



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 2, 2021*

## **Buffalo takes on New York on 3-game slide**

Associated Press

March 1, 2021

Buffalo Sabres (6-10-3, eighth in the East Division) vs. New York Rangers (7-9-3, sixth in the East Division)

New York; Tuesday, 7 p.m. EST

**BOTTOM LINE:** Buffalo looks to stop its three-game slide with a victory against New York.

The Rangers are 7-9-3 against division opponents. New York averages 10.6 penalty minutes per game, the fifth-most in the NHL. Brendan Lemieux leads the team serving 32 total minutes.

The Sabres are 6-10-3 against the rest of their division. Buffalo serves 5.1 penalty minutes per game, the least in the league. Jacob Bryson leads them averaging 1.3.

In their last meeting on Jan. 28, New York won 3-2.

**TOP PERFORMERS:** Chris Kreider leads the Rangers with nine goals and has 11 points. Ryan Strome has four goals and five assists over the last 10 games for New York.

Jack Eichel leads the Sabres with 12 total assists and has 14 points. Sam Reinhart has four goals and four assists over the last 10 games for Buffalo.

**LAST 10 GAMES:** Rangers: 4-5-1, averaging 2.4 goals, 4.3 assists, 4.9 penalties and 12.4 penalty minutes while giving up 2.4 goals per game with a .924 save percentage.

Sabres: 2-7-1, averaging 1.7 goals, 3.2 assists, 2.3 penalties and 4.8 penalty minutes while giving up 2.8 goals per game with a .912 save percentage.

**INJURIES:** Rangers: Justin Richards: out (health protocols), Alexandar Georgiev: day to day (undisclosed), Kaapo Kakko: out (covid-19), Filip Chytil: out (upper body), Jacob Trouba: out (thumb).

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

## **Travis Yost's Sabre Metrics: Among the many problems, the third line is unwatchable**

By Travis Yost  
The Buffalo News  
March 2, 2021

Travis Yost has been involved in the world of hockey analytics for a decade and is part of TSN's Hockey Analytics team. Prior to joining TSN, Yost was a contributor at the Ottawa Citizen, the Sporting News and NHL Numbers, and he has been a consultant for an NHL franchise. He will be contributing breakdowns on the Buffalo Sabres for The Buffalo News. Follow Yost on Twitter: @travisyost.

In the pantheon of questionable decisions, the vacillation between the fourth line and healthy scratches for Buffalo Sabres forward Jeff Skinner probably takes the cake. But the refusal to disassemble the third line isn't far behind.

An enigmatic season ripe with poor puck luck in the offensive zone, torturous defensive zone mistakes and even some creeping lethargy has put coach Ralph Krueger on the hot seat. Whether Krueger is to blame for this season's slow start is up for debate – there are coaching decisions to pick at (and I certainly will again here), but it's hard to look at the roster that's been built and think it is playoff caliber in any division. To that end, I'm a bit sympathetic that Krueger has been dealt a tough hand and is trying to make sense of the pieces he has.

But a head coach does not need to pour gasoline on the fire of mistakes started by the front offices of the past. The organizational decision to slow and sit Skinner remains inexplicable. They probably could get away with it if the top line were scoring, or if the bottom six wasn't getting routinely caved in.

The scoring for Buffalo's first unit will come around at some point. They continue to generate high volumes of offensive zone opportunities, and those same forwards are responsible for a blistering first power play unit. On the other hand, there is nothing to like about the Sabres' third line.

The third line, by and large, has drawn against tough competition. That's called a coaching decision. It has not been a fruitful one.

Krueger continues to deploy Cody Eakin – generally with Tobias Rieder and Kyle Okposo, though Casey Mittelstadt was given an opportunity during Sunday's game against Philadelphia – with high regularity. Not only is the third line consistently drawing defensive zone matchups against better competition, they are playing less than 12 minutes a night at 5-on-5 – around the ice time we would see from Colorado's Nazem Kadri, Tampa Bay's Tyler Johnson and the New York Rangers' Chris Kreider.

The numbers have been disastrous. There isn't another way to say it.

Here is what Buffalo has received from the third line over the course of the season – I'll address the underlying numbers here, but keep in mind we are also talking about a trio that has scored one goal together in 100 5-on-5 minutes.

A decent third line can fight its way to break even over the course of the season, and strong third lines end up taking the run of play to their opponents more often than not. We see this with the Cody Glass line in Vegas, the Jason Spezza line in Toronto, the white-hot Vincent Trocheck line in Carolina. I bring up just a handful of these examples because it is readily achievable when you have deep and competent lineups.

With little confidence from the current coaching staff and no apparent push from the front office to reverse course, Skinner has found himself with a rather immaterial role.

You cannot survive in the modern era of hockey when you have three players getting tuned to 34% expected goals and 43% of shot differentials. And letting them try to figure it out over time, especially considering all three are coming off disappointing seasons, seems suicidal. And even in the minutes where Krueger has tried something different – be it from injury or just usual line tinkering, such as the move to append Mittelstadt to the likes of Eakin and Rieder instead of Okposo – has meant very little. The split numbers are not much better.

This is an issue that needs to be fixed by the front office. There are only so many buttons that Krueger can push, and the bottom six is again limited in talent. But keeping this group together is to accept failure. Krueger's options might be limited, but they aren't zero. Perhaps Krueger could give more minutes for a youngster such as Dylan Cozens, or even try out a player who averages a goal every three games in his career.

Keeping the core part of this line together, though, is not tenable.

Data via NaturalStatTrick, NHL.com, Evolving Hockey

## **Sabres Notebook: First game with fans is Tuesday in MSG**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres will play a game in front of fans for the first time in nearly a year Tuesday when they meet the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden.

Under Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's plan of 10% attendance in New York State venues, 1,800 fans are allowed for games – all of whom will have registered a negative Covid-19 test. They returned for the first time Friday night in a 6-2 win over Boston.

"It sounded like 20,000 fans, not 2,000," Rangers defenseman Adam Fox said after the win.

"I don't think anybody expected the impact they had," added coach David Quinn.

The Sabres announced last week that they will have fans in KeyBank Center for select games beginning March 20 against Boston. The team has yet to announce ticketing or testing details. They have not played in front of spectators since their shootout win over Washington on March 9, 2020, the final game before last season was suspended. The New York Islanders are also planning for fans in Nassau Coliseum under Cuomo's rules, but not in time for the three games against the Sabres this week that start Thursday.

