **Carter Hutton will try to build on good performance Saturday against Pittsburgh**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2021

Buffalo, N.Y. (WGR 550) – Carter Hutton gets his second-straight start on Monday for the Buffalo Sabres against the Washington Capitals.

Cody Eakin is being benched for the first time all season, with Rasmus Asplund stepping into his spot at center. Matt Irwin is in on defense for Brandon Davidson, who is back on the taxi squad.

The Sabres wasted Hutton's spectacular performance on Saturday against the Pittsburgh Penguins. The Buffalo netminder allowed just one goal on 32 shots before Pittsburgh scored two empty net goals.

Hutton made numerous big saves along the way to keep the game at 1-0, and give his team a chance to win. Hutton had allowed 15 goals in his last four starts before that.

"I don't know what's going on. I'm accountable too and we're in this as a team, and I don't know if I've ever been in this kind of funk at this level and it's hard to take," said Hutton following Saturday's loss.

The problem with Hutton, Jonas Johansson and Linus Ullmark is they don't make enough big saves to help cover up the team's mistakes.

"At times, a big save here or there puts me in a better position in games, especially with what we give up, but obviously I need to be better too," Hutton said. "Since Linus has been out, 'J.J.' [Johansson] and I have to be better, and I think the group has to be better too.

"For me, I know that I haven't been good enough lately, and it's something that weighs on me. I'm a pro and I take pride in being good, and hopefully we can find a way to be better as a whole."

Hutton knows what makes it hard for him during a game, and he would like to see his team do those things at the other end of the ice.

"I just think we need to work harder and make it harder on goalies and driving the net," Hutton said. "Sometimes you just have to dumb your game down and keep it simple to outwork teams, and that gets you out of it."

Buffalo is winless in the past 10 games, going 0-8-2. Against Washington this season, they're 1-3-1.

In those five games, they haven't been able to control Nick Backstrom, who has four goals and three assists for seven points. Alex Ovechkin hasn't scored a goal against Buffalo in his three games, but he has three assists.

Backstrom leads the Capitals with 10 goals and 20 assists for 30 points in 27 games. That places him 12th in league scoring. Ovechkin has 10 goals and 10 assists for 20 points in 23 games.

A lower-body injury will keep Lars Eller out of Washington's lineup. Tom Wilson is still serving his seven-game suspension handed to him by the NHL.

The Caps have won four-straight games, and eight out of their last nine.

Rookie Vitek Vanecek gets the call in goal. This season, the 25-year-old is 3-0-1 against the Sabres with a 1.92 goals-against average and a .938 save percentage. Overall, he's 11-5-3 with a 2.88 goals-against average and a .904 save percentage.

Vanecek has only played in one of the team's last four games, giving up four goals in a win over the New Jersey Devils. He's let in eight goals in his last two starts.

Washington is second in the East Division, four points back of the New York Islanders and three points ahead of the Pittsburgh Penguins.



Monday's lines;

Forward:

Skinner – Lazar – Mittelstadt

Olofsson – Staal – Reinhart

Hall – Sheahan – Thompson

Rieder – Asplund – Okposo

Defense:

Bryson – Ristolainen

Dahlin – Miller

Irwin – Montour

Join Schopp and the Bulldog for pregame coverage on WGR starting at 6 p.m. ET when they'll be joined by Ralph Krueger, Rasmus Ristolainen and Rasmus Asplund.

## **Duhatschek: 10 teams that have to make a deal by the NHL trade deadline**

By Eric Duhatschek

The Athletic

March 16, 2021

It's approaching the happiest time of the year for hockey fans – the NHL trade deadline. As in most years, there are some teams that want to make a trade and there are some that feel they have to make a trade.

As always, there'll be the Stanley Cup contenders, who believe a single piece or two can make the difference in helping them win a championship and are bidding on reinforcements. The reality is, nine years out of 10, that theory proves to be wishful thinking and they expend precious resources only to come up short at the end.

Happily, last year proved to be an exception – the Tampa Bay Lightning added two contributing pieces, Blake Coleman (from the Devils) and Barclay Goodrow (from the Sharks), to its stable of depth forwards. Ultimately, their grit and two-way play contributed to getting the Lightning over the hump (though the cost, a first-round pick for each, was prohibitive). But the NHL is a copy-cat league, meaning that recency bias will likely only increase at this year's deadline. If you're one of the teams that believe it is close – the Avalanche, Bruins, Golden Knights – the temptation is going to be great to fill that one perceived gap in their respective lineups.

Then there are the other teams that are simply hot messes – teams that had medium-high hopes entering the season, only to see those hopes dashed once play actually started. The Sabres. The Predators. The Canucks. The Flames. The Blue Jackets. Maybe a few others, too.

