



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Eichel ruled out for rest of season with neck injury

By Stephen Whyno

Associated Press

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Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel won't play the rest of the season because of a neck injury.

The team said Wednesday that Eichel has a herniated disk and is expected to be healthy for the start of next season. The 24-year-old center hasn't played since March 7.

"He (was) playing through it," interim coach Don Granato said after practice. "It's not something you want exposed, obviously, because it's such a competitive environment, so that's information you don't want the opponents to have, obviously, for his safety. It's a bummer."

Granato said he didn't know if Eichel would need surgery, adding, "You hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day."

Eichel had 18 points in 21 games before coming out of Buffalo's lineup. The 2015 No. 2 pick and face of the beleaguered franchise is three seasons into an \$80 million, eight-year contract that runs until 2026.

The Sabres have lost 32 of 42 games this season and are in last place in the NHL. They've started to turn things around since Granato took over for fired coach Ralph Krueger and are 4-2-2 in their past eight games.

General manager Kevyn Adams hinted at a long-term absence for Eichel on Monday, saying "it does look like he's still going to be out for a while."

"I think part of this for Jack has been to make sure that the reason he's not playing is because he's not healthy enough to play," Adams said. "We need to help him, do everything we can as an organization, to get him back there."

Buffalo is 4-11-4 in Eichel's absence. The Sabres traded forwards Taylor Hall and Curtis Lazar, defenseman Brandon Montour and third-string goaltender Jonas Johansson before the deadline.

"It's tough," teammate Sam Reinhart said of Eichel's injury. "You just hope he recovers and comes back better from it."

Eichel has 139 goals and 216 assists for 355 points in 375 regular-season games for Buffalo, which is well on its way to missing the playoffs for the 10th consecutive year.

Granato didn't have any updates on injured goaltenders Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton. Ullmark left the Sabres' game Monday night at Boston with an undisclosed injury and was replaced by Dustin Tokarski.

Buffalo visits Washington on Thursday night in Capitals center Nicklas Backstrom's 1,000th regular-season game.

Another Granato making a case for the family name in Buffalo

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Tony Granato can laugh now in recalling how angry he was at his brother Don for giving up goaltending at 15 and switching to forward.

Tony regarded his younger sibling as one of the better goalies he faced, even at three years younger, and worried Don was throwing away his future for not wanting to ride the bench every second game as part of a rotation.

"I basically said, 'This is one of the dumbest things I've ever heard you say,'" the Wisconsin coach and former NHL player said.

That might have been the last time Tony questioned his brother's life decisions.

Not only did Don Granato teach himself the position by spending hours poring over video — mostly of Wayne Gretzky — to learn the nuances of scoring, he followed in Tony's footsteps four years later by landing a scholarship from Wisconsin.

"It was really an incredible feat," Tony Granato said. "That's where I learned there's more than just being a hockey player, and there's a special thinking part of the game that he has that I don't have."

The Granato family hockey pecking order is daunting. Tony played 13 NHL seasons and sister Cammi is a two-time Olympian, the first female Hockey Hall of Fame inductee and a scout for the NHL expansion team Seattle Kraken. Another brother, Rob, also played Division I hockey.

Yet the Buffalo Sabres interim coach is known by his siblings as "the smart one."

"There's really a simple reason for that," Don Granato explains. "When you have a brother who's three years older, and he's a bit of a bully, you have no option.

"You're not going to win by brawn," he said, chuckling. "You had to figure out tactics."

At 53, Granato might finally be emerging out of their shadows a month into his new role following Ralph Krueger's dismissal.

Taking over a team in the midst of an 18-game winless skid, Granato has coaxed a competitive edge out of a young and injury-depleted roster and one that just lost captain Jack Eichel for the rest of what has been a miserable season. The last-place Sabres are 4-2-2 in their past eight following an 0-5-1 start under Granato.

His first NHL head-coaching opportunity comes after spending 27 years crisscrossing the continent, working in most every pro league as a coach and assistant, and five years at USA Hockey's developmental program.

Granato leaned on those experiences in simplifying Buffalo's approach by emphasizing speed and forechecking. And he eased his players' frustrations by focusing on making gradual improvements.

"My message to the team the first day I took over was just that: 'This streak is not going to define us. So just stop. Stop the worries. Stop the concern, the anxiety,'" Granato said. "I didn't want to win just one game. I want us to win consistently."

He didn't veer from his message when Buffalo's skid hit 18 after blowing a three-goal, third-period lead in a 4-3 overtime loss to Philadelphia on March 29. Two days later, with Buffalo up 4-1 entering the third period against Philadelphia, Granato's put aside providing a pep talk by instead saying he was placing ownership on his players in an eventual 6-1 victory.

"A big part of coaching is knowing when to get out of the way," Granato said. "We want our guys to become independently strong, we want to empower them. That's a process. Any time you can hand that off to the group, that helps that process."

Granato's calming influence is reflected in what Cammi once said about her brother in a story published by USA Hockey: "Donnie was the one who could talk you through mentally. He was a guy you could have a lengthy conversation with and you'd feel so much better when you were done."

Defenseman Rasmus Dahlin has enjoyed a boost of confidence under Granato.

"I love him as a coach," Dahlin said. "We do all the things he says, and it works. He makes all the players very confident. Yeah, he's doing something special."

Opposing coaches have noticed a difference.

"They're not sitting back as much in the neutral zone. They seem to be playing more on their toes," New York Rangers coach David Quinn said.

The sample size is small, but Granato has emerged as a candidate to take over on a full-time basis.

"I think from the beginning, I always thought Donnie should be part of this conversation regardless of what happens," general manager Kevyn Adams said. "What I see right now out of our team is a team that's playing with a purpose."

Granato doesn't lack in qualifications.

He's twice worked as an NHL assistant under Joel Quenneville. At the AHL level, he's coached against Mike Babcock, Claude Julien, Mike Sullivan and Bruce Boudreau. With USA Hockey, Granato developed players such as Toronto's Auston Matthews, Calgary's Matthew Tkachuk and Boston's Charlie McAvoy.

Granato is comfortable with his journey, believing every step has been valuable, while staying in the moment and refusing to look ahead.

"This feels natural. I don't know if I would've felt that way 10 years ago," he said. "No matter what happens, we'll all be OK."

His minor-league experience prepared him for the chaos of this season and uncertainty of an ever-changing roster, with three players traded over the past two weeks. His time developing teens at USA Hockey is also considered a plus with salary-cap dynamics forcing teams to get more production out of younger players.

Tony Granato is pleased his brother is finally gaining attention. He remembers Don breaking down video on a VCR he received for his 15th birthday.

"He would dissect the game to talk about different things, and we're kids, and we're like, 'Come on, Donnie, stop,'" he recalled. "But he always thought of the game in a tactical way."

The smart one.

"That's correct," Tony Granato said. "Cammi and I and Robbie were all on emotion and energy. Donnie could think it through and say, 'Woah, slow down here.' Yes, that is 100% accurate."

Cuomo: Erie County can't demand Bills, Sabres fans be vaccinated to attend games

By Sandra Tan , Thomas J. Prohaska

The Buffalo News

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When Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz announced Tuesday that anyone wishing to attend a Buffalo Bills or Buffalo Sabres game at Highmark Stadium or KeyBank Center would need to be fully vaccinated, he said he didn't need anyone's outside approval to set that policy.

But on Wednesday, Gov. Andrew Cuomo begged to differ.

"I don't think the county executive is legally correct," Cuomo said, "But besides that, we tend to work in a collaborative with local government, and we're just not there yet to make those decisions."

Since the start of the coronavirus health crisis, Cuomo has repeatedly made it clear that policies regarding the shutdown or reopening of local economies would be made by his administration.

So when Poloncarz announced Tuesday that he was unilaterally requiring that attendees at Bills games be fully vaccinated – with no exceptions – he was asked if he needed state permission to move forward.

Poloncarz responded that no state approval is necessary.

"The state has not approved most of the things – actually the state approves almost nothing that we do at the facility," he said.

He also said he anticipated the governor and he would not see eye to eye on the matter.

Cuomo said Wednesday that he's fielded many questions about sports attendance.

"Things change so quickly," he said. "Where are you going to be in four months? I'll tell you in four months. If the immunization all goes right, if there's no variants of interest, if, God forbid, there's not another virus or pandemic. I just think it's early to make a decision months ahead. Legally the state would have to sign off on it. Practically, we tend to do it as a collaborative."

Beth Garvey, special counsel to the governor, added that she believed Poloncarz was speaking "aspirationally."

Cuomo said, "The county executive I think, said something like, he hoped everybody would be immunized and if everybody were immunized, then everybody could go to the game."

Ellen Przepasniak

But Poloncarz was adamant Tuesday that if individuals weren't vaccinated, they weren't getting a seat in Highmark Stadium or Keybank Center. And he did not change his position Wednesday.

His spokesman, Peter Anderson, said that since the stadium and arena are county facilities, the county has say over what happens there. He added that the county will follow state guidance on maximum capacity limits.

"But the bottom line is that the more people who get vaccinated in the next few months, the better the chance of a full stadium in the fall, which is what everyone wants," he said.

Since Poloncarz made his announcement, he has received a lot of praise and a lot of criticism.

His biggest political critic, Comptroller Stefan Mychajliw, has threatened to sue the county executive over his "dictatorial scheme" and wrote a letter to NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell protesting the policy.

A community petition against the policy is also circulating.

"Life is really bad when Andrew Cuomo throws you under the bus, plows you over, then hits the gas again," Mychajliw said after the governor's remarks.

Anderson questioned Mychajliw's standing to take legal action regarding the vaccination policy.

Mychajliw responded that he has standing as a taxpayer, but he might not take any action against Poloncarz after all, "with the governor slapping him around pretty soundly."

Waiver claim Drake Caggiula expresses excitement for 'opportunity' with Sabres

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 14, 2021

Drake Caggiula still can't make sense of what occurred during his time with the Arizona Coyotes.

The 26-year-old winger was using his speed to make an impact all over the ice, consistently generating scoring chances and applying pressure on the Coyotes' opponents. Yet, opportunities did not lead to production with his third team in five NHL seasons.

