



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Penguins jump into 2nd in East with 3-2 win over Sabres

By John Wawrow

Associated Press

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Evan Rodrigues was so focused on the Pittsburgh Penguins' late-season push to win the East Division title the forward didn't realize the implications that came with beating his former team, the Buffalo Sabres.

While the Penguins jumped into second in the tightly contested divisional race, their 3-2 win on Saturday also eliminated the Sabres from playoff contention.

"I didn't know that. I don't think it was really on anyone's minds for us," said Rodrigues, who pumped his arm upon scoring a second-period goal to put the Penguins up 2-0. "We're just trying to get better as a team so we can be going strong the rest of the season into the playoffs."

Rodrigues spent his first five-plus seasons in Buffalo before being traded to Pittsburgh a year ago.

Tristan Jarry stopped 23 shots over the final two periods and 28 overall. Bryan Rust and Jared McCann also scored, and the Penguins improved to 10-2-2 in their past 14. Pittsburgh earned its 59th point to move one ahead of the idle New York Islanders, and remain three behind the Washington Capitals.

The New York Rangers' win in over New Jersey earlier in the day combined with Buffalo's loss made the Sabres the NHL's first team eliminated from playoff contention with some three weeks left in the shortened 56-game season. Buffalo matched the league record in extending its playoff drought to a 10th consecutive year.

Having been out of contention for much of the past month, the Sabres focused on how much better they've been playing in going 5-3-2 since ending an 18-game winless skid.

"Just a little too late, I guess," said Casey Mittelstadt, who scored his eighth goal of the season, and seventh in 10 games. "Obviously, there are some things we can build on and take into the next game."

Tage Thompson also scored for Buffalo. Dustin Tokarski stopped 38 shots in the loss.

The teams complete their two-game series in Buffalo on Sunday.

Rust's goal stood as the winner, coming on the power play to put the Penguins up 3-1 in the second period. Rust was parked in front of the net and tapped in Sidney Crosby's pass from the left circle.

The Sabres didn't back down despite mounting injuries in twice cutting the Penguins' two-goal lead to one. Thompson briefly cut it to 2-1 earlier in the second period, and 44 seconds after Rodrigues' goal.

Mittelstadt made it 3-2 by scoring a power-play goal with 8:16 left when he was set up by Rasmus Ristolainen's pass into the slot.

Buffalo nearly tied the game with 2:21 remaining when Sam Reinhart, parked in front, directed a rebound that dribbled off the right post before Jarry covered it.

Jarry improved to 18-8-3 on the season, and is 6-0-2 since last losing in regulation — a 3-2 defeat to New Jersey on March 18.

"He's stolen a lot of games for us," Penguins defenseman Cody Ceci said of Jarry. "We've got to try to do a better job at the end of games. But teams are going to push. They're going to try and win. He's been great for us in holding us in close games."

Pittsburgh continued its dominance of Buffalo by improving to 5-0 on the season. It has outscored the Sabres by a combined 20-6. The Penguins also improved to 22-4-3 in their past 29 meetings with the Sabres and 13-0-2 in their past 15 games at Buffalo since a 6-2 loss on Feb. 19, 2012.

BE LIKE SID

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan credited McCann for making a Sidney Crosby-like decision by banking in a shot from behind the goal line off Tokarski to open the scoring 10:30 into the first period.

"He's watched Sid do it a number of times a year here for a couple of years, and what better example," Sullivan said. "It may look like happenstance. It may look like it's a lucky play, but it's a real calculated play. And it's a heads-up play to try to take advantage of a goalie when he's in that situation."

PRIDE GAME

The teams played in the NHL's nationally televised first joint Pride Game to promote and celebrate LGBTQ-plus communities.

Both teams participated in pre-game warmups wearing jerseys with rainbow-colored numbers on the back, sticks bearing rainbow-colored tape, and using commemorative pucks with multi-colored designs.

The items are to be auctioned, with proceeds going to the Pride Center of Western New York and GLYS.

The teams donated 100 tickets to LGBTQ-plus organizations, and each fan received a rainbow-colored rally towel. The Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus performed the Canadian and U.S. anthems.

OKPOSO OUT

The Sabres announced before the game that veteran forward Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the season after having surgery to repair a broken left cheekbone. Okposo was hurt when being struck by teammate Matt Irwin's shot in the first period at Washington on Thursday.