The Pittsburgh Penguins and Philadelphia Flyers announced Monday that they will be bringing fans back under Pennsylvania guidelines, and the Sabres have six games left at PPG Paints Arena and Wells Fargo Center, respectively. At 15% capacity, the Penguins are planning for 2,800 fans Tuesday night against the Flyers. Buffalo is in Philadelphia on March 9 in the finale of this road trip.

The Sabres opted to stay off the ice Monday and travel to New York. With four games in six days, they'll also take a CBA-mandated day off Wednesday.

The Rangers do not expect to have star Artemi Panarin in the lineup Tuesday. He has been on a leave of absence after claims of a 2011 assault of an 18-year-old woman surfaced in his native Russia.

### A streak for Lafreniere

No. 1 overall pick Alexis Lafreniere is on the first two-game point streak of his career for the Rangers after collecting an assist in each game of the weekend split against Boston.

Lafreniere's only point in his first 15 games was his overtime goal Jan. 28 in KeyBank Center. He scored his second goal Feb. 20 at Washington and has two goals and two assists in 19 games while averaging 14:37 per outing.

"There's always pressure, but I try to focus on myself a lot and not think about it too much," Lafreniere told New York reporters after practice Monday. "My last game before the season was, maybe, 10 months ago. I had to get my game shape back.

"I think I like the way I'm playing recently, I had not the best start I would say. But I'm getting more comfortable out there and I'm making more plays. Just keep working hard in practices and games."

### Sabre points

- With Linus Ullmark out for at least a month, the Sabres did not claim veteran goalie Alex Stalock on waivers Monday from Minnesota. Stalock, a 20-game winner for the Wild last year who has been battling an upper-body injury, was claimed by Edmonton.
- The Sabres reassigned defenseman Brandon Davidson to the taxi squad. He's averaged 14:06 and posted a minus-1 rating in his three games.

- The back-to-back shutouts by Philadelphia here on Saturday and Sunday marked the first time in the Flyers' 54-year history that they posted shutouts in consecutive games on the road. They blanked Ottawa and Washington in back-to-back road games in 1999, but those wins had a home loss to Toronto in the middle. The wins were the Flyers' first back-to-back shutouts since wins over Florida and Chicago in 2015.
- Brian Elliott's shutout Saturday left his stellar career numbers against the Sabres at 15-2-2, 1.69/.944. Since entering the Jan. 18 game against Buffalo after nearly 32 minutes of play, Elliott has stopped 76 of 78 shots against the Sabres (0.79/.974).

## **Mike Harrington: With Ralph Krueger's credibility shot, Sabres again in a coaching bind**

By Mike Harrington  
The Buffalo News  
March 1, 2021

It feels as if there's no way Ralph Krueger can be the coach of the Buffalo Sabres next year. Heck, you can make the easy case he shouldn't be the coach Tuesday night in New York.

There was an unusual delay before Krueger appeared on his postgame video call following Sunday's snoozer against Philadelphia. I was legitimately wondering if General Manager Kevyn Adams was going to pop on the screen instead to announce Krueger's dismissal.

Think back to 1991. That's what happened at the Aud. After a dismal loss to St. Louis, GM Gerry Meehan made an unexpected appearance in the media room to announce Rick Dudley was out and John Muckler was in.

You can fire Krueger on hockey reasons and you would be justified. But there's a bigger issue at play now: Just like ownership and a neophyte GM who has disappeared from view despite numerous media outlets seeking comment, Krueger has a credibility problem.

In his case, it's gone, at least in the public eye.

The fans are done with Krueger, like they are with just about everything else surrounding this inept franchise. In the wake of a series of missteps by Krueger in the last week, the media can no longer believe anything he says. Back-to-back shutout stinkers to Philadelphia over the weekend gave off the distinct aroma that the players have checked out on him.

And it sure seems Krueger's captain was less than pleased with him after Sunday's game.

Jack Eichel, believed to be mostly in Krueger's corner, hurt his foot/ankle during a collision with Nico Hischier on Tuesday night in New Jersey. Through the binoculars from high above Prudential Center, I watched Eichel standing and flexing his foot on the bench during a television timeout.

Eichel didn't take the morning skate Thursday, with Krueger saying he was taking the workout off for maintenance. No issue. Happens all the time. Eichel appeared at night to take the pregame warmup fully, including rushes with his line, but was then announced as a scratch a couple of minutes before faceoff.

Again, sometimes that happens. But after the game, Krueger emphatically told the media – twice – that Eichel was injured in the warmup, and that his absence in the game wasn't related to his absence in the morning.

"It definitely caught us all by surprise," Krueger said. "This was a completely new development. None of us had seen or heard of the situation."

But asked after Sunday's game how he hurt himself in the warmup, a stern Eichel responded, "I didn't. I hurt myself in New Jersey."

When the issue of miscommunication or some warped gamesmanship was brought up to Krueger, the coach stammered nonsense.

"It turns out there were multiple lower-body injuries. Whatever," Krueger said. "The point is he came out of Jersey hurt. The warmup call and the region that ended up being aggravated, it was his first time back on his skates since that game and now it changed the game and we're working on his health and getting him fit again."

Say what?

With Eichel a late scratch, Krueger put Tage Thompson in the lineup instead of Jeff Skinner. Thompson was dressed and skating in the warmup and Skinner wasn't. Bad decision. Another layer to the Skinner drama.

Krueger told reporters last week that Will Borgen was day to day and it turned out he had a fractured hand and needed surgery. Maybe the medical staff isn't communicating with the coach properly or maybe the coach is stretching the bounds of truth.

It seems like if a player is out long term (Jake McCabe, Linus Ullmark, Rasmus Ristolainen), we get the goods. If he isn't, Krueger goes into deception mode, assuming he has the accurate information. Hey, if a coach doesn't want to give up injury timetables, that's fine. Just say so. Knock off the fibs.

Earlier in the week, Krueger said he was unaware that Don Meehan, Skinner's agent, had been talking to Adams about his client's lack of playing time. But the next day, Krueger went on an unprompted discussion of how he's in concert with Adams and speaks to him multiple times a day.