After scoring only one goal in 27 games in Arizona, Caggiula was placed on waivers and claimed by the Buffalo Sabres. Caggiula boarded a commercial flight and is quarantining with hopes of joining his new team Sunday morning.

Many of Caggiula's teammates will be able to relate to his struggles. A teamwide inability to finish contributed to the Sabres (10-25-7) plummeting to the bottom of the National Hockey League standings. Many of their forwards have benefited from the promotion of interim coach Don Granato, who worked with Caggiula on the Chicago Blackhawks in 2019.

"I think it's a great opportunity for myself," said Caggiula. "Obviously never want to be put on waivers or anything like that but ... it's obviously a big opportunity for me to come in and showcase what I'm able to do. Hopefully my style of play will suit the way the team wants to play and I can really fit in with the group here."

Injuries and trades have created significant holes in the Sabres' lineup. Young forwards are being used in prominent roles, including Casey Mittelstadt, Dylan Cozens, Tage Thompson and Rasmus Asplund. General Manager Kevyn Adams also added 24-year-old left wing Anders Bjork in the trade that sent Taylor Hall and Curtis Lazar to the Boston Bruins.

Adams is remaking this roster in his vision, prioritizing speed and players who bring energy. Caggiula, who attended the Sabres' development camp in 2014, fits the mold. The 5-foot-10-inch forward has totaled 42 goals with 41 assists for 83 points in 249 regular-season games. He has twice reached double-digit goals, most recently 12 in 2018-19, and scored nine during the shortened 2019-20 season.

Caggiula has played on the power play, penalty kill and can be used up or down the lineup. He may receive more minutes in Buffalo, as he was averaging only 12:26 of ice time in Arizona. Caggiula shot a career-low 3.2% – he had a 13.6 shooting percentage in 66 games with Chicago last season – but ranked fifth among all Coyotes forwards in 5-on-5 on-ice shot quality, according to Evolving-Hockey.com.

"He knows and knew then how much I believed in him when we were together in Chicago and it's no different here," said Granato. "I'm very excited to get him in the lineup and get his game going because he can bring a lot of energy, feistiness, grit and speed."

The Sabres can also provide Caggiula with consistent playing time. This is an opportunity for Adams to evaluate the pending unrestricted free agent as a possible bottom-six forward option for next season. Caggiula was in and out of the Coyotes' lineup after missing time with a hamstring injury this season.

"I think when I missed a couple of those chances early on I kind of lost a little bit of confidence and maybe that's something I can work on myself at home or whatever," said Caggiula. "But overall, I wasn't upset about the way I was playing. It's just one of those things that I could always be better and I always want to be better, doesn't matter how good I was playing."

Goaltending question

Granato did not have an update on Sabres starting goalie Linus Ullmark, who exited the game Tuesday night in Boston after suffering a lower-body injury in the first period of the 3-2 shootout loss to the Bruins.

Ullmark, 27, has missed 33 games across the past two seasons with unrelated lower-body injuries. In eight games since returning to the lineup, he had a 4-2-1 record and .915 save percentage. Entering Wednesday,

Ullmark's .937 save percentage at 5-on-5 ranked sixth among all NHL goalies to appear in at least 10 games this season.

If Ullmark can't start Thursday in Washington, the Sabres will again turn to Dustin Tokarski, a 31-year-old who stopped 29 of 31 shots in relief against the Bruins.

"Goaltending is extremely important," Granato said following practice Wednesday. "Linus has been extremely important and I thought Dustin really rose. He looked more comfortable last night than he has in previous games, despite him playing well in previous games. It just looked like he tracked the pucks better, limited second chances better, controlled his rebounds better. He read the shooters much better last night I felt than his previous starts. When I've spoken about his competitiveness and drive, that was clear and evident last night coming into that situation."

Granato also did not have an update on goalie Carter Hutton, whose been out with a lower-body injury since March 22. Hutton, Tokarski and the since-traded Jonas Johansson have gone a combined 1-19-4 for the Sabres this season.

Sabres name Jason Karmanos associate general manager under Kevyn Adams

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 14, 2021

Ten months after mass firings in the Buffalo Sabres' hockey operations department, General Manager Kevyn Adams made another significant hire Wednesday that will help him determine what's next for the struggling franchise.

Jason Karmanos, a longtime assistant general manager under Jim Rutherford with the Carolina Hurricanes and Pittsburgh Penguins, was officially hired by the Sabres as associate general manager.

Karmanos, 46, will serve as general manager of the Rochester Americans. He'll also oversee the team's scouting, player development and analytics departments.

Karmanos worked under Rutherford in Carolina and Pittsburgh from 1998 through the 2019-20 season. The two won three Stanley Cups together, including one in Carolina in 2006 when Adams was a veteran forward for the Hurricanes. Karmanos' father, Peter, was principal owner of the Hurricanes and Hartford Whalers from 1994 through 2018.

"This is a really good choice," Rutherford told The Buffalo News. "He's a very experienced assistant general manager. He knows the game, he knows the players, he knows the CBA, he knows contracts and he's going to be able to help in all area. This was a good hire for the Sabres.

Karmanos joined Rutherford in Pittsburgh, where the two built back-to-back Stanley Cup champions in 2016-17. Karmanos was a behind-the-scenes figure for the Penguins, occupying the assistant general manager role while helping build a strong analytics department.

Adams first interviewed Karmanos in Pittsburgh on March 25, hours before two false positive Covid-19 tests forced Adams to serve as head coach for the Sabres' 4-0 loss to the Penguins.

The trade deadline delayed Adams' hiring process, though he told reporters Monday that he recently had "very, very serious" conversations with a candidate. Adams also plans on adding to the scouting and player development staffs, as the Sabres try to replenish departments that were decimated by the firings.

"It's a huge hire in terms of how we're putting together the hockey department and structure and, like I said before, we need to build the front office back up," said Adams. "We need to hire more scouts, we need to make sure that we're putting the pieces in place from our front office right through the scouting department, player development department and just make sure that as we move forward, we're having the right people in the right positions. But that is a priority for sure, though. It's a huge priority."

Karmanos' arrival comes after a restructuring in Adams' scouting department, as Jeremiah Crowe was reassigned to director of pro scouting and Jerry Forton took over as director of amateur scouting. Jason Nightingale, director of analytics, will continue to assist with the scouting department.

This new scouting model is similar to the one Adams scrapped upon taking over for former General Manager Jason Botterill in June 2020. Following Botterill's firing, the Sabres parted ways with 21 hockey operations employees, as ownership preferred to cut costs. Scouts were asked to use more video for pro and amateur player evaluations.

This was all part of owner Terry Pegula's vision for a more "effective, efficient and economic" approach to running the franchise.

"Today's sports world – and I'm the last guy to know anything about technology, I can't even mute this thing we're talking on here – but I can tell you this, with all the existing technology that exists in the world of sports today, we can move forward much leaner than we operated in the past and much more efficient," said Pegula after Botterill was fired.

"So, we're – you're right – we're going to get leaner. It's just the way the world's heading. Any business today, you look at the things you do, they're more efficient, they do things quick, they use this new technology that we all have at our fingertips."

The organization has not had a general manager for Rochester since Randy Sexton was fired last June.

The Sabres have yet to hire scouts in Finland, Russia and the Western Hockey League. Rob Riley, an amateur scout based in Boston, was fired as part of the recent restructuring, as well as director of hockey strategy Charlie Mendola.

The team's player development department has also been decimated over the past year, as director of player development Matt Ellis and development coach Dan Girardi are currently serving as interim assistant coaches on the Sabres' staff.

Since taking over as general manager last June, Adams has hired two scouts: Tristan Musser and Anders Forsberg.

In Karmanos, though, Adams is adding someone with ample experience in hockey operations, an attribute the organization was missing after the firings last summer.

"I knew Jason when he was really young," said Rutherford. "I probably met him when he was nine or 10 years old. I knew him personally and that made the working relationship easier when he first came in. But he's a very smart guy, he played the game, so he knew the game. It was a matter of getting him started in each role, which he picked up very quickly because he's a very bright guy."

What's next for the Sabres with Jack Eichel done for the season?

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 14, 2021

The silence surrounding Jack Eichel's status ended Wednesday with the Buffalo Sabres announcing that their 24-year-old captain will miss the final 14 games with a herniated disk in his neck.

That Eichel is sitting out the final three weeks of a 10th consecutive nonplayoff season might seem inconsequential. Eichel, the Sabres' first-line center and power-play quarterback, has not skated with the team since a 5-3 loss to the New York Islanders in Nassau Coliseum on March 7.

The television feed showed Eichel wincing in pain and flexing his neck on the bench following a third period hit from behind. It was the latest setback in a calamitous sixth season for Eichel, who finished with two goals and 16 assists for 18 points and a minus-9 rating in 21 games.

Sportsnet's Elliott Friedman reported Eichel will undergo surgery, a report that interim coach Don Granato did not comment on following practice Wednesday in Washington's Capital One Arena. The timing of the decision will allow Eichel ample time to train this offseason, as he's expected to be at full health for the start of the 2021-22 season.

However, Eichel's difficult season and recovery could impact the Sabres' short- and long-term plans. It's no secret the third-year captain isn't pleased with having not experienced team success since he was drafted second overall in 2015, and his fondness for former coach Ralph Krueger has raised further questions about Eichel's future in Buffalo. He's played under three coaches – Don Granato would be the fourth – and three general managers.

The abrupt firing of former General Manager Jason Botterill and 21 other hockey operations employees in June 2020 led teams to call the Sabres to see if Eichel would be available in a trade. General Manager Kevyn Adams listened to those inquiries, though he insisted that he had no intention of trading Eichel.

If Adams planned on exploring an Eichel trade this summer, he might be forced to wait. Will teams be willing to part with a significant package of players, prospects or draft picks after Eichel's bad luck-stricken season that ended with a significant neck injury? The trade return would improve with Eichel back on the ice and performing to his potential.