Sabres Okposo to miss rest of season with broken cheekbone

Associated Press

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres forward Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the season after having surgery to repair a broken bone in his left cheek, the team announced Saturday.

Okposo was hurt after being struck by teammate Matt Irwin's shot in the first period of a 5-2 win at Washington on Thursday.

Okposo joins a growing list of injuries for the last-place team that is one loss from being mathematically eliminated from contention for the Stanley Cup playoffs and matching an NHL record 10-year playoff drought. The Sabres are already minus captain Jack Eichel, starting goalie Linus Ullmark and defenseman Jake McCabe.

Okposo is a 14-year NHL veteran who is completing his fifth season in Buffalo. He has two goals and 11 assists in 35 games this year.

Okposo has filled a valuable leadership role and has been a stabilizing voice for a team that went through an 18-game winless skid this season, which matched the 14th longest in NHL history.

"Everybody looks up to him, so we definitely lose a big portion of that," interim coach Don Granato said before Buffalo hosted the Pittsburgh Penguins. "It's bad that it's happened and he's missing the season. But certainly I'm grateful we've had him to this point because he's done an awful lot for us."

Inside the NHL: Sabres have to be wary about deadline impact on current and future rivals

By Mike Harrington
The Buffalo News
April 18, 2021

The Sabres are no different than any NHL team in that they've likely pondered how the trade deadline has impacted two groups of opponents. Because nobody knows what next season will bring.

The immediate effect on them, of course, is how the East Division became a total arms race among the top four clubs. The Islanders struck the first blow by getting Kyle Palmieri and Travis Zajac from the Devils, the Bruins worked the Taylor Hall/Curtis Lazar trade, the Penguins nabbed Jeff Carter and the Capitals pulled the late Anthony Mantha shocker with Detroit right as the 3 p.m. buzzer rang on Monday.

But will three of those four teams truly matter to Buffalo much next year? We don't know. The working assumption has been that the NHL is reverting back to its standard divisional format for the 2021-22 season. That, of course, means a farewell to the Pens, Caps, Islanders and their ilk and a return to a more sane setup where the Sabres again see Boston, the two Florida teams, Detroit and the Canadian trio of Toronto, Montreal and Ottawa.

There's little chatter about that not being the case yet. But we all know it's going to be dependent on what happens in Canada, where virus cases continue on a surge and the pace of vaccinations has simply not kept up. You can't go back to the old setup until that border opens and does anybody see that happening any time soon? Especially now that Ontario has gone into another stay-at-home order?

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So while that topic will have to be addressed in the coming months, there's no doubt teams out of the race like the Sabres have paid particular attention to what's gone on in their current division but have also noted what's gone on in their normal one. You have to be concerned on both fronts.

Some quick impressions:

The East: The Mantha deal looks like a winner for both sides, but for now it gives the Capitals another scoring option that helps balance their lineup more. Hall does the same thing in Boston, where he already has two goals in his first three games playing alongside David Krejci after scoring just twice in 37 games with the Sabres.

Carter can plug the huge hole the Penguins have without the injured Evgeni Malkin, who missed his 15th straight game here Saturday. With Anders Lee out for the season, the Islanders chose Palmieri over Hall. Another Crosby-Ovechkin showdown in the second round could be in the offing between Pittsburgh and Washington.

Detroit: How long do we really think Steve Yzerman will let the Red Wings languish at the bottom of their division? You're already seeing signs of improvement there as the Wings entered the weekend 4-1-1 in a six-game stretch that included two wins over Carolina and one over Tampa Bay.

For Mantha, the Wings got Jakub Vrana, Richard Panik, a first-round pick this year and a second-round pick next year. The Wings have 12 picks this July – seven in the first three rounds – and virtually unlimited cap space. They're going to get better fast.

The Canadian trio: Montreal made its moves (Eric Staal, Jon Merrill, Erik Gustafsson) for players who are all UFAs after the season and it's hard to see the Habs taking out Toronto in a seven-game series. The Leafs did likewise with Nick Foligno, Riley Nash, Ben Hutton and David Rittich but got a much better group to fill their needs. That North Division spot in the final four is theirs to lose. Ottawa simply offloaded defensemen for picks as part of its rebuild.