If you're trying to fix the chemistry of your underachieving team, sometimes the trade deadline is the best time to do it because that's the moment when contenders get singularly motivated to make a move and sometimes will consider paying a premium to get the desired piece.

There's nothing like an auction to extract maximum value for a player. The trade deadline is also a great time to dump overpriced players. No one has more bad money on the books than the Sharks. If there's ever a time to start dangling expensive vets, this is it, especially expensive vets on expiring contracts, or ones with limited term remaining on their deals.

Let's look more closely at 10 teams, spread over a few broad categories, just to see analyze what they might attempt.

The "hot mess" category

Buffalo Sabres

The Sabres' 16 points puts them dead last in the NHL. They've lost 11 in a row and have only four regulation victories in their first 26 games. In the offseason, the Sabres added Taylor Hall's skill and Eric Staal's leadership. If you factored in the development of their young nucleus, it was reasonable to think this was a team that could compete in a tough, deep division. It didn't happen. In fact, it went the other way.

GM Kevyn Adams reiterated his disappointment in the team's performance in a Zoom call last week and the suspicion is he's open for business. So, let's see what the Sabres can offer. Jack Eichel is the sexiest name on the list, but trading a \$10 million franchise player mid-season (who is currently dealing with an injury) is logistically problematic. Once in a while, GMs will surprise you with their boldness, but mostly, those sorts of trades happen in the offseason.

A \$9 million per season Jeff Skinner seems untradeable, even if Buffalo were to absorb half the contract. Sam Reinhart has had a decent season goal-scoring wise, and at 25, earning \$5.2 million, he'll be a restricted free agent when this year ends, but remains under a team's control. He has value.

Staal, at \$3.25 million, on an expiring contract, could provide leadership – a return to Carolina would be a natural. Hall has a full no-move, but at \$8 million on an expiring deal he is going to tempt a contender – and then it'll just be up to Hall to sign off on the deal. But if he wants to escape a sinking ship, this could be a good time to execute an exit strategy. The Sabres also have two inexpensive depth players on expiring contracts, Tobias Rieder and Riley Sheahan. Trading young players that haven't quite found their NHL stride doesn't happen often in the NHL, but there would be interest in Casey Mittelstadt, who might benefit from a fresh start elsewhere.

On defense, the 26-year-old Brandon Montour, a pending UFA, would probably attract the most genuine interest. Montour plays the third-most minutes on the team and has an offensive side that hasn't been unlocked with the Sabres. Maybe the most intriguing player on the Sabres outside of Eichel is defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, 26, with this year and next left on a contract that pays him \$5.4 million. There are two downsides to trading for Ristolainen: One is that you'd almost certainly have to find a way of fitting him on your protected list for the Seattle expansion draft and two, if you wanted to give up any assets of consequence for him, you'd have to get some indication he'd like to commit to your organization for the longer term. But if you could satisfy yourself on both those fronts, Ristolainen would be a potential difference-maker on the blue line and those sorts of players rarely spring loose at the deadline.

## **Sabres' losing streak hits 11: 'Tough to find the energy right now'**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 15, 2021

BUFFALO – In addition to his job as coach, Ralph Krueger has also become the Sabres' spinmeister, trying to glean some positives following loss after loss.

"I don't feel (the) quit of anybody," the embattled Krueger said on a Zoom call after Monday's 6-0 shellacking from the Washington Capitals inside KeyBank Center, the Sabres' 11th consecutive loss.

Krueger's ability to communicate helped the Sabres take notable steps last season and even early this one. He got through to his players, something his predecessors couldn't do. The Sabres, after years of futility, seemed to be on the right path.

But a lot has changed over the last six weeks, and Krueger's tenure with the Sabres could soon be over.

"It's not easy right now," Sabres winger Kyle Okposo said. "It's not easy, this is not an easy situation. Guys care, it's just not happening right now. I don't know how else to put it. It's just, it's tough. We're in a really tough spot here. Guys are trying and it's just not working. I don't know what else to say."

It's hard to fathom the hapless Sabres, who have lost 15 of their 17 games since their COVID-19 pause ended last month, can keep the status quo.

They've become the NHL's laughingstock. After a 4-3-2 start, they've imploded, sinking to the bottom of the league again. They often showcase little passion.

"It's tough to find the energy right now, to be honest, when you're kind of battling and things aren't going your way," Sabres winger Sam Reinhart said. "So we just need to dig deeper and get our legs under us and find any sort of bit of energy here, because nothing's changing this except for us."

He added: "I love the group of guys, love the coach. The result isn't good enough."

After a decent start Monday, the listless Sabres chased the rest of the game.

The Capitals outshot the Sabres 13-2 in the first period. The Sabres had eight shots when the Capitals led 4-0 in the second period.