Granato would not say how or when Eichel's injury occurred, but Eichel played through a few ailments throughout the season. He missed the start of training camp with an upper-body injury, sat out two games in February with a lower-body injury and hasn't been seen since that game on Long Island. Some of his performance can also be pinned on the Sabres' two-week pause following a Covid-19 outbreak in February.

"Very difficult," Granato when asked about Eichel's season. "Knowing him as a person, his commitment, his character and he's playing through it. It's not something you want exposed, obviously, because it's such a competitive environment. That's information you don't want the opponents to have, obviously, for his safety. It's a bummer. It is. You just hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day. That in essence what you think of and how you think about it."

It's unclear what Adams' plan is for his second offseason as general manager. According to CapFriendly.com, the Sabres will have approximately \$32.5 million in salary cap space. Defenseman Jake McCabe and goalie Linus Ullmark are among their top pending unrestricted free agents. Forward Sam Reinhart and defenseman Rasmus Dahlin will be restricted free agents.

With Eichel injured and the Sabres sitting at the bottom of the NHL, Adams pivoted to prioritizing player development following Krueger's firing. Eric Staal, Brandon Montour, Taylor Hall and Curtis Lazar were traded. Dylan Cozens, Casey Mittelstadt, Rasmus Asplund, Tage Thompson and Henri Jokiharju have been thrust into prominent roles. The trade that sent Hall and Lazar to Boston landed the Sabres 24-year-old winger Anders Bjork.

Would Eichel want to lead a youth movement in 2021-22? Adams has stockpiled draft picks as currency for the expansion drafts and trades, a possible route to upgrading this roster without overspending in free agency. The

rapid development of young players, particularly Dahlin, could make this team relevant next season if goaltending holds up.

The biggest question might be the coaching decision. Ten days after Eichel's last game, Krueger was fired amid a stretch that resulted in a franchise-record 18-game winless stream. Granato, whom Eichel knew through USA Hockey, took over in an interim capacity and has led the Sabres to a 4-2-3 record over their last nine games.

Adams told reporters following the trade deadline Monday that Granato is "in the mix" to stay on as head coach for the 2021-22 season. Following Krueger's departure, Adams called Eichel to explain why the decision, but it's fair to wonder if Eichel is willing to play for another coach when a path to the playoffs isn't clear.

"But Jack and I do – you can ask him, I guess – we do, I feel, have a good relationship," said Adams. "We've talked about his own situation, we've talked about our team, we've talked about previously when the coaching change was made and helping him understand why and what the reasons were. I feel good we have that open communication. I've encouraged Jack to ask questions. I've said this to you guys before, the players on the ice, they feel it, they know, they're in the trenches, they're dealing with it every day. So, it's valuable for me to ask them questions and listen. Sometimes it's just important to ask the right question and then listen to the answer before you make decisions."

This season was supposed to be Eichel's opportunity to lead the Sabres closer to contention. He totaled a career-high 36 goals among 78 points in the Covid-19-shortened 2019-20 season, earning him votes for the Hart Trophy.

The plan was for Eichel to join forces with Hall, a former Hart Trophy winner and left wing whose elite speed could make the Sabres' top line one of the best in the National Hockey League. The two helped lead the team's power play to near the top of the league, but they skated together for only 166:25 at 5-on-5, as Krueger desperately tried to piece together multiple effective scoring lines.

According to Evolving-Hockey.com, Eichel ranked second on the Sabres in generating on-ice shot quality at 5-on-5 and he was their top forward in terms of limiting opponents' shot quality at even-strength. However, Eichel shot a career-worst 3.3% – for context, he had a 15.9 shooting percentage in 2019-20 – and, according to MoneyPuck.com, his goals above expected, a metric that illustrates a player's ability to finish scoring chances, is the 13th-worst mark in the NHL.

Though Eichel is under contract, he will gain leverage when his no-movement clause begins in 2022-23. This would allow him to determine where he can be traded. If Adams chooses not to begin a rebuild, Eichel could remain part of a core that also includes Reinhart, Dahlin, Cozens and Jeff Skinner.

The team also finally has depth down the middle behind Eichel, as Mittelstadt and Cozens have emerged as effective options at center.

While an early end to the season became a forgone conclusion Monday when Adams said Eichel would still be out a while, confirmation now raises questions about what's next for an organization that once tanked an entire season to land the face of the franchise.

Caggiula looking forward to opportunity with Sabres

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

April 14, 2021

After being placed on waivers last Thursday by the Arizona Coyotes, Drake Caggiula found out 24 hours later that he had been claimed by the Buffalo Sabres.

The 26-year-old was not having a great season in the desert, with just one goal and six assists for seven points in 27 games with the Coyotes. If he had cleared waivers, the move would have allowed the Coyotes to either place Caggiula on the taxi squad or assign him to the Tucson Roadrunners of the American Hockey League.

Instead, Caggiula found himself heading to Buffalo to join the last place Sabres, who had the first rights of claiming the fifth-year veteran of the National Hockey League.

"I think it's a great opportunity for myself," Caggiula said during his introductory Zoom conference call with the Buffalo media on Wednesday. "You never want to be put on waivers or anything like that, but being claimed this late in the season with the circumstances with [COVID-19] and all that sort of stuff; It's a little bit more of a difficult situation, but it's obviously a big opportunity for me to come in and showcase what I'm able to do. Hopefully my style of play will suit the way the team wants to play, and I can really fit in with the group here. Who knows what's going to happen for next season during the offseason, but this is definitely an opportunity for me to step in and showcase what I'm capable of doing."

At the start of the 2020-21 season, Caggiula was a regular in the Coyotes lineup after signing late with the team in free agency to a one-year deal worth the league-minimum of \$700,000.

Caggiula played in the team's first 11 games of the season, where he put up five assists and registered 17 shots on goal in 12:43 of average ice-time, before exiting the lineup for five games due to injury. When he came back, Caggiula was not so much a regular in the lineup, and over the course of the next 16 games, he only put up two more points (1+1) and 14 shots on goal in 12:15 of average ice-time.

In the first half of his season, Caggiula felt that he was generating quality scoring chances, but the puck luck just wasn't going his way.

"I probably had two or three Grade A scoring chances a game, and I just, for whatever reason, wasn't capitalizing on it," Caggiula explained. "Some years they go in, some years they don't, and some years you score a goal off someone's skate. That's just the way hockey works. You don't always get the bounces or whatever, but the opportunities were there. It wasn't for a lack of opportunities, which is a positive that I can take from it."

When Caggiula came back from his injury in mid-February, he felt that the rhythm of his game was gone.

"I was in-and-out of the lineup every couple of games, and that was a little bit difficult for me to find my footing again and find that rhythm that, as a hockey player, you're always looking for," Caggiula said. "If you can find consistency, whether it's linemates or consistently being in the lineup, it allows you to be a little bit more confident in yourself. I think when I missed a couple of those chances early on, I kind of lost a little bit of confidence... Overall, I wasn't upset about the way I was playing. It's just one of those things where I could be better, and I always want to be better. Doesn't matter how good I was playing."

Caggiula's name should sound familiar to some Sabres fans. If it doesn't, he was a participant at the team's development camp back in 2014, where he stood out in the crowd and made a name for himself as a camp invitee.

"Looking back at 2014, that was kind of my first sniff of NHL experience," Caggiula said of his time back then. "Obviously being undrafted, that was my first introduction to the NHL, and it was a good stepping stone for me. Being a free agent, I wanted to have a good camp and kind of put my name on the radar for whatever teams in the future would hopefully want to sign me. I thought I had a really good camp, and I remember being part of that 3-on-3 tournament, which my team ended up winning, which was pretty cool. I just think it was a great introduction for me to get my feet wet with the NHL experience."

That experience at Sabres development camp helped earn Caggiula the attention of many over the course of his junior and senior seasons at the University of North Dakota. In his final two years of college hockey in Grand Forks, he combined to score 43 goals and register 44 assists for 87 points in 81 games played.

In his senior season, Caggiula produced well with 25 goals and 26 assists, while helping North Dakota to a 2016 NCAA title. He was named the Most Outstanding Player of the NCAA Tournament, while also earning NCHC First All-Star Team honors for his play throughout the year.

Heading into the summer of 2016, Caggiula was a highly-sought after college free agent, and garnered interest from a number of NHL teams. In the end, he decided to sign an entry-level deal with the Edmonton Oilers, but not before circling back to the team that helped him get that first look.

"I was pretty close [to signing with the Sabres]," Caggiula said. "I came here for a visit amongst a few other teams, and I had some loyalty to Buffalo, because they gave me my first opportunity. I ultimately chose Edmonton for different reasons. I think it's pretty funny how you come full circle, and I ended up here now."

During his NHL career, Caggiula has shifted from playing center to wing, with the past few seasons being primarily spent on the wing. In 249 career NHL games with the Oilers, Chicago Blackhawks and Coyotes, Caggiula has found success playing in all sorts of roles, scoring 42 goals and amassing 41 assists for 83 points.

That sort of versatility has allowed Caggiula the opportunity to stick around in the NHL as long as he has.

"If you're not one-dimensional, it gives the coaches a lot of different options," Caggiula said. "I played center for my first year or so in the NHL. I played center all the way up until the NHL. Once you play center, you kind of understand how to play all the other positions. Throughout my time in the NHL, I've played left wing, right wing, first line, fourth line, everything in-between, power play, penalty kill; It's one of those things where growing up, I was put into those situations all the time, and I think I just really learned how to play in those type of situations.

"Being versatile has allowed me to one: get to the NHL, and two: stay here, because if I was supposed to be a first line guy all the time and my numbers aren't what they're supposed to be, you might not be having a job anymore."

As of right now, Caggiula is currently serving his quarantine period before he is allowed to join the Sabres and play in any games. Caggiula believes that his last COVID-19 test is set to come on Saturday morning, and hopes to be able to join the rest of the group come Sunday. However, he is uncertain if he will be in the lineup for Sunday's 3 p.m. ET matchup with the Pittsburgh Penguins at KeyBank Center.

If Caggiula is able to play Sunday, he will have a maximum of 12 games available to play in before the end of the 2020-21 season for the Sabres.