The Florida duo: Tampa Bay made its big move by renting Columbus defenseman David Savard and still looks to have a great chance to become a repeat champion, even with Steven Stamkos again going on IR. Remember, the Lightning are expecting Nikita Kucherov back for the playoffs after hip surgery. The Joel Quenneville-led Panthers – who haven't won a playoff series since 1996 – added Brandon Montour from the Sabres and Sam Bennett from Calgary, and took a flier on deposed Devil Nikita Gusev.

Carolina, Tampa Bay and Florida entered the weekend one point apart in the Central and first place is really going to mean a lot here. A first-round series against Nashville or Chicago is a much better option than a first-rounder against one of the other top three.

Marleau passing Gordie Howe

Sharks winger Patrick Marleau, 41, reaches a huge milestone Monday in Vegas when he passes Gordie Howe and sets the all-time record by skating in the 1,768th regular-season game of his career. Marleau tied Howe at 1,767 Saturday in Minnesota.

Howe has held the mark since Nov. 26, 1961, when he overtook Ted Lindsay (999) and became the first player to appear in at least 1,000 games. Marleau will become the first player in the four major sports to become an all-time leader in games since kicker Morten Andersen overtook George Blanda to take the NFL lead on Sept. 26, 2004.

"Just first and foremost is loving the game and I just love being out there and playing," Marleau said Thursday. "Obviously, every kid's dream is to hoist that Stanley Cup, so I've been chasing it all this time and that goal hasn't changed for me, since you know what the Stanley Cup's about."

Marleau made his debut on Oct. 1, 1997 vs. Edmonton and remains the youngest player in the NHL to skate in the last 75 years at 18 years, 16 days. He entered the weekend with 566 goals (23rd all-time) and 1,196 points. He will become the league's 50th player to reach 1,200.

Marleau has also played with Toronto and Pittsburgh and is in his third tour of duty with the Sharks. He has played 1,592 games with them, second only to Howe's 1,687 with Detroit as the most with one franchise.

Marleau, Toronto's Joe Thornton and Washington's Zdeno Chara are the NHL's only remaining players who skated during the 1990s. The league also calculated that 166 current players were not born when Marleau made his NHL debut.

In recent days, players from several teams, including Anaheim goalie and longtime former Sabre Ryan Miller, have approached Marleau on the ice after games to offer congratulations for his upcoming feat.

"For those guys to do all that, it's humbling," Marleau said. "You've played against them a lot of games, a lot of hard-fought battles. There's mutual respect there. For them to take the time to come over and shake my hand and congratulate me on what can possibly happen here in the next few days, I don't take that lightly. That obviously means a lot to me."

Iafallo thrilled with new deal

Another big trade deadline takeaway was the fact the Los Angeles Kings now consider Eden native Alex Iafallo one of their core players. They worked hard to keep him and not trade him, and the sides landed on a four-year, \$16 million deal.

"I've loved it since I got here. Just a great organization and great players along the way," said Iafallo, a free agent signee in 2017 out of Minnesota-Duluth after leading his school to the championship game of the Frozen Four. "The group we've got now we can do something special and I'm excited to be a part of it the next four years."

Iafallo entered the weekend third on the team with 11 goals and tied for third in points with 26. He had career highs of 17 goals and 43 points in 70 games last season.

"Having Iafallo re-signed is really important to our organization," said Kings coach Todd McLellan. "In my opinion, he's a 'Swiss Army Knife' and I feel good about putting him on the ice in every situation. It's amazing how many teammates came by me and said, 'Hey, what's going on with him? We've got to get him signed. All that type of stuff. They really wanted him to be here and he wants to be here."

"It was coming down the wire. I was texting him, 'do you want me to call 'Blakey' and say to sign you?' joked defenseman Drew Doughty in a reference to GM Rob Blake. "I was like, 'You better not get traded.' So now we were all saying that every single guy in this team wants 'AI' back."

Sabre points

- Alex Ovechkin and Sidney Crosby entered the weekend 34th and 35th, respectively, on the NHL's all-time points list. Ovechkin had 1,317 and Crosby hit town Saturday at 1,312. Who's next on the list? The Sabres' first two No. 1 overall picks.

Pierre Turgeon finished his career with multiple teams at 1,327 points and Gilbert Perreault is at 1,326. They had remarkably similar goal-assist numbers, with Turgeon at 515-812 and Perreault at 512-814.