"What I feel was an engagement in the process and a first period that went radically against us due to mistakes on our part and certainly missed opportunities on the other end," Krueger said. "We didn't execute the way we needed to against Washington to create offensive chances. We gave up six, seven shooting opportunities. They got the lead and the game ran away from us."

When the Sabres actually generated offense – they had a three-on-one and a three-on-zero – they missed the net.

The Sabres, who lost 3-0 Saturday, have been shut out in back-to-back games twice in barely two weeks.

"That's been a big problem for us, is burying our offensive opportunities," Okposo said. "I've never seen it through 27 games like the way it's gone with essentially everybody. It's just unfortunate. It's tough, it's tough right now."

The Sabres play a road game tonight against the New Jersey Devils. What could happen Wednesday?

They haven't won since they beat the Devils 4-1 on Feb. 23 in New Jersey. The Devils, who also endured a long COVID-19 pause, have lost four straight games and 12 of their last 14.

It's as winnable a game as the Sabres will have over the final two months this season.

Evgeny Kuznetsov scored 18:46 into the game, the only goal the Capitals needed. Alex Ovechkin closed the scoring 16:21 into the third period, his 717th career goal, tying him with Phil Esposito for the sixth-most goals in NHL history.

## **Sabres have no plans to rest Rasmus Ristolainen: ‘He’s such a competitor’**

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 15, 2021

BUFFALO – Rasmus Ristolainen’s harrowing battle with COVID-19 left him so weak he struggled to walk up the stairs in his home. The Sabres defenseman did not play for 27 days and missed seven games.

But since Ristolainen returned to the lineup Feb. 27, he has played all 10 contests, averaging 21 minutes, 28 seconds of ice time in the first nine entering Monday’s 6-0 loss to the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center.

Have the Sabres considered resting Ristolainen, perhaps giving him a breather for one game of a back-to-back, so they don’t wear him out?

“You tell him that,” Sabres coach Ralph Krueger joked during a Zoom call Saturday. “No way, not with Risto. He’s such a competitor.”

He added: “There’s no way we could take him out of a game.”

Veteran Jake McCabe suffered a season-ending knee injury last month, so the hapless Sabres, who have lost 10 straight games, are already down one of their top defensemen. They desperately need the 6-foot-4, 221-pound Ristolainen, whose elite conditioning has helped him handle the heavy workload.

“He’s evolved over the last two years to an important leader,” Krueger said of Ristolainen. “He’s a voice in the locker room now. With Jake McCabe out of the lineup, (I) can’t imagine Risto not being there. ...

“There’s no way Risto will ever miss a game unless the injury is really serious and even at a few percentage points off the mark, he’s still valuable to us.”

Ristolainen, like most of his teammates, has struggled at times over the past few weeks. The Finn compiled one goal, two points and a minus-13 rating since in his first nine games back.

“I don’t feel like I felt before the COVID, but it’s not an excuse,” Ristolainen said Monday morning. “I am not happy (with) the level I’ve been playing after and that’s how we all feel. There is so much better we can do as a team and individually.

“So, I mean, the only way for me to get better and feel better out there is to play. There is no practice or off-ice workout that can fix the level that needs to be or was.”

Overall, Ristolainen, 26, had averaged a team-high 22:34 of ice time this season entering Monday. Krueger will likely rest him by having him sit out of practice.

The Sabres’ COVID-19 pause last month created a jam-packed schedule. They play a road game Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils.

–

Sabres center Cody Eakin, who has scored just one goal in 26 games this season, an empty-netter, was a healthy scratch Monday.

Rasmus Asplund, who hadn’t played since Feb. 25, replaced Eakin between Tobias Rieder and Kyle Okposo.

Eakin’s penalty-killing prowess has helped the Sabres improve from 30th last season to fifth this year. His 57.5 faceoff percentage ranks first among Sabres who have taken at least 100 draws.

But Eakin, who scored a career-high 22 goals in 2017-18, hasn’t produced much offense. Overall, he has compiled four points and a minus-7 rating this season.

"Certainly, his role with us is clear, that maybe not as much of late, but I would say through the first 20 games, multiple games, where he would be matched up against top lines of the other team, would've neutralized possibly some of his offensive risk and or attacking ability," Krueger said. "But he has been a good penalty killer for us. He has been a good faceoff man for us. He's a character player for us. ...

"We will be speaking to him more about that type of (scoring) input. Moving forward, we do need depth scoring and he can be a very valuable source of that. So we're looking at the different ways that we can bring into the game."

Eakin signed to two-year, \$4.5 million contract after spending last season with the Winnipeg Jets and Vegas Golden Knights.

Asplund, 23, has scored one goal in four NHL outings this season. The Swede also registered two assists in three games with the Rochester Americans. He has spent most of the year skating with the taxi squad.