While it has been nearly seven years since the last time Caggiula was in Buffalo taking part in team activities with the Sabres, there are a couple of connections he has with the current roster.

First, he took part in the same development camp as forwards Sam Reinhart and Victor Olofsson, who were just recently drafted by the Sabres in the 2014 NHL Draft. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and goalie Linus Ullmark were also part of the roster that took part in that development camp in Buffalo.

Second, his interim head coach in Buffalo, Don Granato, spent some time with Caggiula in Chicago when he served as an assistant coach first under current Florida Panthers head coach, Joel Quenneville, then under current Blackhawks head coach, Jeremy Colliton.

While the time spent together in Chicago was not long, Caggiula believes that having the familiarity with Granato will be helpful in his transition to the Sabres with just about a dozen games remaining in the season.

"The energy he brought on and off the ice, and the energy I brought on and off the ice kind of mixed well together," Caggiula said. "If I made a big hit, blocked a shot or scored a goal, he was always one of the first people to come running down the bench and give you that positive encouragement. I think that really goes well for me. I like having feedback, good or bad. I think communication is a big thing, and he was obviously big on that."

"Just speaking to him earlier this week about the style that the team wants to play, I think it's really going to benefit with the way that I play the game, and I'm really looking forward to getting started and re-uniting with him, as well."

While Caggiula remains back in Buffalo quarantining, the Sabres are in Washington, D.C. preparing for a Thursday night matchup with the Capitals at Capital One Arena.

Following Wednesday's practice, Granato was asked for any update regarding goalie Linus Ullmark's lower-body injury suffered in Tuesday night's 3-2 shootout loss to the Boston Bruins. However, the interim head coach did not have any new information to present.

Granato also did not have any new information on the progression of backup goalie Carter Hutton, who is rehabbing a lower-body injury and is still considered week-to-week.

The Sabres announced on Wednesday that Jack Eichel's 2020-21 season is officially over as he is dealing with a herniated disk in his neck. Sportsnet hockey insider Elliotte Friedman reports that Eichel will have surgery to repair the damage to his neck and then begin preparations for the 2021-22 season.

When asked about the potential need for surgery, Granato did not confirm whether or not his captain would undergo surgery, and said it was a better question for general manager Kevyn Adams to answer.

The Sabres will skate again Thursday morning before their 7 p.m. ET matchup to close out the season series with the Capitals. Pregame coverage on WGR starts at 6 p.m. ET with Mike Schopp.

Sabres hire Jason Karmanos as associate general manager

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

April 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams made a key addition to his front office staff on Wednesday with the hiring of Jason Karmanos as the team's new associate general manager.

According to the team's official release, Karmanos will serve as the general manager of the Rochester Americans in the American Hockey League, while also oversee the scouting, player development and analytics departments.

It was back on March 17 when Adams first made mention that he was looking to add to the Buffalo front office. The Sabres general manager had reportedly been interested in adding Karmanos to his staff for quite some time, and was reportedly set to interview the former Pittsburgh Penguins assistant general manager back on March 25.

Karmanos is a veteran front office executive in the National Hockey League, spending 15 years to start his career with the Carolina Hurricanes before being hired by the Penguins back in the 2014-15 season.

The 46-year-old was fired as Pittsburgh's assistant general manager back on Oct. 26, 2020 by general manager Jim Rutherford, who has since stepped down in that role due to personal reasons. Karmanos was originally hired as the Penguins' Vice President of Hockey Operations before taking his role as assistant general manager after winning back-to-back Stanley Cups in 2016 and 2017.

According to his executive bio with the Penguins, Karmanos looked after the team's amateur scouting staff, while also helping Rutherford with other aspects of hockey operations. Meanwhile, he helped lead the overhaul of Pittsburgh's use of analytics with any decision-making processes in management.

Jack Eichel done for 2020-21 season with herniated disk in neck

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

April 14, 2021

Jack Eichel's 2020-21 season is officially over.

The Buffalo Sabres announced Wednesday that Eichel will not return this season due to a herniated disk in his neck. Eichel is expected to be healthy and ready for the start of the 2021-22 season.

The Buffalo captain suffered the injury back on March 7 in a 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders. At first, Eichel was declared out "for the foreseeable future" by former head coach Ralph Krueger.

Sportsnet hockey insider Elliotte Friedman reports that Eichel will need surgery to repair the damage in his neck, and the goal will be to get the surgery done soon so he can begin preparations for next season.

The 24-year-old's season was quite the struggle from the start.

Eichel missed the opening week of training camp due to an upper-body injury, and upon his return, still did not look himself as the season progressed. Eichel also dealt with a separate lower-body injury shortly before suffering the herniated disk.

In just 21 games this season, Eichel finished with two goals after putting up a 43-goal pace the year before. He also registered 16 assists for 18 points, which still ranks him third among players on the active roster in scoring.

Sabres post-deadline depth chart: Where Jeff Skinner, Dylan Cozens, others sit now and moving forward

By John Vogl
The Athletic
April 14, 2021

On Anders Bjork's first day with the Sabres, he earned a point.

He made an even better one.

"I don't think my time in the NHL has gone the way I wanted it," Bjork said Tuesday. "But this is a great opportunity for me to start over and begin working even harder to become the player that I believe I can be."

The 24-year-old's keen self-analysis stood out during his opening hours in a Buffalo uniform. Bjork could have gone in numerous directions while assessing the first 3 1/2 years of his career. Rather than looking at the difficulties in Boston, such as being buried on a talent-filled roster and multiple injuries, he put it on himself to become better.

"I haven't really established myself," Bjork said. "I don't think I have my identity set yet, and that's something that excites me, for sure. I'm looking forward to establishing that and building my game."

He'll get every chance. The Sabres' organizational depth chart has been reset after the trade deadline, and Bjork is sitting in a good place. While left wing is the most crowded position, it's also one with opportunity at the top.

Here is every player the Sabres have under contract for the 2021-22 season. Those shaded in green are exempt from the Seattle expansion draft while Jeff Skinner must be protected from the expansion Seattle Kraken by virtue of his no-movement clause. There are a slew of skaters who can play multiple positions, and they're placed where they appear most or fit best.

Center

Jack Eichel
Dylan Cozens
Casey Mittelstadt
Arttu Ruotsalainen
Cody Eakin
Brandon Biro

The injured Jack Eichel remains the face of the franchise. He's followed by youth and potential.

Numerous injuries have cut into Dylan Cozens' rookie season, but the Sabres expect the 20-year-old to become a cornerstone.

Casy Mittelstadt, 22, looks like a new player after being demoted last season and starting this year on the taxi squad. In the 10 games since Buffalo traded Eric Staal and gave Mittelstadt more ice time, he has five goals and seven points.

Arttu Ruotsalainen, who has played his first three NHL games on the wing, was his team's leading scorer in Finland and Rochester this season.

Buffalo hoped Cody Eakin would rediscover his offense, but he's a nonfactor with two goals and 34 shots in 41 games.

The Sabres still lack a clear No. 2 center, but the audition is on for Cozens and Mittelstadt.

Left Wing

Jeff Skinner
Victor Olofsson
Anders Bjork
Rasmus Asplund

Zemgus Girgensons
Brett Murray
Matej Pekar
Linus Weissbach
Dawson DiPietro

Skinner still has six seasons remaining on his eight-year, \$72 million contract. What he doesn't have is a grip on the top line. His plummeting offense, coupled with Victor Olofsson's spotty five-on-five play could give Bjork a chance to slide next to Eichel.

Bjork led Notre Dame in scoring during his final two seasons and put up 22 points in 29 games in the American Hockey League. But in his last 88 games with Boston, he had 11 goals and 24 points. He skated just 12:43 per game, 12th among Bruins forwards.

"My speed is an asset, for sure, and something that I'm trying to use in the right way and find better ways to use it," Bjork said. "I think I have some offensive ability, and I want to learn and develop into a more offensive player and score more goals. That's a way I can help this team."

The Sabres are giving the 23-year-old Rasmus Asplund a chance to show what he can do, and he's responded with five goals in 14 games.

After signing a three-year contract extension, Zemgus Girgensons suffered a season-ending injury in training camp. General manager Kevyn Adams clearly loves him, but younger, lesser-priced players have begun to take advantage of the veteran's absence.

Right Wing

Sam Reinhart
Kyle Okposo
Tage Thompson
Jack Quinn
Andrew Oglevie

The lack of depth has pushed Olofsson to the right side often. Sam Reinhart is the established No. 1. He'll be a restricted free agent this summer and is set to become unrestricted in July 2022. The Sabres have a contract decision to make.

Kyle Okposo is enjoying a nice run with 12 points in 16 games, but he had three points in his opening 22 and will be 33 next season.

Tage Thompson is also rallying. After being scratched 18 times, he has three goals and five points in nine outings. He leads the Sabres with 27 shots during that span.

Jack Quinn, the Sabres' first-round pick last season, is having the expected growing pains after an unexpected start in Rochester. The 19-year-old was set to go back to the Ontario Hockey League for more development, but it never started play. Quinn needs time to make an impact in Buffalo.

Left Defense

Rasmus Dahlin
Jacob Bryson
Mattias Samuelsson

Rasmus Dahlin celebrated his 21st birthday Tuesday with a goal, a nifty number in which he danced along the blue line to find space before firing a slap shot. He's been reborn since the firing of coach Ralph Krueger and has six points in six games while showing flashes of his pre-draft stardom.

The 23-year-old Jacob Bryson got a chance because of Jake McCabe's season-ending injury and is showing second- or third-pair skills.

Mattias Samuelsson, 21, is playing well during his first pro season in Rochester, but the Sabres clearly need to add to this position.

Right Defense

Rasmus Ristolainen
Henri Jokiharju
Colin Miller
Will Borgen
Casey Fitzgerald
Oskari Laaksonen

The defense corps still leans way too far to the right. While the Sabres may lose Asplund or Thompson in the expansion draft, they could use their picks to entice Seattle to take Colin Miller or even Rasmus Ristolainen, who both have only one season remaining before becoming UFAs.