So are we to believe the GM didn't tell his coach that Skinner's agent is unhappy? Seriously?

Krueger's coaching logic isn't doing much better.

What happened to his postgame thought from Saturday that he wanted to "inject some energy" into the team Sunday? He scratched Dylan Cozens, one forward who was actually making something happen, and gave Kyle Okposo the second-most ice time at 5 on 5 behind Eichel.

That's Kyle Okposo, wonderful human being but holder of zero goals and one point for his \$6 million contract.

The greatest indictment of Krueger's offensive system, as everyone has learned the last few weeks, is the club's abysmal scoring rate at 5 on 5. We all know it's bad. You probably didn't know it's historically inept.

The Sabres have 21 goals at even strength in 19 games, a pathetic rate of 1.11 per game. Only six times this season have they scored more than one in a game, which is mind-boggling when you consider this is a roster featuring all kinds of high draft picks.

Even worse than that, it's a lower rate than the two seasons that ownership and management actually wanted this team to lose.

In 2013-14, the Sabres scored 96 goals at 5-on-5 in 82 games, a rate of 1.17 per game. In 2014-15 – when seemingly everyone in the arena and across town was all-in for Connor McDavid and didn't care about franchise dignity – that number was at 1.34.

Remember, they built a team to lose those two years. No excuse for what's going on this year. The players are underachieving and the coaches have no answers.

Skinner, by the way, has now gone more than a year without a goal, since Feb. 29, 2020. That's 20 games, of which 19 of them have seen him collect no points. Okposo has gone 21 games without scoring, since Feb. 23, 2020. He has three points in that span.

It is hard to fathom where the Sabres go from here. Krueger is signed through next year at a rate that Pierre LeBrun of TSN and the Athletic reported was around \$4 million. Ownership has shown a willingness to pay coaches and GMs not to work, but how can they do that now amid the pandemic and virtually no revenue coming in?

But the Sabres have 19 games left this season against Boston, Pittsburgh and Washington and three games on the road this week against the New York Islanders.

How bad is this going to get and how can Krueger possibly survive?



## **OPINION: Another year, another tire fire**

By Howard Simon

WGR 550 SportsRadio

March 1, 2021

Now I know how Ryan O'Reilly felt.

My love of hockey has also taken a beating thanks to the Buffalo Sabres.

I didn't have playoff expectations going into this season, but I was pretty confident the Sabres would stay close enough to the pack that we'd finally see meaningful games in the month of March. That should not have been a big ask since the season didn't begin until mid-January.

But here we are, going from February to March, and the Sabres' 2020-21 campaign is over.

The way the Sabres played during the weekend losses to the Philadelphia Flyers, it sure seemed like the players feel it's over too. Granted, they were without their best player on Saturday, their No. 1 goalie is out for a month, and one of their top-two defensemen is out of the lineup for the rest of the season, but let's face it: The Sabres have looked out of it since they came back from their COVID-19 pause in mid-February.

The team is not winning games, the big guns aren't scoring, and one of the few proven goal scorers, who has yet to net a goal this season, was recently a healthy scratch in three straight games.

Fun, huh?

Unfortunately, losing is nothing new for the Sabres franchise.

We recently marked the 10th anniversary of Terry and Kim Pegula purchasing the Sabres, and the first decade of their ownership couldn't have gone much worse. When they took over in February of 2011, the Sabres produced a late-season push that earned them a playoff spot.

As you well know, that was the last time the franchise was in the postseason. If this edition of the Sabres doesn't have a miraculous turnaround, they will equal a National Hockey League record by missing out on the playoffs for a 10th-straight season. Since the Pegulas took over, the Sabres are 30th in points in the NHL.

Following the Rigas ownership, which ended with them going to jail, and the budgetary constraints of the Tom Golisano period, it felt like the dawn of a new era when the Pegulas took control. Paychecks would no longer bounce and the Sabres would now have money to keep their best players.

However, it didn't translate into winning. The Pegulas have hired three general managers and five head coaches, and the Kevyn Adams/Ralph Krueger pairing doesn't look any better than the previous general manager/head coach tandems.

When Lindy Ruff was here, he used to talk about a hope tank. I have to tell you my hope tank has been steadily drained over the years. If the Sabres were a car, the light came on a while ago and I'm just driving around on fumes, at this point.

I can usually find a way to have some hope or belief. I'm a New York Mets fan, so I have a lot of experience when it comes to convincing myself.

In case you forgot, we went through a 17-season playoff drought with the Buffalo Bills. General managers came and went, head coaches were fired every three years, and quarterback-after-quarterback proved to be average, at best. Now the Bills are a Super Bowl contender with strong management, good coaches and a very talented young quarterback.

It doesn't seem like that will ever happen with the Sabres, who have been plagued by bad personnel decisions, subpar coaching, and a roster that isn't good enough, despite the fact they've been picking in the top-10 of the NHL Draft for the last eight years.

If the Sabres can't make the playoffs in a season where the league actually had 24 of its 31 teams advance and if they can essentially be out of a playoff race one-third of the way into a 56-game schedule, I'm not sure when they will ever play for Lord Stanley's Cup again.

There have been stretches in recent seasons where you might have thought the Sabres' fortunes were about to change, but they were just stretches of short-term success.

Last season, they got off to an 8-1-1 start, but still missed out on the playoffs in a pandemic-shortened schedule.

Remember the 10-game winning streak two years ago? They were finding different ways to win, the games were exciting, fans were happy. Twitter was a great place to be during the games, and it was all amazing. However, they lost five-straight after the win streak, the season would go down the tubes and the head coach would be fired.

Of course, this does mean there is less stress in my life.

I watch Sabres games devoid of emotion. The last time I was emotionally invested in the outcome of their games was the tank season. I've come to expect losing from the Sabres no matter what roster changes were made in the offseason, or who is behind the bench, or who is in charge of the front office.

I find myself looking for other games to watch, so I can enjoy the NHL product. Sad to say, I was more excited about the Toronto Maple Leafs-Edmonton Oilers game on NHL Network on Saturday night than the Sabres' weekend series with the Flyers.

Wait, it could actually get worse.

I don't even want to consider it, but unless things change fast, the speculation about Jack Eichel wanting out after the season will only intensify.