He has tried to use the extra time to hone small details in his game. He mentioned he has focused on becoming stronger along the walls and keeping the puck longer.

"Usually you don't get the opportunity during the season to really work on stuff," he said. "Even when I play some games, we have a lot of video to watch, really get into what the small details are that are going to make a difference in my game."

–

The AHL announced Monday it has postponed Wednesday's Rochester Americans home game against the Syracuse Crunch "out of an abundance of caution in accordance to league COVID-19 protocols."

The Amerks have multiple positive COVID-19 cases, according to The Buffalo News.

COVID-19 problems have forced the league to postpone three Amerks games in the last week. No makeup date was announced for Wednesday's contest.

Krueger said Friday the Amerks went into quarantine, meaning the Sabres can't recall any players from their AHL affiliate right now.

Notes: The Sabres made one change on defense Monday, inserting Matt Irwin for Brandon Davidson. They recalled Asplund from the taxi squad before the game and sent Davidson back to the taxi squad. ... Rookie center Dylan Cozens (upper body) missed his second game. Captain Jack Eichel (upper body) missed his fourth game. ... Defenseman Henri Jokiharju, who's still on the taxi squad, has sat out five of the last six games.

## **Sabres to make lineup changes, scratch Cody Eakin**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 15, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres center Cody Eakin, who has scored just one goal in 26 games this season, an empty-netter, will be a healthy scratch tonight against the Washington Capitals.

Rasmus Asplund, who hasn't played since Feb. 25, will replace Eakin between Tobias Rieder and Kyle Okposo.

Eakin's penalty-killing prowess has helped the Sabres improve from 30th last season to fifth this year. His 57.5 faceoff percentage ranks first among Sabres who have taken at least 100 draws.

But Eakin, who scored a career-high 22 goals in 2017-18, hasn't produced much offense. Overall, he has compiled four points and a minus-7 rating this season.

"Certainly, his role with us is clear, that maybe not as much of late, but I would say through the first 20 games, multiple games, where he would be matched up against top lines of the other team, would've neutralized possibly some of his offensive risk and or attacking ability," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said on a Zoom call this morning. "But he has been a good penalty killer for us. He has been a good faceoff man for us. He's a character player for us. ...

"We will be speaking to him more about that type of (scoring) input. Moving forward, we do need depth scoring and he can be a very valuable source of that. So we're looking at the different ways that we can bring into the game."

Eakin signed to two-year, \$4.5 million contract after spending last season with the Winnipeg Jets and Vegas Golden Knights.

Asplund has scored one goal in four NHL outings this season. The Swede also registered two assists in three games with the Rochester Americans. He has spent most of the year skating with the taxi squad.

"He left a good mark last time he was in and we need any percentage point of energy we can find and get right now," said Krueger, whose Sabres play a road game Tuesday against the New Jersey Devils.

Asplund, 23, has tried to use the extra time to hone small details in his game. He mentioned he has focused on becoming stronger along the walls and keeping the puck longer.

"Usually you don't get the opportunity during the season to really work on stuff," he said. "Even when I play some games, we have a lot of video to watch, really get into what the small details are that are going to make a difference in my game. So I'm just trying to enjoy it."

In other lineup news, goalie Carter Hutton will face the Capitals inside KeyBank Center, marking the first time he has started consecutive games since Jan. 18-19.

The Sabres will make one change on defense, inserting Matt Irwin for Brandon Davidson. An upper-body injury will sideline center Dylan Cozens for the second straight game.

Meanwhile, Tage Thompson skated at right wing this morning beside center Riley Sheahan and Taylor Hall, so Sam Reinhart moved beside center Eric Staal and Victor Olofsson.

Capitals superstar Alex Ovechkin, who scored his 716th goal on Saturday, needs one more to tie Phil Esposito for the sixth-most in NHL history.

Update: The Sabres this afternoon recalled Asplund from the taxi squad and sent Davidson back to the taxi squad.

Update: The AHL announced today it has postponed Wednesday's Rochester Americans home game against the Syracuse Crunch "out of an abundance of caution in accordance to league COVID-19 protocols."



The Amerks have multiple positive COVID-19 cases, according to The Buffalo News.

COVID-19 problems have forced the league to postpone three Amerks games in the last week. No makeup date was announced for Wednesday's contest.

Krueger said Friday the Amerks went into quarantine, meaning the Sabres can't recall any players from their AHL affiliate right now.

## **Five Observations: Sabres shut out by Washington Capitals 6-0**

By Adam Unger

WKBW

March 15, 2021

**BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW)** — It's been over 120 minutes on the ice since the Sabres have scored a goal. The Washington Capitals trounced Buffalo 6-0 on Monday night at KeyBank Center. Vitek Vanecek made 23 saves in the win.