Henri Jokiharju has improved since Don Granato took over as interim coach. He was lost around the net but has regained confidence.

Will Borgen, 24, was excelling during his second stint in the NHL but suffered a broken arm in his fourth game. He'll be back soon, giving the Sabres a few weeks to decide if he's worthy of expansion protection.

Goalies

Dustin Tokarski
Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen

Yeah, the Sabres have to do a lot.

Goaltending was an Achilles' heel this year and is set to become the Achilles' heel, calf, knee, thigh and hamstring. Adams is hoping to lock up pending UFA Linus Ullmark, who gives the team a chance every start. But he suffered another injury Tuesday, the latest in a long line of ailments.

Even if Buffalo keeps Ullmark, it needs another No. 1A/B goaltender. Putting two NHL goalies on this chart is Adams' top priority.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen, 22, needs to stop pucks more consistently in Rochester before getting the call to Buffalo.

Overall, the Sabres find themselves in a tricky spot. They're about to set an NHL record with their 10th straight playoff miss. They need to start winning.

But the organization is young. Of these 31 players, 19 are age 24 and under, including seven who are 21 or younger. Only three players are above 28.

"Everyone's still learning, including myself," Bjork said. "A lot of guys play very mature, though, I've noticed already. They play with a chip on their shoulder and want to prove themselves, which I think is awesome."

Adams' offseason goal is to determine which players should prove themselves in Buffalo and whether any should be shipped out for veterans who've already proved themselves. Bjork is eager to show that he's a keeper.

"There's a lot of opportunity here," Bjork said, "which is something that I'm very much looking forward to."

Bills, Sabres fans must be vaccinated to gain entry: ‘There’s no God-given right to attend football games’

By Matthew Fairburn

The Athletic

April 14, 2021

Roger Goodell has said he expects NFL games to be played in front of full stadiums in 2021. On Tuesday, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz took a step toward making that a reality, announcing he also expects 100-percent capacity at Bills and Sabres games but that anyone attending the game must be vaccinated against COVID-19. No vaccine, no entry.

Fans will have to show proof of vaccination, which they can do through New York’s Excelsior app, or they will be turned away from the stadium.

“As we did last year, we will continue to cooperate and comply with all New York state and local government regulations regarding our sporting events,” the Bills said in a statement.

While the Bills are a private company, the stadium is owned by the county, which is why Poloncarz made this announcement.

“Some people are like, ‘Well that’s unfair,’ but there’s no God-given right to attend a football game,” Poloncarz said.

“You have no guaranteed rights in the Constitution to inflict illness on other people, just like you have no guaranteed right in the Constitution to attend a Buffalo Bills football game. You can be removed at anytime. Our goal is to ensure that everyone in there is safe.”

This announcement was part of a campaign to increase vaccination rates across Erie County. As of Tuesday, half of eligible residents had received one dose of the vaccine and 33 percent of residents are fully vaccinated. This comes at a time when Erie and Niagara counties are seeing rising numbers of COVID-19 cases.

Poloncarz’s announcement was met with some pushback. Rachel Bush, the wife of Bills safety Jordan Poyer, started a petition [change.org](https://www.change.org) to speak out against the rule. She doesn’t think she should be forced to take the vaccine in order to watch her husband play football in person.

“I am alarmed by the amount of Americans that think it’s perfectly okay for the government to force an experimental vaccine on citizens,” she tweeted. “Very disturbed.”

The government hasn’t mandated the vaccine. But the NFL has to sort through this issue as well. This week, NFL Network reported that the league told teams any employee who refuses the vaccine without legitimate religious or medical reason will be barred from Tier 1 or Tier 2 status in team facilities, which would prevent those people from working directly with players.

Players won’t be required to get the vaccine, because that issue would have to be collectively bargained between the NFL and NFLPA.

Last week, appearing on a podcast with Kyle Brandt, Bills quarterback Josh Allen expressed hesitancy about the vaccine but supported the league not making it mandatory,

“I’m still debating that,” Allen said when asked whether he was interested in getting vaccinated. “I’m a big statistics and logical guy. So, if statistics show it’s the right thing for me to do, I’d do it. Again, I’d lean the other way, too, if that’s what it said. I haven’t been paying attention to it as much as maybe I should have. I’ve just been doing my thing and masking up when I’m going out and just staying close and hanging around family.”

When Brandt asked about the league not mandating the vaccine, Allen said, “I think everybody should have that choice to do it or not to do it. You get in this tricky situation now where if you do mandate that that’s kind of going against what our constitution says and the freedom to kind of express yourself one way or the other. I think we’re in a time where that’s getting a lot harder to do. Everybody should have that choice.”

While Poloncarz said he understands some people will view the vaccine requirement for Bills games as strict, the county is doing it for everyone's protection.

"We're trying to protect not only the people in the stands, but the players on the field, concessionaires, our sheriff's deputies, the security guards," Poloncarz said. "And the best way to do it is to ensure that everyone's vaccinated."

Meanwhile, NFLPA president J.C. Tretter sent a memo to players saying the NFLPA is pushing for organized team activities, which are scheduled to begin next Monday, to be held virtually as they were last season. The Broncos, Buccaneers and Seahawks players have already announced they won't be attending the voluntary workouts.

"A number of players recently tested positive at team facilities," Tretter wrote in the memo. "COVID weekly positive rates are as high, if not higher than, at this point last offseason, and NFL players who contracted COVID last season can become infected again. We believe that having the same offseason rules as last year is in the best interest of the players and gives us the best chance to complete a full NFL season in 2021."

Teams are allowed to host mandatory minicamps in June, but the NFLPA is also pushing for those to be held virtually this season. Bills players haven't yet announced any decision on what they will do when their offseason program is scheduled to begin on April 19. But the issue of COVID-19 and vaccinations isn't going away for the league, players, individual teams and local governments.

Sabres, coach Don Granato offer Drake Caggiula fresh opportunity, comfort

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 14, 2021

When forward Drake Caggiula visited NHL teams as a free agent in 2016, he said he felt some loyalty to the Buffalo Sabres.

Two years earlier, the Sabres had given the undrafted Caggiula a chance to attend their summer development camp following his sophomore season at North Dakota.

"They gave me my first opportunity," said Caggiula, who was claimed on waivers Friday by the Sabres.

Caggiula, 26, nearly chose the Sabres five years ago – "I was pretty close," he said – before he signed his entry-level contract with the Edmonton Oilers.

"It's pretty funny how you come full circle, though, and you end up here now," Caggiula said on a Zoom call Wednesday.

Caggiula has bounced around over the last two and a half years, playing for three teams: the Oilers, Chicago Blackhawks and Arizona Coyotes.

After signing a one-year, \$700,000 contract with the Coyotes, Caggiula compiled one goal and seven points in 27 games before they waived him. He said he couldn't capitalize on a slew of early-season scoring chances and lost some confidence.

When the 5-foot-10, 176-pound Caggiula returned from hamstring injury in early February, he said he couldn't regain his rhythm and started getting scratched.

"I wasn't upset about the way I was playing, it's just one of those things that I could always be better and I always want to be better," Caggiula said.

The Sabres, who need forward depth, could give Caggiula a long look over the final two weeks this season after he completes his quarantine.

"This is definitely an opportunity for me to step in and showcase what I'm capable of doing," Caggiula said.

Caggiula flew commercial to Buffalo, so he must follow the NHL's COVID-19 protocols. He won't play in Thursday's road game against the Washington Capitals. He said if he tests negative on Saturday, he can join the Sabres on Sunday.

While the Sabres host the Pittsburgh Penguins that afternoon, he will likely make his debut later next week.

The Sabres and interim coach Don Granato clearly offer Caggiula some comfort. He knows Granato well, having spent a half season with him in Chicago.

"Anytime you have a coach that you've had a relationship with and can go to bat for you, I think that goes a long way," Caggiula said.

When Granato has spoken to Caggiula over the past several days, he said their conversations have been "easy."

"We have a prior relationship and in a very competitive environment in our prior relationship, so that helped," said Granato, who was an assistant with Chicago in 2018-19. "He knows and knew then how much I believed in him when we were together in Chicago and it's no different here.

"I'm very excited to get him in the lineup and get his game going because he can bring a lot of energy, feistiness, grit and speed."

Caggiula said he remembers the energy Granato possessed on and off the ice.

"If I made a big hit or blocked a shot or scored a goal, he was always one of the first people to come running down the bench and give you that positive encouragement," he said. "I think that really goes well for me. I like having feedback – good or bad. I think that communication is big thing."

He added: "Just speaking to him earlier this week about the style the team wants to play, I think it's really going to benefit the way I play the game. I'm really looking forward to getting started."

Granato said last week, Caggiula, a natural center, will likely be utilized at wing. Caggiula can play anywhere up front and possesses the skill to skate up and down the lineup.

He said he believes that versatility helped him reach the NHL and stay in the big leagues.

"I played center for my first year or so in the NHL, I played center all the way up until the NHL," he said. "And I think once you play center, you kind of understand how to play all the other positions. Throughout my time in the NHL I played left wing, right wing, first line, fourth line – everything in between – power play, penalty kill.

"So it's one of those things where growing up I was put into those situations all the time and I think I just really learned how to play in those types of situations and playing with star players and playing on the fourth-line role."

Sabres add to front office, hire Jason Karmanos as associate GM

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 14, 2021

After Kevyn Adams took over as Buffalo Sabres general manager last June, he said he wanted to catch his breath and develop an understanding of what he needed for his front office.

Adams, who had never worked in a hockey department, inherited a skeleton crew with no assistant GMs after the Sabres fired GM Jason Botterill and 21 members of his department.

On Wednesday, Adams added a major piece, hiring Jason Karmanos as associate GM.

Karmanos, 46, will serve as the Rochester Americans' GM and oversee scouting, player development and analytics.

He spent the last six years with the Pittsburgh Penguins, serving as their vice president of hockey operations for three seasons before being named assistant GM. He was fired in October.

Karmanos won the Stanley Cup with the Penguins in 2016 and 2017 and another championship as the Carolina Hurricanes' assistant GM and executive vice president of hockey operations in 2006.