- An interesting sidelight from Sabres GM Kevyn Adams when asked about No. 1 pick Jack Quinn's dalliance at center in Rochester: "I know that's something that the Bills talk a lot about is versatility and how do you get more out of players? So for me, it's only positive. We'll see where that goes. I certainly don't mind seeing that moving forward here over the next couple of weeks."

Adams and Bills GM Brandon Beane have spoken several times the last few months, including heading into the NHL draft. It makes sense that Adams would be open to the thoughts of his Pegula Sports counterpart.

- The Sabres' win Thursday in Washington marked the first game for former Buffalo winger Conor Sheary since he signed a two-year, \$3 million extension with the Caps. Sheary has 11 goals and 19 points for Washington this year playing on a \$735,000 deal, so he essentially doubled his salary.

Sheary had 23 goals and 53 points the last two years in Buffalo before he was traded back to Pittsburgh at the deadline in February 2020.

"I'm a complimentary player that can play up and down the lineup and with the skill and the talent that's on this team, I think I was just able to fit in seamlessly," Sheary said of the Caps. "... So I think it was a no-brainer for me when I was offered the contract to come back."

Observations: Sabres' drought reaches historic level, but youth inspires hope

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

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Matt Irwin thought he was in position to help the Buffalo Sabres kill a penalty, standing in front of the net with very little space for the Pittsburgh Penguins to earn a scoring chance.

Then Sidney Crosby provided a difficult lesson. The transcendent talent received a pass atop the left circle, skated forward and threaded the puck through the Sabres' penalty-kill coverage, past Irwin, to Bryan Rust for an easy redirect goal in the second period Saturday.

Unlike past seasons, the Sabres did not unravel. Casey Mittelstadt, a 22-year-old center, cut the deficit to one with a power-play goal in the third period. The Penguins, though, withstood a barrage to earn a 3-2 win inside KeyBank Center.

"Obviously, early in the game we struggled a little bit," Mittelstadt said following a game in which the Sabres had only four shots in the first period. "They were coming at us hard. They're an old, experienced team. They know how to play."

The highlight-reel plays from Crosby have been commonplace during the Penguins' 14 consecutive playoff appearances, three of which have ended with the 33-year-old captain hoisting the Stanley Cup. Without injured center Evgeni Malkin and top-six forward Kasperii Kapanen, Pittsburgh peppered Buffalo backup goalie Dustin Tokarski with 41 shots.

The Sabres, without captain Jack Eichel and stalwart defenseman Jake McCabe, had their playoff drought officially reach 10 seasons, tied for the longest in NHL history and the third longest active streak in the four major professional sports.

Those failed seasons have all occurred under the watch of owners Terry and Kim Pegula, who have employed six different full-time coaches and four general managers during that span.

A path to the playoffs remains unclear. The Pegulas have tried mirroring the plan executed by Pittsburgh, first by hiring former Penguins coach Dan Bylsma and then adding Jason Botterill as general manager. Most recently, current Sabres General Manager Kevyn Adams hired former Penguins assistant general manager Jason Karmanos.

Modeling any organization after the Penguins, Boston Bruins or Washington Capitals will require a cast of contributors, not one or two stars. Drafting and development are critical areas, as recent Stanley Cup championships have shown us. And while this latest loss showed the divide between playoff team and upstart, the Sabres' priority to play the kids may have a promising long-term impact.

"It's very, very important for the young players to take ownership in the situations we're in but the situation that everybody's in," said interim coach Don Granato. "You're going to need everybody to be successful as a franchise. It's not just your star players and your top players. It's depth. Teams that win around the league have depth."

A healthy Eichel will need a much better supporting cast in 2021-22 for the playoff drought to not reach 11 seasons. Mittelstadt, Tage Thompson, Dylan Cozens and Rasmus Dahlin are among the young players to inspire hope in a failed season.

Mittelstadt, a former eighth-overall draft pick, has seven goals among nine points in his last 10 games, including the one-timer to cut the deficit to 3-2 with 8:16 left in regulation. Thompson, 23, scored for the fourth time in sixth games by gathering a Penguins turnover, continuing to pursue the puck after having a shot blocked and fighting his way to the slot before beating goalie Tristan Jarry in the second period.