As bad as things have been over the last 10 years, at least we have been able to watch Eichel for half of the time. If I were him, I would certainly want out, because I'd be tired of the losing. He's seen former teammates like O'Reilly and Zach Bogosian go elsewhere and win a Stanley Cup.

I don't know what would keep him here, other than the team refusing to trade him if, indeed, he made such a request.

Someone recently called our show and asked, "When will all of this change?"

The answer is: I have no idea, and it might get even worse before it possibly gets better.

Darcy Regier wasn't kidding when he said to prepare for some suffering.

## **Inside Sabres TV road games, broadcast from home: 'It's just really bizarre'**

By John Vogl

The Athletic

March 2, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. – Dan Dunleavy sees the scoring chance coming and his eyes widen. The Sabres announcer leans closer to the play, his voice grows louder and the inflection makes it clear this is one thrilling moment.

For a guy who's simply watching television, there's a lot going on.

Like all the folks who tune in for Buffalo's road games, Dunleavy and analyst Rob Ray are nowhere near the action. They're in the KeyBank Center press box watching on flat screens as the Sabres skate 400 miles away.

Despite the distance, bringing viewers close to the ice remains the goal.

"It's different, but once you get going, the game is the game," Dunleavy said. "We are all here to entertain people. You could just sit back and be kind of, 'Oh, you know, I'm just watching on TV.'"

"No, it's the Buffalo Sabres playing hockey tonight. You've got a whole city that, even as disappointed as they are in the way things have gone, they're still watching. You want to convey that with your call."

Though a few hiccups are obvious in a season shaped by COVID-19, the crew that brings in some of the NHL's top ratings is pleased with the broadcasts. Many viewers remain unaware or forget the announcers aren't on site, even though the team isn't hiding it.

"Everybody's readjusted and pivoted to make it as seamless as possible," said Chrisanne Bellas, the Sabres' vice president of media and content. "The fact that people don't know is always interesting to me."

The NHL's coronavirus protocols have bumped broadcasters, producers, directors and replay technicians from team charters. The league has also established universal feeds for home and road teams, eliminating the need for commercial travel and its accompanying risks.

So, while the Sabres are in New Jersey or Philadelphia, the announcers are in a quiet arena at the foot of Jim Kelley Way. Dunleavy and Ray are socially distanced in their own booths, but they can see each other through a glass wall and the newly installed partitions that hang from the ceiling.

After jointly recording the game's opening segment, they go to work in their own way.

Dunleavy sits with his back to the arena bowl. A big-screen TV in front of him streams the same feed that fans see from their couch. A smaller monitor usually has identical angles but also shows upcoming replays selected by the producer and director. Dunleavy has a laptop propped on two wooden stools that he uses to check notes he accumulated for every player or view the in-game stats since he doesn't have a scoreboard or shot counter.

While this is a new world for many play-by-play men, Dunleavy has experience announcing sports off a monitor. He's called Olympic soccer and downhill skiing while seated across the globe.

"My expectations were we'd be able to pull it off and do a really good job," he said. "First of all, you're all happy you're back working, happy the league is going, so you're excited. You'll call a game anywhere."

And it's still live action. Though it's on a screen, these moments are happening in real time and need a voice to enhance or accompany them.

"Because it's your job and what you do, you very easily get drawn into the game," Dunleavy said. "You're excited and you're hoping for good things to happen. For me personally, even for the opposition, I just like to see good hockey and exciting hockey. We could be sitting on our couch anywhere, watching a good game even if the Sabres weren't involved, and it's something that just gets you intrigued."

Buffalo's exciting moments echo through viewers' TV speakers and the empty arena. Bellas works across the rink from Dunleavy in the 200 Level, where studio hosts Brian Duff and Martin Biron handle the intermission segments.

"Sometimes I'll be turning around doing something and I hear Dan, then I quickly turn and look at the monitor because I could tell by his intonation that something's going on," she said.

Dunleavy's headset includes the synthetic fan noise that's played inside home arenas. He likes to be fully immersed in the sights and sounds of what's going on there. But when he takes the headset off during commercial breaks, a cold reality strikes.

"You turn around and there's an empty building behind you," he said. "You'll just sit here and there is no energy anywhere. There's dead silence. There's not a pin drop. Nothing.

"It's just really bizarre."

Ray faces the empty seats throughout the game. He's got two small monitors in front him, which mirror Dunleavy's setup with one showing the game and the other previewing replays. It's a gargantuan change for the color commentator, who has always called games from ice level between the benches.

"I hated being up top to begin with because you get a better feel for the game when you're down low," Ray said from the press box. "Up here, I find that I see too much negative. The game is slower from up here. You see all the negatives. When you're down there, you miss a lot of that."

Two things affect Dunleavy's call most. Because the audio transmission reaches his headset before the video hits his screen, he'll hear a puck ring the post or a whistle blow and not know what's next. Did the puck clang iron and ricochet home or float harmlessly away? And is the whistle for a penalty, an offside call or is someone hurt off screen?

"I did mention a couple times, 'Play is stopped and I've got to be honest, I'm not sure why,'" Dunleavy said. "And I'm sure everyone at home is thinking the same thing."

The biggest impediment for Dunleavy and Ray is their inability to see the entire ice. Top play-by-play calls rely on anticipation. If Dunleavy sees Jack Eichel jump over the boards as Rasmus Dahlin begins a long clearing pass, he can prepare. But with the camera focused only on the puck carrier during road games, Dunleavy has no idea where or to whom a pass might go.

"I watch games, and you can tell the crews that are at home when you see a broadcast," he said. "If you hear the Vegas crew calling a game in Vegas, you can tell they're in their rink."

Part of Ray's job as color commentator is to provide insight into what's happening behind the play. Is there a scuffle? Was someone slow on a line change, which resulted in the opposition's scoring chance? Since he can't see it, he can't say it.

Ideally, there'd be an additional wide-angle camera set up in one end of the home arenas. It would stream to another monitor, allowing the announcers to glance over and see what's going on away from the normal broadcast.

"I could do everything that I have to do on a screen that shows the whole ice instead of being close to a player and watching the puck move," Ray said. "It all depends on the camera work in the building. The play could be here and the referee could be there, and you don't see his arm going up for a penalty or you don't see what the penalty was.