He held those titles for 13 years with Hurricanes, who were owned by his father, Peter Karmanos. Adams played parts of five seasons in Carolina during Karmanos' tenure.

Jason Karmanos played four seasons at Harvard as a forward and was teammates with Adams on Team USA's entry at the 1994 World Junior Championship.

Steve Greeley and Randy Sexton served as the Sabres' assistant GMs under Botterill.

Herniated disc in neck will sideline Sabres' Jack Eichel rest of season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
April 14, 2021

As late as Monday, Buffalo Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams held out a sliver of hope injured captain Jack Eichel could return and play some late-season games.

But on Wednesday, the Sabres announced Eichel, 24, will miss the rest of the season recovering from a herniated disc in his neck.

The Sabres expect Eichel will be healthy and ready for the start of next season. Interim coach Don Granato said he doesn't know if Eichel needs surgery.

"Very difficult," Granato said on a Zoom call Wednesday of Eichel's season ending. "Knowing him as a person, his commitment, his character and he's playing through it. It's not something you want exposed, obviously, because it's such a competitive environment. That's information you don't want the opponents to have, obviously, for his safety.

"It's a bummer. It is. You just hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day."

Eichel, the Sabres' top center and offensive threat, hasn't played since the New York Islanders' Casey Cizikas hit him behind the net March 7. He has missed the last 19 games.

The American has spent the last six weeks rehabbing. Shortly after hurting his neck, he traveled out of state for another assessment of the injury.

Eichel compiled two goals, 18 points and a minus-9 rating in 21 games during his frustrating season. He missed the early portion of training camp recovering from a rib injury, according to The Associated Press. He also missed two games in late February battling a lower-body injury.

He mustered zero goals and nine assists during his final 13 outings.

With Eichel out, Casey Mittelstadt, Sam Reinhart and rookie Dylan Cozens will likely remain the Sabres' top three centers. All three have spent most of the season playing wing.

The Sabres close their three-game road trip Thursday against the Washington Capitals.

—

Granato did not have an update on Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark, who left Tuesday's 3-2 shootout loss to the Boston Bruins after gloving a shot 4:54 into the game.

Dustin Tokarski replaced Ullmark, making 29 saves before allowing two shootout goals.

"I thought Dustin really rose," Granato said of Tokarski's sixth appearance. "He looked more comfortable last night than he has in previous games, despite him playing well in previous games. It just looked like he tracked the pucks better, limited second chances better, controlled his rebounds better. He read the shooters much better last night I felt than his previous starts.

"When I've spoken about his competitiveness and drive, that was clear and evident last night coming into that situation."

If Ullmark can't play Thursday, taxi-squad goalie Michael Houser will likely back up Tokarski.

Ullmark has been the Sabres' backbone this season, compiling a 9-6-3 record with a 2.63 goals-against average and a .917 save percentage in 20 games.

The Sabres recently lost all 15 games Ullmark missed while recovering from a lower-body injury.

The rest of the Sabres' goalies have a combined record of 1-19-4.

Jack Eichel out for season, reportedly to have surgery

By Adam Unger

WKBW

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Sabres announced Wednesday afternoon that Jack Eichel won't be back on the ice for the rest of the 2021 season. Buffalo's star center will reportedly have surgery on a herniated disc in his neck.

Eichel's last appearance of the ice was on March 7th against the New York Islanders. When he left the game, trainers were paying close attention to his neck. Former head coach Ralph Krueger never revealed a timetable for his return.

"It's a bummer, it is," interim head coach Don Granato said. "You hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day and that's in essence what you think of and how you think about it."

"It's always tough missing time, no-one wants to go through a stretch like this watching games and you hope he recovers and he comes back better from it," forward Sam Reinhart added.

In 21 games played, Eichel had two goals and 16 assists for the Sabres. The team expects him to be healthy and ready to go for the start of the 2021-22 season.

Cuomo: Too early to make decisions on vaccine requirement for stadium attendance

By Nick Veronica

WTVB

April 14, 2021

Gov. Andrew Cuomo says Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz might have gotten ahead of himself Tuesday when he asserted that vaccinations will be required for fans to attend Bills and Sabres games this fall.

Cuomo was asked directly about Poloncarz's claim that Erie County — which owns both the Bills' Highmark Stadium and the Sabres' KeyBank Center — would be able to make the call on its own to host a full-capacity, fully vaccinated crowd.

"I don't think the County Executive is legally correct," Cuomo said Wednesday during a conference call with statewide media. "But besides that, we tend to work in a collaborative with local government and were just not there yet to make those decisions. ... Legally, the state would have to sign off on it. Practically, we tend to do it as a collaborative."

A spokesperson for Poloncarz pushed back on Cuomo's statement later Wednesday, saying "the county does have the power to determine what happens there."

Stadiums in New York are currently allowed to host 20% of their full capacity. Fans must either show proof of full vaccination or have a negative COVID-19 test result to gain entry.

Poloncarz's announcement indicated a negative COVID-19 test would not be enough. "No Vaccine = No Entry," a slide in his presentation plainly declared. Erie County is believed to be the first region in the nation to announce plans that would require all fans to be vaccinated.

Attorney Terry Connors provides legal analysis on Erie County's Bills game vaccination rule
Cuomo said he anticipates stadium attendance to be an ongoing question as we progress through the pandemic.

"I was with the Islanders today, it's going to be the same question all across the board: What do you do with sports attendance when you get down toward the end of the year and the seasons restart?" Cuomo said. "And I think you have to see where you are. Things change so quickly. 'Where are you going to be in four months?' I'll tell you in four months. If the immunizational goes right; if there's no variants of interest; if, God forbid, there's not another virus or pandemic ... so, I just think it's early to make a decision months ahead."

Poloncarz said Tuesday he had discussed his plan with the Bills.

"Our plan is that unless you are vaccinated, you will not have entry to the stadium," Poloncarz said. "It is easy, it is safe. We can then guarantee 70,000-plus people at the stadium."

"I want to see that stadium full, I know the Bills want to see that stadium full," he added. "We want to return fans back to the stadium. That's why the county supports returning all fans to the stadium and (hockey) arena for this fall ... We know there's a way to do it. We know there's a way to ensure it. That's that all fans and staff are fully vaccinated."

You will need to be vaccinated to attend Bills and Sabres games, Erie County executive says
Cuomo did say one part of Poloncarz's statement was true.

"The County Executive, I think said something like he would hope that everybody would be immunized, and if everybody were immunized then everybody could go to the game. Which is also true," Cuomo said. "If everybody's immunized — and, by the way, (if) there's no variant of interest, and the vaccinations work the way we hope they're going to work — if everyone's immunized, then theoretically we're back to normal."

"I have too much experience to try to guess what four months down the road looks like," Cuomo said. "I think the past year has taught us that."

In response to Cuomo comments, Poloncarz's office released the following statement:

It is very early to make any decisions, and that's something everyone realizes; after all, we are currently in a third wave of COVID-19 locally and numbers are rising, so anything could happen and in that light, in-person attendance at any sporting event seems far off until those numbers come down. The start of the season is still 4.5 months away, so a lot can happen in that time. However, both the stadium in Orchard Park and the Key Bank Center are county facilities, so (like any county facility) the county does have the power to determine what happens there. We have worked with NYSDOH all along and will continue to follow their guidance as to what "maximum capacity" might be by the start of the football season, but the bottom line is that the more people who get vaccinated in the next few months, the better the chance of a full stadium in the fall, which is what everyone wants.

Sabres captain Jack Eichel out for remainder of the season with neck injury

By Heather Prusak

WIVB

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams said on Monday the team would be “completely transparent” when it has “proper information” on captain Jack Eichel’s injury. Wednesday, the team announced Eichel will miss the rest of the season with a herniated disc in his neck.

“Very difficult knowing him as a person, his commitment, his character and he’s playing through it. It’s not something you want exposed obviously because it’s such a competitive environment so that’s information you don’t want opponents to have obviously for his safety but it’s a bummer, it is,” interim head coach Don Granato said on Wednesday.

“You hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day and that’s in essence what you think of and how you think about it.”

Granato could not say whether or not Eichel needs surgery or when the injury occurred but Eichel is expected to be healthy and ready to play at the start of next season.

“It’s tough, I mean it’s always tough missing time. No one wants to go through a stretch like this watching games so you just hope he recovers and comes back better from it,” Sam Reinhart said.

Eichel has been out with an upper-body injury since the Sabres’ 5-2 loss to the Islanders on March 7, when it appeared he hurt his neck. Then-coach Ralph Krueger said the following week Eichel will be out for the “foreseeable future” but there was no mention of it being season-ending.

During his trade deadline zoom call on Monday, general manager Kevyn Adams said Eichel will still be “out for a while” which didn’t sound promising for a return this season with 15 games left.

Sabres GM Kevyn Adams says Jack Eichel is still going to be out ‘for a while’

“He was again recently looked at by the doctors and slight improvement from where he was at before. I don’t want to go too much further than that but it does look like he’s still gonna be out for a while so where that puts him in terms of return, we’ll have to see,” Adams said on Monday.

“The reason he’s not playing is because he’s not healthy enough to play and we need to help him do everything we can as an organization to get him back there. I think as we move forward here in the coming days there will be more clarity. We have a little bit more information last week and then here in the next couple of days gonna have some more conversations with the doctors and then for sure, kind of what are the next steps and why? And be transparent with that information with you guys,” Adams also said on Monday.

Sabres' Jack Eichel to miss the remainder of the season with a herniated disc in his neck

WGRZ

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — More bad news for the Buffalo Sabres' and their captain.

The team announced Wednesday that Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season due to a herniated disc in his neck.

They anticipate Eichel will be healthy and ready to play at the start of the 2021-22 season.

With the abbreviated season due to the COVID-19 pandemic, Eichel has 18 points in 21 games. He last played on March 7.

The Sabres are getting ready to take on the Washington Capitals Thursday.