Alex Ovechkin's lone goal in the contest was the 717th of his career; he's tied with Phil Esposito for the sixth most goals in NHL history. Buffalo hits the road to play the New Jersey Devils tomorrow night.

Five observations from Monday's game:

Both of these types of goals seem to plague the Sabres. There's the late-period goal against that visibly deflates the team and takes all the wind out of their sails. Then, no matter when it occurs, there's the goal that causes a complete collapse from top to bottom for Buffalo.

So which would you rather? Tonight, the answer was, simply, yes.

A shot with horrible angle off the half boards from Evgeny Kuznetsov put Washington on the board just before the end of the first period. Despite getting dominated by Washington, they almost came away unscathed after 20 minutes. Then the wheels fell completely off for the Sabres.

Stop me if you've heard this one before...

Three words: in all alone. It's certainly a byproduct of the Sabres being unable to get out of their own way. It also has to do with abysmal puck management in the neutral zone. But there were countless times that a Capital was just on an island with Carter Hutton.

T.J. Oshie's first period chance was a little lazy. Alex Ovechkin's best chance of the night was saved by a hook from Rasmus Dahlin. Ovi had already cooked Buffalo's prodigal blue-liner. But Washington cashed in plenty on opportunities handed to them by the Sabres in the second period.

Can't fault the goaltending

Carter Hutton is serviceable at best. There's no denying that. Linus Ullmark shows flashes of being an elite goalie, but those are too far and few between. Plus, he's been out for weeks. And for the role he's supposed to play, Joonas Johansson holds his own.

But when Buffalo is getting peppered night in and night out, and egregiously out-possessed, there's only so much they can do. How many breakaway saves is Carter Hutton expected to make? How many cross-crease saves are required when the back door is wide open? They might not be solutions, but what's in front of them is the problem.

Wasted Opportunities

As if getting dominated on the scoreboard, in shot totals, and in possession time wasn't bad enough, the Sabres' best chance was squandered. Jeff Skinner brought it down the right wing as Casey Mittelstadt headed to the net.

Both of them were all alone, and another Sabre wasn't far behind. What transpired next might encapsulate the last four weeks of hockey perfectly...

Jeff Skinner missed the net.

Empty for the final time

Head coach Ralph Krueger boasted about a top-ten record in 2019-20 at home. He also expanded upon the energy that fans bring to KeyBank Center and how much he's missed it. The next time Buffalo plays at home, they have a chance to prove it.

Front-line workers and their guests will make up a crowd of fans on Thursday's game against the Boston Bruins. Saturday will offer the first chance for Sabres fans to buy tickets. There's so much more missing from this team. But maybe a jolt from real fans, instead of ambient fan noise, can help make a difference.

## **Sabres flat in all aspects, lose 6-0 to Capitals**

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

March 15, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Make it 11 straight losses for the Buffalo Sabres. They were shutout once again, the fourth time in this 11-game stretch, and the second time they've scored zero goals in back-to-back games. Players are adamant that the effort is there, it's just not working out in their favor.

"Guys are trying it's not easy right now it's not easy this is not an easy situation," forward Kyle Okposo said.

"Guys care it's just not happening right now right now I don't know how else to put it it's just tough we're in a really tough spot guys are trying and it's just not working I don't know what else to say."

Buffalo was outshot 13-2 in the first period, and didn't get more than 14 shots all game until the 3rd period. Meanwhile, Washington dropped three goals in the 2nd period to add to an already 1-0 lead, giving them a 4-0 advantage going into the final period.

"It's tough to find the energy right now to be honest when you're battling and things aren't going your way," forward Sam Reinhart said. "We just need to dig deeper and get our legs under us and find any bit of energy here because nothing's changing this except for us. "

Ralph Krueger believes his team still has the fight to turn things around.

"...the score obviously is extreme and I don't feel the quit of anybody that's for others to judge what I feel is and engagement in the process a first," Krueger said. "That went radically against us due to mistakes on our part and certainly missed opportunities on the other end we didn't execute the way we needed to against Washington and create offense of chances we gave up six or seven shots opportunities they got the lead in the game ran away from us..."

Sabres move to 6-17-4 and face New Jersey on Tuesday.

## **Ovechkin ties Esposito, Capitals shut out Sabres for fifth straight win**

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

March 15, 2021

**BUFFALO** -- Alex Ovechkin scored his 717th goal to tie Phil Esposito for sixth in NHL history, and the Washington Capitals won their fifth straight game, 6-0 against the Buffalo Sabres at KeyBank Center on Monday.

Ovechkin scored from the slot at 16:21 of the third period to make it 6-0.