"You miss so much."

The viewing limitations extend to the two broadcast trucks, which are parked in the back lot of KeyBank Center.

"When we're the road team, we're limited to how many cameras we have access to," said producer Joe Pinter. "Basically, we're recording four sources instead of 10."

In a normal year, the home and road teams have a full complement of cameramen. With only one universal feed, the number of workers and angles has been cut in half.

The host producers run the main feed. They obviously want to give their local viewers the best show possible, so the majority of camera angles focus on the home team. But the longtime producers for teams in the East Division have been friends for years, so they keep the road team in mind as much as possible.

"We've taken it upon ourselves to help each other out," Pinter said. "We went into this saying, 'I've got to give you four broadcasts and you've got to give me four, so let's do the right thing so all eight are good.'

"We've all rearranged the way we produce games to make it easier for the visiting feed to take the broadcast."

The road team's producers and directors still have a say in how their broadcast turns out.

"We've got one camera that we control on-site where we literally have a phone line so he can hear us and we can direct him to do whatever we need," Pinter said. "If their producer wants to show a replay and it's pertinent to what we're doing, we'll just take his feed and show the replays. But if they're doing something with a sponsor that we're not going to carry, that's when we'll go to our camera and programming."

The replays can be tricky for Ray. While he's in near-constant communication with Pinter through a headset, there are times when they know the theme of an upcoming replay but haven't seen the actual moment.

"Joe will get in your ear and say, 'You'll have an Eichel replay,'" Ray said. "'What of?' 'We don't know.'

"Boom, they send it right back to you. It pops up. Normally, Joe would have time to briefly tell you what it was about. Now you're sitting there and it's playing and you've got to try to figure out what it is. You can't see numbers on the jerseys half the time, so it's hard to tell who they are."

It's also impossible to tell what players are thinking. When Dunleavy and Ray accompany the Sabres on road trips, they chat with players in the dressing room or hotel. There's no in-person access for any media this season, so they've lost the anecdotes that add spice to the broadcast.

"We do better storytelling if we get one guy from each team for just five minutes," Dunleavy said. "Even if we don't talk hockey, now you can relate you had a conversation with Jack Hughes today and say, 'He seems like a really good kid,' or whatever you take from that conversation.

"And then, yeah, you just miss the atmosphere in the building. To be there and feel it, we all feed off the energy."

But, for the foreseeable future when the Sabres head out of town, he'll get his buzz from a TV screen. It still makes for a good show, but the job is way sweeter when the announcers are watching games in person.

At least that still happens for half of their nights in Buffalo's arena.

"I'll give it the same inflection, the same professionalism for road games, as will Rob, but now we've got a hockey game in front of us," Dunleavy said. "It's like someone's showing you the cake on the baking show and you're like, 'Ohhhh, I can imagine what that tastes like.' Then for home games someone actually brings the cake to the arena and you can dig into it and say, 'Ohhh, I knew I liked that.'

"Either way, as soon as the sounds come into my headset, it feels like a normal night."

## **Why is Sabres captain Jack Eichel having such a down season?**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 2, 2021

**BUFFALO** – Three weeks ago, Sabres captain Jack Eichel felt confident he would shake off his underwhelming start and, in his words, begin to “take off.”

Eichel, understandably, had trouble adjusting to the dizzying pace of the schedule earlier this season.

An upper-body injury sidelined him the first five days of an abbreviated training camp. Then he played 10 games in 18 days following barely a week of practice.

So the COVID-19 pause that began Feb. 2 helped refresh Eichel, who used the time off to rest his body and study video of his exploits from last season.

But Eichel, 24, hasn’t resembled his old self since the season resumed. In seven outings – a lower-body injury shelved him two games last week – he has registered zero goals and three assists.

In 17 games this season entering tonight’s road contest against the New York Rangers, Eichel has scored only two goals and 14 points. His shooting percentage is just 3.8. Last season, it was 15.9%.

Incredibly, Eichel has mustered only one goal and five points at even strength.

Instead of solidifying his place among the NHL’s elite centers, Eichel might be enduring the worst season of his career. It certainly looks like it could be the most turbulent.

On Feb. 22, the night before he suffered a lower-body injury, Sabres coach Ralph Krueger said Eichel wasn’t playing hurt.

“For me, it’s a confidence factor and he needs to stick with it and persevere here,” Krueger said following the Sabres’ 3-2 loss to the New York Islanders.

So why hasn’t Eichel looked anything like the player who generated MVP chatter while scoring 36 goals and 78 points in 68 games last season?

A scout who has watched Eichel throughout his career said he believes the lack of personal and team success is weighing on him. By now, after six seasons, he was supposed to have helped them morph into a perennial Stanley Cup contender.

Instead, he has yet to sniff the postseason. Considering the Sabres rank last in the loaded East Division, their playoff drought will likely hit 10 seasons, a stunning number that would tie the NHL record.

Naturally, Eichel’s confidence has suffered.

“He looks to me like an unhappy camper,” the scout said. “I have noticed it more this year. It’s my guess he knows it’s not working here. Yeah, he’s been nicked up a bit with some injuries, but nothing that should be keeping him at two goals.”

When Eichel was a surprise scratch after skating in Thursday’s pregame warm-up, it was believed the injury he suffered Tuesday in New Jersey kept him from playing. While he finished the 4-1 win against the Devils, he appeared to hurt his ankle or foot in a collision with Nico Hischier. But following Thursday’s 4-3 overtime loss to New Jersey, Krueger said Eichel suffered a different injury in the warm-up.

Then after Sunday afternoon’s 3-0 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers, Eichel said he was hurt Tuesday.

Why aren’t Eichel and Krueger on the same page?

Krueger said Sunday there was no miscommunication over Eichel's injury and he did not hide it for a bit of gamesmanship.

His answer, however, was puzzling.

"When I mentioned it, the specific region that actually took him out of the game the first time I'd heard about it was warm-up," Krueger said. "But that he was injured and he came out of the Jersey game injured was clear to me. But it turns out there were multiple lower-body injuries and whatever. The point is that he came out of Jersey hurt.

"The warm-up call and the region that ended up being aggravated, it was his first time back in his skates that game and it changed the game. Now we're working on his health and getting him fit again. I definitely didn't do gamesmanship there; it was just that we had hoped he was going to play that game."