Hamilton: Evaluating Eichel's injury and where Sabres go from here

By Paul Hamilton

WGRZ

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — To nobody's surprise, the Sabres announced on Wednesday that Jack Eichel's done for the season with a herniated disk in his neck. Sportsnet in Canada says Eichel will undergo surgery, but the Sabres have not confirmed that.

I asked former Sabres coach Ralph Krueger straight up after a game Eichel struggled in if he was playing hurt, and Krueger said, "No."

What we don't know is if this is the offseason injury that kept him out of the first week of training camp, or did it happen on March 7 against the New York Islanders, when he was shown on TV to be in a lot of pain when the trainer pressed against his neck.

Eichel also has a lower-body injury that kept him out of a few games too. With all these injuries, the Sabres' captain could only score two goals and 16 assists for 18 points in 21 games.

When the season was officially called off last year, Eichel said that he was sick of all the losing here. The new general manager, Kevyn Adams, listened to trade offers, but he never made any calls himself to trade Jack, and he told other teams that Eichel wasn't available. I do know neither Eichel nor his agent ever asked Adams or ownership for a trade.

Eichel likes the City of Buffalo and feels the fans deserve a winner. At the end of last season, he was still very committed to being a part of that, but has being a part of the worst team in the NHL for another year changed his mind?

Dylan Cozens can definitely be a top-six center in the NHL, and Casey Mittelstadt has improved by leaps and bounds under interim head coach Don Granato. I would've loved to have seen what a healthy Eichel could've done playing for Granato.

What Adams has to figure out is, can the Sabres be a championship team with Eichel, Cozens and Mittelstadt as their top three centers moving forward?

Before Jake McCabe was injured, he and Rasmus Ristolainen were having their best NHL seasons together. McCabe will be an unrestricted free agent July 1, but with the injury he suffered, I would think he would be back.

Rasmus Dahlin and Henri Jokiharju have played very well since Granato became coach, and Will Borgen and Jacob Bryson have been terrific as well.

I've been told 2018 second round pick Mattias Samuelsson has been terrific in Rochester and could play in the NHL right now. The 21-year-old turned pro this year after two seasons at Western Michigan.

So again, I'll ask the question: Can Buffalo be a championship team with a defense of McCabe, Ristolainen, Dahlin, Jokiharju, Bryson, Borgen and Samuelsson?

Another sign that the Sabres are becoming a NHL franchise again instead of the joke of the league was the hiring of associate general manager Jason Karmanos. This gives Adams an experienced hockey man to sit with him as they navigate getting this team back to the playoffs.

The two know each other very well, as they played together on Team USA in the 1994 World Junior Championship and won a Stanley Cup together in Carolina, where Adams was a player and Karmanos was in the front office. Karmanos has won three Cups with the Hurricanes and Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Pegulas made a snap decision to gut the hockey department after they fired Jason Botterill, and it didn't even last a full season before Adams convinced them it was a huge mistake.

Karmanos will be the GM of the Rochester Americans, which was badly needed, and will oversee the scouting, player development, and analytics departments, where there was almost no experience at all.

Karmanos will get to work hiring more scouts for the Sabres and put together a structure and a plan for the Amerks.

Sabres hire Jason Karmanos as associate general manager

WGRZ

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres announced they have hired a new associate general manager.

Jason Karmanos will serve as general manager of the AHL's Rochester Americans, the Sabres' farm team. Karmanos will also oversee the Sabres' scouting, player development, and analytics.

Karmanos is originally from Michigan and spent the past six seasons with the Pittsburgh Penguins, where he served as assistant general manager for three seasons. He also served as an assistant general manager for the Carolina Hurricanes for 13 seasons.

Sabres star Jack Eichel to miss rest of season

By Brian Campbell

Spectrum News

April 14, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season due to a herniated disc in his neck, the team announced Wednesday.

His last game was on March 7.

The team says that Eichel is expected to be fully healthy and ready to play at the beginning of the 2021-22 season.

Eichel recorded 18 points (2G, 16A) in 21 games this season.

Buffalo Sabres' Jack Eichel to miss rest of season with neck injury

By Emily Kaplan

ESPN

April 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season because of a herniated disc in his neck. The team made the announcement Wednesday, adding that Eichel is "expected to be healthy and ready to play at the beginning of the 2021-22 season."

It's been a brutal season in Buffalo. Eichel has been out since March 7. The team endured an 18-game winless streak, the longest in the salary-cap era, and fired coach Ralph Krueger in March.

The Sabres are poised to miss the playoffs for the 10th consecutive season and unloaded Taylor Hall, Brandon Montour and Eric Staal before Monday's trade deadline.

Eichel, 24, recorded 18 points (two goals, 16 assists) in 21 games this season. He was on a four-game point streak at the time of his injury. Interim coach Don Granato told ESPN earlier this month that he was "hopeful" Eichel would return this season.

"I had Jack in the U.S. program when he was 16," Granato told ESPN. "I got to know him then, and I thought the world of him then. It's something I'm excited to be a part of when he's back -- because we expect him back, we're hopeful he'll be back before the end of the year -- and I look forward to that, now in the position of head coach.

"He means a lot to me personally. I love the fact that he has such strong and visible emotions of the game. I've reminded him numerous times that he's got to make sure he finds the fun in all of this, too. Sometimes a lot of these great athletes are so intense, and there's so much demand on them that they feel like they can't have fun. It becomes such a business. They're judged on different levels. I'm speaking generally now, but when you lose that, or you stop being aware of that, it becomes even harder."

Eichel out for season for Sabres with neck injury

NHL.com

April 14, 2021

Jack Eichel is out for the season for the Buffalo Sabres because of a herniated disk in his neck.

The center is expected to be ready for next season.

"Very, very difficult," Sabres coach Don Granato said Wednesday. "Knowing as a person, his commitment, his character, and he's playing through it. And it's not something you want exposed, obviously, because it's such a competitive environment, so that's information you don't want the opponents to have, obviously, for his safety. ... It's a bummer. It is. You just hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day, and that's in essence what you think of and how you think about it."

Eichel scored 18 points (two goals, 16 assists) in 21 games and last played March 7, a 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders. The Buffalo captain was reevaluated after not playing in a 5-4 shootout loss to the Philadelphia Flyers two days later and was expected to be out at least 7-10 days.

Granato said he was not sure if Eichel would need surgery.

"Our medical team, you know, you hand it off as a coach to them and the doctors, between our trainers, our doctors and (general manager) Kevyn [Adams]," Granato said. "So any information regarding that, I wouldn't have, honestly. I just stay out of it. I communicate with Jack, but even when I talk to Jack, I don't talk about the injury. He has enough people talking to him about the injury, so it's not my role."

Eichel missed two games with a lower-body injury Feb. 25 and Feb. 27. The two goals scored in 21 games were the fewest to start his six-season NHL career.

The Sabres lost 18 straight games (0-15-3) from Feb. 23- March 29, including the final 11 without Eichel.

"Yeah, it's tough," Buffalo forward Sam Reinhart said. "I mean, it's always tough missing time. You know, no one wants to go through a stretch like this, watching games, so you just hope he recovers and comes back better."

Selected by Buffalo with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, Eichel has scored 355 points (139 goals, 216 assists) in 375 games. He scored at least 24 goals in each of his first five NHL seasons, including a career-high 36 last season.

The Sabres (10-25-7) are last in the NHL standings. They visit the Washington Capitals on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSWA, MSG-B, NHL.TV).

Sabres' Jack Eichel out for rest of season with herniated disc in neck

Sportsnet

April 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the 2020-21 season due to a herniated disc in his neck, the team announced Wednesday.

The Sabres say Eichel will be healthy and ready to play in time for the start of the 2021-22 campaign.

Sportsnet's Elliotte Friedman reports the 24-year-old needs surgery to address the injury and is expected to undergo a procedure soon.

Eichel hasn't played since a March 7 loss to the New York Islanders.

The star pivot struggled in 2020-21, like most of his teammates on the lowly Sabres, recording just two goals and 18 points in 21 games.

Eichel was coming off a pandemic-shortened 2019-20 campaign when he produced at a career-best 1.15 points-per-game clip and put up 78 points in 68 games.

The news comes amid a disastrous season for the Sabres — who sold off top players like Taylor Hall, Brandon Montour and Eric Staal ahead of the trade deadline — and are all but assured of matching the NHL playoff drought record of 10 seasons.

Sabres' Jack Eichel to Have Surgery on Neck Injury, Miss Rest of Season

By Tim Daniels

Bleacher Report

April 14, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres announced center Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the 2020-21 season because of a herniated disc in his neck.

Elliotte Friedman of Sportsnet reported Wednesday that Eichel, who last played March 7, will have surgery "soon" so he can begin recovery and preparations for next season.

The 24-year-old Boston University product is one of the NHL's most dynamic offensive talents when healthy. He's recorded 355 points (139 goals and 216 assists) across 375 games since the Sabres selected him with the second overall picks in the 2015 draft. He tallied two goals and 16 helpers in 21 appearances this season.

Eichel has remained mostly durable during his time in Buffalo. His absence because of the upper-body injury marked his first extended time out of the lineup since suffering a high-ankle sprain in back-to-back seasons (2016-17 and 2017-18).

Sam Reinhart should continue to serve as the team's top-line center after shifting over from right wing. It could also lead to more opportunities for the resurgent Casey Mittelstadt in offensive situations.

Eichel is a critical piece of an otherwise struggling Sabres offense. It always made sense for the team to play it safe with its captain following his latest injury since they fall well short of the contender category again this season and he remains a foundational cornerstone for the future.

Jack Eichel injury update: Sabres star out for rest of season due to herniated disk in neck

By Gabriel Fernandez

CBS Sports

April 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres star Jack Eichel's herniated disk in his neck will cause him to miss the remainder of the season, the team announced on Wednesday. The Sabres expect the captain to be fit and ready to play for the 2021-22 season.

Eichel last suited up for the bottom-dwelling Sabres on March 7 in a 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders. The injury that kept him out of a game against the Flyers two days later was expected to only require 7-10 days of recovery, but turned out to be much worse.