"I grew up in Massachusetts watching Phil, so to be able to grow up and watch him and the player he was ... he was an unbelievable player, unbelievable goal scorer," Capitals coach Peter Laviolette said. "Now to get a chance to work with Ovi and have these two guys sitting here at the same number is pretty, pretty incredible. So I am really happy for 'O.' He works hard, and really he takes pride in his game and takes pride in doing the best he can to put that puck on net. It was great to watch him score that goal there."

Ovechkin has scored a goal in three straight games and in four of the past five.

"Obviously, it's nice to be in this company," the 35-year-old left wing said. "I just do what I have to do. I try to use my chances and move on."

Vitek Vanecek made 23 saves for his first NHL shutout for Washington (18-6-4).

"He's played really well for us. I've said it before, he's given us a chance to win on a nightly basis," Laviolette said of the 25-year-old rookie, who is 12-5-3 with a 2.74 goals-against average and .908 save percentage. "He's done a really good job. It's nice for him to get his first shutout, and I thought the guys were really good for two periods, and then he had to work for it a little bit in the third and was able to get it done, and our guys were really happy for him."

Carter Hutton made 24 saves for Buffalo (6-17-4), which was shut out for the second straight game ( and has lost 11 in a row (0-9-2).

"It's not easy right now," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said. "It's not easy, this is not an easy situation. Guys care; it's just not happening right now. I don't know how else to put it. It's just, it's tough. We're in a really tough spot here. Guys are trying, and it's just not working. I don't know what else to say."

Evgeny Kuznetsov scored from the right half-wall three seconds after a power play expired to give the Capitals a 1-0 lead at 18:46 of the first period.

The Sabres had 12 shot attempts in the first period but only two were on goal. They were outshot 13-2 in the period.

"'Hutts' keeps us in it in the first," Buffalo forward Sam Reinhart said. "They get a tough one [after] the power play. After he's making some five or six Grade A scoring opportunities against, he's keeping us in that game."

Nicklas Backstrom swept in the rebound of a T.J. Oshie shot at the side of the net to make it 2-0 at 2:41 of the second period.

Richard Panik made it 3-0 at 5:59 with a one-timer from the top of the left face-off circle.

Daniel Sprong extended it to 4-0 when he scored on a breakaway at 15:07.

"Obviously, a solid shot," Ovechkin said of Sprong, who has scored a goal in three of the past four games. "I always tell him, 'Just shoot the puck and you never know what's going to happen.' I think right now he's on a hot streak and he looks good, and it's good for us."

Garnet Hathaway tipped in defenseman Justin Schultz's shot from the point to make it 5-0 at 6:46 of the third period.

"I think that's been a big problem for us, is burying our offensive opportunities," Okposo said. "I've never seen it through 27 games like the way it's gone with essentially everybody. It's just unfortunate. It's tough, it's tough right now."

NOTES: Ovechkin is 14 goals behind Marcel Dionne for fifth in NHL history (731). ... Schultz, forward Conor Sheary and defenseman Nick Jensen each had two assists for the Capitals. ... Kuznetsov's goal was his 400th NHL point. ... Backstrom played his 984th NHL game, passing Calle Johansson for second in Washington history behind Ovechkin's 1,176. ... The Sabres, who lost 3-0 to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Sunday, have been shut out in consecutive games twice in their past 10 after also losing 3-0 to the Philadelphia Flyers in back-to-back games Feb. 27 and 28. ... Buffalo has not won since Feb. 23 (4-1 at the New Jersey Devils) and has been outscored 46-17 in the 11 consecutive losses.

## **While Ovechkin ties Esposito, Sabres are in a ‘very deep, dark place’**

By James O'Brien

NBC Sports

March 15, 2021

It was more of the same for Alex Ovechkin, and also the Buffalo Sabres, in the Washington Capitals' 6-0 win on Monday.

Ovechkin ties Esposito with 717th goal

For Alex Ovechkin, it was about piling up more milestones. By scoring the 717th regular-season goal of his career, Ovechkin is now tied with Phil Esposito for sixth all-time in NHL history.

This didn't come from "Ovechkin's office," but it felt like an appropriate way to reach 717:

Ovechkin is now 14 goals behind Marcel Dionne, who sits in fifth place.

Wayne Gretzky: 894 goals

Gordie Howe: 801

Jaromir Jagr: 766

Brett Hull: 741

Marcel Dionne: 731

Alex Ovechkin, Phil Esposito: 717

Dark times for Buffalo Sabres

For the Buffalo Sabres, Monday represented another humiliation. We'll leave it to long-suffering Sabres fans if this represents a new low. (Unfortunately, they've been building up a lot of experience with those lows lately.)

Being a footnote as Alex Ovechkin rewrites history already wouldn't be great. To some extent, that wasn't even the most miserable Ovechkin-related Sabres clip of the night, either.