Notes: The Edmonton Oilers claimed goalie Alex Stalock on Monday. There was speculation the Sabres might be interested in him because a lower-body injury will sideline No. 1 goalie Linus Ullmark at least one month. ... The Sabres sent defenseman Brandon Davidson back to the taxi squad on Monday. ... The Sabres did not practice Monday.

## **Hamilton: Sabres don't have the players to execute Ralph Krueger's system**

By Paul Hamilton

WGRZ

March 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Sabres have lost six straight games at home, but none worse than the two they dropped to the Philadelphia Flyers over the weekend.

All I keep hearing about is how talented this group is offensively yet they didn't score on the Flyers all weekend and have been shutout by a weak defensive team in three straight games.

I think the time has come to say this team is not all that talented. They are 29th in the 31-team NHL in goal scoring and are quite a bit worse than last season.

There comes a time in a player's career where he no longer can score goals and it's possible Jeff Skinner has hit that point. Skinner hasn't scored in 20 games and has just 18 goals in his last 100 games.

James Neal scored 25 goals for the Vegas Golden Knights back in 2017-18. Since then he had seven for the Calgary Flames, 19 for Edmonton Oilers and has two this season for the Oilers.

In 2011-12 Matt Moulson netted 36 goals for the New York Islanders. His next year he had 15 for New York followed by 17 for the Islanders and the Sabres. After that it was 13, 8 and 14.

Corey Perry had 34 for the Anaheim Ducks in 2015-16. In 2018-19 he scored six for the Ducks and only had five for the Dallas Stars the next season.

Anyway, this isn't just a case of bad luck. Bad luck doesn't last for two years. Taylor Hall hasn't scored in 18 games, Jack Eichel hasn't scored in nine games and has two goals all season and Eric Staal hasn't scored in 10 games. Cody Eakin has one goal in 19 games. Skinner, Kyle Okposo, Brandon Montour and Tage Thompson are all zero for the season.

The whole weekend was unacceptable. Rasmus Dahlin said, "I'm very embarrassed. This is not acceptable, this sucks, it's the worst."

The whole team should be embarrassed. Ralph Krueger should be embarrassed that he employs a system that the players on this team aren't capable of executing. Good coaches adjust to what they have but Krueger said, "The principles of play or the core structure that we're searching for we embrace. There's no negotiation that it works in the National Hockey League and we've seen it."

On the other hand, if Krueger is inflexible with his system, then general manager Kevyn Adams should be embarrassed with the team that he gave Krueger. Adams needs to find players that embrace what Krueger wants to do and if that was the plan, Adams failed miserably.

The one thing this team has none of is grit, passion, drive, jam and confidence. Dahlin was very angry after Sunday's game and said they need somebody to hit somebody or start a fight. Actually, they need anything that would show they have a pulse.

I bet the fans really enjoyed watching Joel Farabee stand in front of Dahlin with a little over a minute left in the game and challenge a 20-year-old kid from Sweden that is supposed to be a future star in this league. Maybe that's what Dahlin was talking about. If Rob Ray or Andrew Peters or Craig Rivet or Pat Kaleta or Cody McCormack or Adam Mair were on that team a full scale riot would've broken out. You do not let the other team stand there and challenge Rasmus Dahlin and go unanswered.

The fact that there is nobody on this team that will respond to anything is on Adams.

I'm not saying you need a bunch of fighters, but you need some guys who can play the game and add energy to the team. Will Carrier would look great in that role, but Jason Botterill thought it was important to keep Linus Ullmark so Carrier went to Vegas in the expansion draft.



The type of players I'm thinking of is Casey Cizikas, Cal Clutterbuck, Pat Maroon, Yanni Gourde, Barclay Goodrow or Matt Martin. They change the momentum of games, they make guys like Dahlin and Jack Eichel feel comfortable out there. When was the last time you saw Skinner get into somebody's face? He doesn't because he knows there's nobody out there that will back him up. Jake McCabe and Will Borgen would, but they're injured. Players like that can also play the game and contribute.

It's unbelievable that this season is just over a month old and the Sabres are already out of it. Buffalo will likely miss the playoffs for a 10th straight year and there's no end in sight. I don't know how Krueger is still on the plane going to New York as the coach of the Buffalo Sabres. His system may work for other teams, but it doesn't work for this one and the eye test and the numbers totally show it.

Krueger's team is 28th this season in points percentage and last year they were 25th. Buffalo is worse this season in almost every category except special teams. They are dead last in 5-on-5 scoring. The Flyers have more goals 5-on-5 than the Sabres have overall. Coaches, general managers and players all change, but the one thing that is consistent for the Buffalo Sabres every single season for the last 10 years, they're in on the NHL Draft Lottery. Maybe it's just me, but I don't think that's anything to be proud of.

## **Sabres' Krueger not worried about job security after losing eight of last 10 games**

By Julianne Pelusi

WGRZ

March 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Sabres Head Coach Ralph Krueger said he is "absolutely not" worried about his job security on Sunday, after back-to-back shutout losses to Philadelphia this weekend.

"I'm not wired that way," Krueger said. "I'm wired to to work on solutions and to take responsibility, and I do both right now."

"Coach isn't on the ice. We're on the ice. Playing together just seems like... we're off," Sabres captain Jack Eichel said, defending his coach after Sunday's 3-0 loss to the Flyers.

"[It] doesn't seem like we're on the same page, and [the East Division], where the checking is as tight as it is, doesn't allow for that."

The Sabres are currently last in their division, with 15 points over 19 games. With the top four of the eight divisional teams making the postseason, the playoffs already seem out of reach for the Sabres, a month and a half into the season.

"Right now we have nothing to lose, so we have to some alternatives around, but it all starts with competing," defenseman Rasmus Dahlin said.

"Someone has to step up and make a hit, make a play, I don't know. We have to find something, but it all comes down to work for each other, to start to compete."

"[It] seems like we're working and like everyone's in the right mindset it's just seem like we're not very connected as a group, so I'm trying to process this all myself," Eichel said. "It's tough... If we had answers I think we would be spitting them out."

But of course, it's Krueger's job to find these answers, but the players are left with just questions - including their coach questioning their confidence - after eight losses over the last 10 games.