"Very, very difficult," Sabres coach Don Granato said, per NHL.com. "Knowing as a person, his commitment, his character, and he's playing through it. And it's not something you want exposed, obviously, because it's such a competitive environment, so that's information you don't want the opponents to have, obviously, for his safety. ... It's a bummer. It is.

"You just hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day, and that's in essence what you think of and how you think about it."

Granato then added that he wasn't sure if Eichel would require surgery for the injury.

The 24 year old had racked up 18 points (two goals, 16 assists) through 21 games this season. His goal scoring mark was the fewest he'd put together in his career so far. He was coming off of a career year last season with a 36-goal campaign. But falling short of expectations has been a theme for the Sabres this season. The team experienced an 18-game losing streak that went from Feb. 23 until March 29. They are currently last in the league with 27 points and a 10-25-7 record.

Eichel to miss rest of season with neck injury

By Josh Gold-Smith

The Score

April 14, 2021

UNIONDALE, NY - MARCH 06: Buffalo Sabres Center Jack Eichel (9) skates with the puck during the third period of the National Hockey League game between the Buffalo Sabres and the New York Islanders on March 6, 2021, at the Nassau Veterans Memorial Coliseum in Uniondale, NY.

Jack Eichel's season is officially over.

The Buffalo Sabres superstar won't return to the ice this season due to a herniated disc in his neck, the club announced Wednesday. The team expects him to be ready to play at the start of the 2021-22 campaign.

Eichel hasn't suited up for a game since March 7. The normally dominant Sabres captain struggled to score in 2021, collecting two goals and 16 assists in 21 contests. He posted a shooting percentage of only 3.3 after tallying at a 15.9% rate last season. The 24-year-old racked up a career-high 36 goals to go along with 42 assists over 68 games in 2019-20.

His underlying numbers also indicated bad luck was a factor in 2021. The dynamic center produced a goals for percentage of 38.46 at five-on-five, but his expected goals for percentage was a favorable 56.42 in those situations, according to Natural Stat Trick.

Eichel has played his entire six-year career with Buffalo. The Sabres drafted him second overall in 2015 and named him captain at the start of the 2018-19 campaign.

Sabres star Jack Eichel done for season with herniated disk

By Justin Cuthbert

Yahoo! Sports

April 14, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres don't need any assistance to finish last in the NHL this season, but here's a little push in that direction anyway.

Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season with an herniated disk in his neck, the team announced Wednesday. The injury will require surgery, and the captain is expected to be healed up in time to start next season.

Eichel has been out since March 7 with the issue.

It seems to be a fitting conclusion to a disastrous season for Eichel, who has likely seen his performance affected by the ailment. Eichel was limited to two goals and 18 assists in 21 games before exiting the lineup for the remainder of the season, which was a far cry from the impressive numbers he posted through his first five seasons in the league.

Eichel is recently coming off his most productive season, scoring 36 goals in 68 games and contributing a personal-best 1.15 points per game.

Of course, many will wonder if Eichel has played his last game for the Sabres, now that his season is officially done. Whispers of his unhappiness have grown louder as the organization continues to regress, even beyond the most pessimistic of expectations.

Eichel will now be six seasons into his NHL career without appearing in even a legitimate postseason race, and it seems the Sabres are headed toward another significant re-tooling.

In other Sabres news, the club is expected to name Jason Karmanos to the executive team, presumably to help guide rookie general manager Kevyn Adams through that roster overhaul from an associate position.

Karmanos was a member of the Pittsburgh Penguins staff which recently won back-to-back Stanley Cups.

Good luck to Jason.

Bishop, Eichel, Radulov ruled out for remainder of 2020-21 NHL season

By Sean Leahy

NBC Sports

April 14, 2021

Three big names have been ruled out for the remainder of the 2020-21 NHL season.

First up, the Sabres announced that captain Jack Eichel has a herniated disk in his neck and will not play again this season. Eichel, who is signed through the 2025-26 season with a \$10M cap hit, has not played since March 7 and finished with two goals and 18 points in 21 games.

"He was again recently looked at by the doctors and slight improvement from where he was at before," Sabres GM Kevyn Adams said on Monday. "I don't want to go too much further than that but it does look like he's still gonna be out for a while so where that puts him in terms of return, we'll have to see."

The 24-year-old Eichel suffered the injury during a game against the Islanders in March where he was checked into the boards by Casey Cizikas.

According to the Sabres, the expectation is that he will be healthy and prepared to start the 2021-22 NHL season.

Stars pair out, but Seguin returning soon

The Stars will try to get into the Stanley Cup Playoffs without the services of Ben Bishop and Alexander Radulov.

Bishop has not played at all this season after undergoing right knee surgery in October. The initial diagnosis was that the 34-year-old netminder would miss five months, but the decision has been made to allow him more time to rehab and be ready for next season.

Radulov, meanwhile, last played on March 18 and will need core muscle surgery. Like Bishop, he's expected to be ready for next season.

There is good news for the Stars, though. GM Jim Nill said this week that Tyler Seguin, who has not played this season due to off-season hip surgery, could return in two weeks time. Seguin began skating with the taxi squad this week.

"I don't like to give exact dates, because when you're coming back from major surgery, things can change quick," Nill said. "The tough part in bringing players back is we never practice anymore. To get players up to game condition, game speed, and get in the grind of everyday hockey, we don't have that ability."

Caggiula hopes to showcase his potential with Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 14, 2021

Drake Caggiula switched teams for the first time midway through the 2018-19 season, when the Edmonton Oilers - with whom he had signed out of college two teams prior - traded him as part of a package to the Chicago Blackhawks.

Whenever Caggiula would block a shot or deliver a big hit for the rest of that season, he remembers Don Granato being ready to greet him afterward.

"He was always one of the first people to come running down the bench and give you that positive encouragement," Caggiula said. "I think that really goes well for me. I like having feedback, good or bad. I think that communication is big thing. He was obviously big on that."

Granato departed from his role as assistant coach with the Blackhawks after that season and served in the same role with the Sabres until being promoted to interim head coach last month. His 26-game stint with Caggiula was enough for him to vouch for the forward after the Sabres claimed Caggiula off waivers from Arizona last week.

"When I've spoken to him it's been easy conversations because we have a prior relationship," Granato said. "... He knows and knew then how much I believed in him when we were together in Chicago and it's no different here. I'm very excited to get him in the lineup and get his game going because he can bring a lot of energy, feistiness, grit and speed."

Caggiula, 26, attended development camp with the Sabres as an invitee in 2014. He went on to win a national championship as a senior at North Dakota and was a coveted undrafted free agent in 2016, when he considered Buffalo before ultimately deciding to join Edmonton.

He joined Arizona prior to this season and tallied seven points (1+6) in 27 games. He felt happy with the chances he generated offensively early on but was unable to translate them to points before a hamstring injury forced him to miss five games in February. He never recaptured his rhythm.

"I was in and out of the lineup every couple of games and that was a little bit difficult for me just to kind of find my footing again and kind of find that rhythm that as a hockey player you're always looking for," Caggiula said.

"... I think when I missed a couple of those chances early on I kind of lost a little bit of confidence and maybe that's something I can work on myself at home or whatever. But overall, I wasn't upset about the way I was playing, it's just one of those things that I could always be better and I always want to be better, doesn't matter how good I was playing."

Caggiula sees an opportunity to prove himself amid a young lineup that is currently playing with confidence and for a coach that has his back. He will remain in quarantine until Sunday, lining up his debut either for that afternoon against Pittsburgh or, perhaps more likely, next Tuesday against Boston.

"It's obviously a big opportunity for me to come in and showcase what I'm able to do," he said. "Hopefully my style of play will suit the way the team wants to play and I can really fit in with the group here."

"Who know what's going to happen for next season during the offseason, but this is definitely an opportunity for me to step in and showcase what I'm capable of doing."

Wednesday's practice

The team announced prior to taking the ice for practice in Washington that captain Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season due to a herniated disk in his neck. He is expected to be healthy and ready to play at the beginning of the 2021-22 season.

"It's a bummer," Granato said. "It is. You just hope for him to feel better every day and improve every day. That in essence what you think of and how you think about it."

Granato did not have an update on the status of Linus Ullmark, who left with an injury during the first period on Monday. The team currently has Dustin Tokarski as the other active goaltender on the roster and Michael Houser on the taxi squad.

The Sabres conclude their three-game road trip against the Capitals on Thursday. Coverage on MSG begins at 6:30 p.m.

Sabres name Karmanos associate general manager

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 14, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres announced today that the team has named Jason Karmanos associate general manager.

In his role, Karmanos will serve as the general manager of the AHL's Rochester Americans and will oversee the Sabres' scouting, player development and analytics departments.

A native of Orchard Lake, Michigan, Karmanos spent the past six seasons with the Pittsburgh Penguins, where he served as the assistant general manager for three seasons. He was the club's vice president of hockey operations prior to that.

In his roles with Pittsburgh, Karmanos spearheaded the revamping of the Penguins' use of hockey analytics to assist management in their decision-making process.

He was also a member of the Carolina Hurricanes' front office from 1998-2013 and served as an assistant general manager for 13 of those seasons.

Karmanos, 46, has been part of three Stanley Cup championships. He won with Carolina in 2006 and with Pittsburgh in 2016 and 2017.

Sabres general manager Kevyn Adams was an alternate captain on the 2005-06 Hurricanes. Adams and Karmanos were also teammates on the United States' 1994 World Junior Championship team.

Before becoming a hockey executive, Karmanos played four seasons at Harvard, where he earned a Bachelor of Arts degree with honors. He played one season for the Raleigh Ice Caps of the ECHL in 1996-97, but an eye injury ended his playing career.

Eichel to miss remainder of season with neck injury

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 14, 2021

Buffalo Sabres captain Jack Eichel will miss the remainder of the season due to a herniated disc in his neck, the team announced today.

Eichel is expected to be healthy and ready to play at the beginning of the 2021-22 season.

Eichel recorded 18 points (2+16) in 21 games this season. His last game was on March 7, where he picked up an assist to extend his point streak to four games.

The Sabres' next game is against the Washington Capitals on Thursday at Capital One Arena. Faceoff is scheduled for 7 p.m. on MSG and WGR 550.