Watch as treasured defenseman Rasmus Dahlin looks lost against Ovechkin, not his only rough moment of the night.

But, hey, it happens. Especially when you're trying to contain Alex Ovechkin.

Either way, this was a hopeless effort for a sputtering Sabres squad. Allowing Ovechkin to tie Esposito is just part of the Sabres making some dubious history.

Overall, the Sabres lost their 11th game in a row, while the Capitals are now on a five-game winning streak.

"It feels like we're in a very deep, dark place right now, and the only way we get into any light is keeping the fight in the team and sticking together," Ralph Krueger said, via The Athletic's John Vogl. "We're not going to get any outside help or pity. This division is ruthless."

Considering how lost the Sabres look, are we sure that Krueger is the one who can find some answers?

## 5 takeaways | Sabres shut out in loss to Capitals

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 15, 2021

Sam Reinhart remained steadfast in his belief in the Buffalo Sabres dressing room following a 6-0 loss to the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center on Monday.

"I love the group of guys," Reinhart said. "Love the coach. The result isn't good enough."

Reinhart echoed the sentiments of fellow alternate captain Kyle Okposo and coach Ralph Krueger, who painted a picture of a team working together to find a path out of its slump but ultimately struggling to string together a positive result.

The Sabres are winless in their last 11 games (0-9-2) and have been shut out in two straight contests.

"Guys care, it's just not happening right now," Okposo said. "I don't know how else to put it. It's just, it's tough. We're in a really tough spot here. Guys are trying and it's just not working."

Here are five takeaways from the game.

### 1. Capitals earn first-period lead

The Capitals played to 13-2 shot advantage during the first period. They were held off the board for most of the period thanks in part to key saves from Carter Hutton, including a breakaway stop on T.J. Oshie.

The Capitals opened the scoring with 1:14 to go in the period, seconds after the conclusion of their first power play, when Evgeny Kuznetsov beat Hutton with a wrist shot from the half wall.

Krueger said the team addressed its own offense during the first intermission, with a focus on trying to generate second chance looks.

"It's absolutely unacceptable," Krueger said. "I mean, we spoke about it after the first. For all the opportunities that were there, we were too complicated, and we need to simplify. I mean, we had multiple opportunities to bring pucks to the net, bodies to the net. We didn't do it."

### 2. Mistakes mount during the second

The game slipped away from the Sabres as mistakes piled up during the second period.

Oshie deked his way past Rasmus Dahlin and Colin Miller on his way to setting up a Nicklas Backstrom goal that made it 2-0. Turnovers led to goals for Richard Panik and Daniel Sprong, the latter of which was scored on a breakaway.

"They got the lead and the game ran away from us," Krueger said.

### 3. Missed chances on offense

Krueger pointed to a 3-on-1 rush that ended with an errant pass from Jeff Skinner to Casey Mittelstadt as a microcosm of the Sabres' woes on scoring chances this season.

"We missed the net on multiple opportunities alone in front of the net, they're putting it right under the crossbar," Krueger said. "That's the difference right now to the final results."

The Sabres finished with an 11-5 edge in high-danger chances, according to NaturalStatTrick.com, but struggled to make life difficult on rookie goaltender Vitek Vanecek. Skinner missed the net on an odd-man rush during the third period. Taylor Hall saw a pass skip off his stick on a potential breakaway.

"I think that's been a big problem for us, is burying our offensive opportunities," Okposo said. "I've never seen it through 27 games like the way it's gone with essentially everybody. It's just unfortunate. It's tough, it's tough right now."



#### 4. Lineup notes

Dylan Cozens missed a second straight game with an upper-body injury. Rasmus Asplund joined the lineup in place of Cody Eakin, who was a healthy scratch, and skated 14:17.

Hutton made his second straight start in net, making 24 saves on 30 shots.

#### 5. The big picture

The Sabres hit the halfway point of the season following Tuesday's game against the New Jersey Devils, a team that will be looking to snap an 11-game winless streak on home ice.

"We have no time to think about this," Krueger said. "What we need to do is react. And we will do that, and we will work towards that now."

## **At The Final Horn: Capitals 6 - Sabres 0**

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

March 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres found themselves without a goal for the second straight game and the sixth time this season in a 6-0 loss to the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center on Monday.

Buffalo is 0-9-2 over the last 11 games and 2-13-2 since returning from a two-week COVID-related pause on February 15.

Carter Hutton made 24 saves for Buffalo.

The Sabres were also shut out on Saturday against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Capitals, meanwhile, have won six in a row and five straight on the road.

Evgeni Kuznetsov, Nicklas Backstrom, Richard Panik, Daniel Sprong, Garnet Hathaway and Alexander Ovechkin scored for Washington. Vitek Vanecek stopped all 23 shots he faced.