"We need to get back to the fundamentals, but we need to we need to also psychologically make sure we're connected as a group, that we work as units and for each other and point fingers at ourselves and not the others," Krueger said on Sunday.

Krueger will not have much practice time with the team this week, as the Sabres did not practice Monday, traveling to New York for the first of four games in six days against the Rangers on Tuesday night.

Looking ahead to New York, Krueger said, "The Rangers will be waiting hungry on Tuesday, to try to keep us where we're at right now, and it's going to be about character it's going to be about fight. It's going to be about grit and and hard work.

"It is a challenge. There's a wall ahead of us and we got to climb over it. We got to climb over together."

The Sabres will need to find a way to generate more offense, and do so quickly, to move ahead from where they are "at right now."

## **Sabres Fall 3-0 for Second Day in a Row to Flyers**

Spectrum News

March 1, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — It was déjà vu for Sabres fans as the team hosted the Philadelphia Flyers after their 3-0 loss to them on Saturday.

The team welcomed back Captain Jack Eichel after missing two games with a lower body injury hoping to ease their recent scoring struggles.

Jonas Johansson got the start in goal for Buffalo.

After a scoreless first period, Philadelphia got on the board not once, not twice, but three times.

The Sabres were not able to bounce back in the third period, falling 3-0 to the Flyers for the second day in a row. The Sabres have not scored against the Flyers in nine periods.

The Sabres have lost their last three games.

The team will look to bounce back Tuesday as they head to Madison Square Garden to take on the New York Rangers.

## **What to Watch: Sabres-Islanders begin 'Hockey Day in America' on Sunday**

By Nicholas J. Cotsonika

NHL.com

March 1, 2021

What to Watch: Week 8

Get ready for a jam-packed Sunday, as the Sabres, Islanders, Lightning, Blackhawks, Devils, Bruins, Rangers and Penguins play on NBC and NBCSN

Battle of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia Flyers at Pittsburgh Penguins

Tuesday, 7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SNE, SNO, SNW, ATTSN-PT, NBCSP

Thursday, 7 p.m. ET; SN360, SNE, SNO, SNP, ATTSN-PT, NBCSP, NHL.TV

Saturday, 1 p.m. ET; TVAS, ATTSN-PT, NBCSP, NHL.TV

The Flyers have become one of the best stories in a season disrupted so much by the coronavirus pandemic, and they might be just getting started.

They had four games postponed in February, and have had as many as six players, including four of their top-six forwards, unavailable because of the NHL COVID-19 protocol. Yet at 11-4-3, they have the best record in the MassMutual East Division (.694 points percentage) and everyone back entering Monday.

Philadelphia opened the season with consecutive lopsided wins at home against Pittsburgh, 6-3 on Jan. 13 and 5-2 on Jan. 15. Now we have the Battle of Pennsylvania, three games in a row in Pittsburgh, starting Tuesday on NBCSN. It will feel like a series in the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

Stat of the week

107 -- Points Sidney Crosby has scored in 72 games against the Flyers (45 goals, 62 assists), second most against any team in his NHL career. The Penguins center has scored 120 points (38 goals, 82 assists) in 73 games against the New York Islanders. He is the only active player to score 100 points against any opponent.

Comeback B's

Washington Capitals at Boston Bruins

Wednesday, 7 p.m. ET; NBCSN

Friday, 7 p.m. ET; NHLN, SN, TVAS, NESN, NBCSWA, NHL.TV

Let's say you're watching "Wednesday Night Hockey" on NBCSN, and the Capitals take the lead against the Bruins at TD Garden.

Don't touch that remote.

The teams have played twice this season, and each time the Bruins have rallied from three goals down to earn at least a point.

On Jan. 30 at Capital One Arena, the Capitals led 3-0 in the second period, then Nick Ritchie, Brad Marchand and Charlie McAvoy scored for the Bruins to make it 3-3, the tying goal coming with 58 seconds left in regulation. Alex Ovechkin scored 28 seconds into overtime to give Washington a 4-3 win.

Two days later in the same building, the Capitals led 3-0 in the second period again. One of the goals came from defenseman Zdeno Chara, the former Bruins captain. But David Pastrnak scored twice, and Craig Smith, Brandon Carlo and Marchand followed to give Boston a 5-3 win. The go-ahead goal came with 2:37 left in regulation.

This will be Chara's first game in Boston since he signed with Washington as a free agent Dec. 30.

Toronto's time?

Toronto Maple Leafs at Vancouver Canucks

Thursday, 10 p.m. ET; SNP, TSN4, NHL.TV

Saturday, 7 p.m. ET; NHLN, CBC, SNO, SNP, NHL.TV

The Maple Leafs entered Monday with a record of 16-4-2, which is the best in the NHL (.773 points percentage) and a seven-point lead over the second-place Winnipeg Jets in the Scotia North Division, the biggest lead of any team in any division.

This could be a chance to pull ahead even more.

These teams have played three times this season, and Toronto has three wins by a combined score of 15-5. The Maple Leafs have never won four games against the Canucks in a season, but they have won five straight against them dating to Dec. 10, 2019.

Vancouver averages 3.54 goals against per game, third-most in the League. Toronto averages 3.55 goals per game, second-most in the League.

"Hockey Day in America" will feature players born in the United States, starting with Jack Eichel of the Sabres and Anders Lee of the Islanders on NBC.

Eichel, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, has 14 points (two goals, 12 assists) this season. Well, so does Lee, the No. 152 pick in 2009, who has nine goals and five assists. Four of his goals have come as the Islanders have gone 3-0-0 against the Sabres.

Afterward, it's the Tampa Bay Lightning visiting the Chicago Blackhawks (2:30 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN1, SNW, TVAS, NBCSCH, NHL.TV), the New Jersey Devils at the Boston Bruins (5 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN1, SNW, NESN, NHL.TV) and the New York Rangers at the Penguins (7:30 p.m. ET; NBCSN, SN1, ATTSN-PT, MSG, NHL.TV).

Blackhawks forward Patrick Kane, the No. 1 pick the 2007 NHL Draft, has 34 points (11 goals, 23 assists). He's tied for second in the League with Leon Draisaitl of the Oilers. Kane, who scored his 400th NHL goal on Sunday, is on schedule to play his 1,000th NHL game Sunday.