### What happened

Hutton built off his strong start on Thursday stopping the first 11 shots he saw in the first period, including a breakaway save on T.J. Oshie five minutes into the game.

However, the 12th shot eluded him, giving the Capitals a 1-0 lead when Kuznetsov wristed in a shot from the right halfwall with 1:14 remaining in the period. A Sabres penalty had expired seconds before the puck found the back of the net. Washington outshot Buffalo 13-2 through 20 minutes.

The Capitals jumped out to a 3-0 with a pair of goals in 3:18 to start the second period.

Backstrom knocked in a rebound from an Oshie chance 2:41 into the period and then Panik snapped a one-timer from about 46 feet out, giving the Capitals a three-goal edge.

With 4:53 remaining in the second, Sprong roofed one in on a breakaway.

Justin Schultz's point shot through traffic was deflected in by Hathaway at the 6:46 mark of the third period.

Ovechkin netted his goal with 3:39 remaining in regulation.

### Worth mentioning

With his goal, Ovechkin tied Phil Esposito for sixth on the NHL's all-time scoring list with 717 goals.

The Sabres nearly had a four-minute power play midway through the second period. Curtis Lazar was bleeding from the mouth after a collision with Zdeno Chara and the officials booked the Capitals defenseman with a double-minor for high sticking. However, just before the puck was dropped to commence the man advantage, the officials took another look on video replay.

They then ruled that Chara's skate - not his stick - clipped Lazar as he fell to the ice behind the net and they rescinded the penalty.

### Coming up

Buffalo faces the New Jersey Devils on the road tomorrow night. Faceoff from Prudential Center is scheduled for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550 with pregame coverage starting at 6:30 on MSG.

## **Sabres recall Asplund, loan Davidson to taxi squad**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 15, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have recalled defenseman Rasmus Asplund from the taxi squad. Defenseman Brandon Davidson has been loaned to the taxi squad.

Sabres coach Ralph Krueger announced Monday morning that Asplund will join the lineup against the Washington Capitals in place of Cody Eakin, who will be a healthy scratch.

Asplund has scored one goal in four games this season. He has skated with the taxi squad since last appearing against New Jersey on Feb. 25.

"I think it's a really good experience for me mentally to come in every day and try to get better and work on stuff and small details," Asplund said.

Coverage on Monday begins at 6:30 p.m. on MSG. The puck drops at 7.

## Morning Skate | Asplund to join lineup vs. Washington

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 15, 2021

Rasmus Asplund will step into the lineup in place of Cody Eakin when the Buffalo Sabres host the Washington Capitals at KeyBank Center on Monday.

Asplund has appeared in four games for Buffalo this season. He has skated with the taxi squad since last appearing against New Jersey on Feb. 25.

"We've spoken about potential rotations and making sure players that are really working hard in the taxi squad get opportunity to bring energy into the team," Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said. "Cody will be sitting out today's game and we're pleased to see Rasmus Asplund back in."

Eakin has four points (1+3) in 26 games this season. He has been deployed largely in a defensive role, checking other teams' top lines and contributing on the penalty kill, though Krueger said the team will be looking for more offensive contributions from him in the absence of captain Jack Eichel.

"He has been a good penalty killer for us," Krueger said. "He has been a good faceoff man for us. He's a character player for us. ... We will be speaking to him more about that type of (offensive) input. Moving forward, we do need depth scoring and he can be a very valuable source of that. So, we're looking at the different ways that we can bring into the game."

The Sabres are seeking to snap a 10-game winless streak (0-8-2) that continued with a shutout loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins at home on Thursday.

"We need to get going," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "I feel like we need one win and we relieve the pressure in the team and then maybe we can put some more wins together."

### The lineup

Matt Irwin will join the lineup on defense, replacing Brandon Davidson. Carter Hutton was the first goaltender off the ice at the morning skate, suggesting he'll make his second straight start.

Here's how the Sabres lined up in full:

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

78 Jacob Bryson - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
44 Matt Irwin - 62 Brandon Montour  
26 Rasmus Dahlin - 33 Colin Miller

### Scouting the Capitals

Alex Ovechkin is on the precipice of history once again, one goal shy of tying Phil Esposito for sixth on the NHL's all-time list (717). Marcel Dionne is fifth at 731.

"When his chances come, and they always come here and there, he is as aggressive on those chances as if it's his last opportunity every time," Krueger said. "What an example of finishing. Not only does he have the skill, but he has the grit that goes with it all the time."

Ovechkin scored his 10th goal of the season in a 5-4 win for the Capitals over Philadelphia on Saturday, their fourth victory in a row and eighth in the past nine games.

### Tune in

Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m. You can also listen to the game on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7.