Other United States-born players to include Blackhawks forward Alex DeBrincat, Lightning forward Tyler Johnson, Bruins defenseman Charlie McAvoy, Devils center Jack Hughes, Penguins forward Jake Guentzel and Rangers defenseman Adam Fox.

NHL Stats contributed to this report.

## **Who Gets Fired Next: Ralph Krueger or John Tortorella?**

By Ken Campbell

The Hockey news

March 1, 2021

It's comforting to know that neither Ralph Krueger nor John Tortorella seems terribly concerned with his precarious job security at the moment. Apparently, Krueger isn't, "wired that way," and Tortorella is busy, "(going) about my business." But if the Buffalo Sabres and Columbus Blue Jackets continue losing and creating drama they way they have recently, neither of these men will have to worry about dealing with the pressures of coaching in the NHL, either.

(Speaking of drama, if there were a matrix that measured drama created in relation to size of the market, there's no doubt the Sabres and Blue Jackets would be the top two franchises in the NHL, and it wouldn't be close. Seems like it's always something with these guys.)

So who walks the plank first? Well, the smart money is on Krueger, who is overseeing a situation in Buffalo that seems almost untenable. The team is underachieving at epic levels and hasn't scored a goal in 124 minutes and 30 seconds. Including overtimes, the Sabres have lost nine of their past 10 games and look an awful lot like a team that has quit on its coach. If you could somehow combine Jack Eichel, Taylor Hall and Jeff Skinner into one player, that player would currently sit tied for 202nd in the NHL in goals. That's 33.1 percent of the Sabres' cap space, or \$27 million, and the organization has three goals in a combined 52 games from them.

Krueger appears to be losing the room, and he's losing credibility, as evidenced by the latest soap opera surrounding Eichel. The Sabres' captain seemed to hurt his foot or ankle last Tuesday night when he collided with Devils captain Nico Hischier. He took the warm-up on Thursday night, but he didn't play. Krueger maintained that Eichel had been injured in the warm-up Thursday night, but Eichel contradicted his coach by saying he was indeed hurt the game prior to that. A coach misleading media members about injuries is nothing new. Coaches have been out-and-out lying about maladies since Jack Adams was in short pants, even though that will thankfully almost certainly become a thing of the past if the NHL and their teams continue to associate themselves with gambling websites. That is really not a big deal, but to be publicly called out on it by the captain, a player who until now seemed to be on Krueger's side, doesn't augur well for the man behind the bench.

On the one hand, Krueger has not had a complete 82-game season as coach of this team. On the other hand, the 36-41-11 mark the Sabres have recorded in his 88 games behind the bench since taking over last season is a big enough sample size to realize that Krueger's message, whatever it may be, is most definitely not getting through.

In Columbus, the Blue Jackets never, ever seem to get beyond being the gritty underdog who works hard and blocks shots. And some of that has to be attributed to Tortorella, a guy who probably would have created that identity with the 1976-77 Montreal Canadiens. Including extra-time games, the Blue Jackets have lost five in a row and won just three of 10 games in the month of February. When they play to their identity, they can't seem to score. And when they try to run with teams, the goals-against come in bushels.

In fact, Tortorella was so frustrated after Sunday's game that he basically pulled the chute on explaining his team's performance, saying that he wasn't about to break down his team's game, saying it's nothing that hasn't been hashed and rehashed numerous times. Again, nothing terribly egregious about that, but when your team is terrible, it just adds another layer of problems when you don't communicate to the fan base.

Columbus GM Jarmo Kekalainen was quick this past weekend to quash any notion that Tortorella's tenure in Columbus is in peril, saying, "All I'll say is (Tortorella) has been a great coach for us for many years now. We've had setbacks before and come back from them, and I believe we'll do the same with the (coaching) staff this year."

Kekalainen may be right, although it sure doesn't feel that way this season, does it? And even with the vote of confidence, if the tide doesn't turn, it wouldn't be a surprise to see Tortorella join Claude Julien in the ranks of unemployed coaches in the NHL. He may be able to take consolation in the fact that, if that happens, Ralph Krueger will likely be there by that time, too.

## **CRACKS OF DON: A Tale of Two Cities - Leafs, Sabres at opposite ends of NHL standings**

By Don Brennan

Ottawa Sun

March 2, 2021

Only 160 kilometres separate Buffalo from Toronto, but their NHL teams couldn't be further apart.

The Sabres and Maple Leafs are at opposite ends of the overall standings, and pointed in different directions.

The Sabres have missed the playoffs nine straight years. They suffered back-to-back 3-0 losses to the Philadelphia Flyers on the weekend. They are now alone in the league cellar.

The fan base has lost confidence in Ralph Krueger, their fifth coach since 2013. Krueger is not getting any support in the Buffalo media, which has caught him fibbing about players' injuries.

The latest trade rumour has captain Jack Eichel destined for the New York Rangers, but the way he's playing (two goals in 17 games) and with his contract (\$10 million per year until 2026), plus past behaviour that screams "I am no leader!" well, why would anyone want him?

"This franchise is an utter disgrace," our pal Mike Harrington, a tell-it-like-it-is columnist at The Buffalo News, tweeted Sunday. "Ownership, management, coaches, players. All of 'em. That's all I got to say today."

Just up the road, the Maple Leafs are the best team in the NHL. Don't take my word for it, look at the standings. Before they played Edmonton on Monday, they had a five-point lead on the next-best team, the defending champion Tampa Bay Lightning.

The Leafs had 34 points in their first 22 games.

In the 11 years they won the Cup, they never had more than 32 at this point, and they were only in the 30s twice.

People are genuinely excited about the Leafs, and they should be.

For as long as it has been since they sipped from Lord Stanley's mug in 1967, they never missed the playoffs more than seven seasons in a row.

The 50-year-old Sabres have never been crowned champs, and that ain't changing anytime soon.

## **Sabres assign Davidson to taxi squad**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 1, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have reassigned defenseman Brandon Davidson to the taxi squad, the team announced Monday.

Davidson skated a season-high 16:17 against Philadelphia on Sunday. The veteran has appeared in three games and averaged 14:06.

The Sabres open a five-game road trip Tuesday against the New York Rangers. Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m.