"It's obviously a great opportunity, not only for myself but all the young guys," said Thompson, who had a team-high six shots on goal. "I think the team in general, when you play against better teams, learning how to win these games, obviously, we didn't get the result we wanted tonight, but I thought we played a really well-rounded game."

Dahlin, a 21-year-old former first overall draft pick, played a team-high 24:02. Defensemen Henri Jokiharju, 21, and Jacob Bryson, 23, also eclipsed the 20-minute mark. This wasn't this group's best game by any means.

The goaltending discrepancy was apparent, as Jarry made a few outstanding saves to preserve the Penguins' lead. Irwin failed to tie up Rust on the power-play goal, allowing Crosby's pass to successfully reach his intended target. Cozens' turnover behind his own net led to Evan Rodrigues scoring in the second period.

But these final weeks are valuable lessons for the Sabres. Each of their four opponents are in the playoffs or fighting for a spot: Pittsburgh, Boston, the New York Rangers and New York Islanders. Improvement of young players will be key. This is also a lesson for all involved in the Sabres' hockey operations.

Playing the kids is a nice step, but much more work is needed for contending to become a reality.

"I think everyone's got a chip on their shoulder and we got something to prove," said Thompson. "I think you see that from everyone in the room, we're a hungry group. We want to win, turn things around and just become better every day."

Here are other observations from the game Saturday:

1. Encouraging moment: Mittelstadt's goal came after the Sabres' 3-for-52 power-play slump that stretched 26 games.

Zone entries have been a problem. Puck management has led to turnovers. The Sabres aren't regaining possession after a misfired shot. Granato, though, emphasized a few basic adjustments Saturday, particularly quicker passes.

We saw more puck movement on the Sabres' only man-advantage opportunity Saturday. Victor Olofsson hit the post before Rasmus Ristolainen found Mittelstadt open in the slot for the team's second goal.

"I think there's been times where we've forced plays and try and take what's not there I guess," said Mittelstadt. "Today we just took what they gave us and obviously we ended up making a nice play."

2. No goaltending plan yet for Sunday: The Sabres plan to give top goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen at least one NHL game. It's unlikely Luukkonen will be ready for the second game of this back-to-back, as he hasn't played in a game since suffering a minor lower-body injury last week.

The Sabres may try to push Dustin Tokarski to start consecutive games for the second time this season. The 31-year-old stopped 38 of 41 shots Saturday, and his one blemish was being out of position on Jared McCann's shot from behind the goal line that gave the Penguins a 1-0 lead.

If Tokarski can't go, the Sabres will turn to Michael Houser, a 28-year-old with zero NHL experience who has not appeared in more than one American Hockey League game in any season since 2015-16.

The goaltending carousel this season should show Adams that the position needs to be a priority this summer.

3. The Sabres need leaders to emerge. Eichel, the Sabres' third-year captain, is out for the season. McCabe, an alternate captain, also won't play again until 2021-22.

And now, Kyle Okposo, a 33-year-old winger, won't return before the regular-season finale after undergoing surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek. Okposo suffered the injury Thursday in Washington when he was struck by Irwin's errant dump-in attempt.

With Eric Staal and other veterans traded ahead of the deadline, there is a leadership void in the dressing room.

"It's a loss because of what you mentioned; he's a leader, he's helped us as coaches in the transition, he's such a great communicator to us, to the teammates," said Granato. "Everybody looks up to him. So, we definitely lose a big portion of that. He's a guy that's around all the time, and I'm sure he'll still be helping us in many respects."

Ristolainen and Sam Reinhart, both of whom have worn the 'A' with Eichel and McCabe out, will be asked to lead this young group. But the Sabres also need someone like Cozens to have a stronger voice in the room.

For Okposo, this is a disappointing finish to his fifth season in Buffalo. He finished with two goals and 11 assists for 13 points in 35 games, including 10 points over his final 13 games.

Mike Harrington: Don Granato is looking like the right choice for Sabres

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

April 17, 2021

Keep a big-picture focus on the final two months of the Sabres' schedule, devoid of results in a season that was long-ago lost. Do they look cohesive? Do they give full effort for 60 minutes? Are they improving, as a team and individually? Do they look happy playing the game?

From this view, you can offer a resounding yes to every one of those questions. And that's a credit to Don Granato, an interim head coach who is looking like he deserves to get that title amended.

The Sabres will have a heavy decision on their hands after the season. They have to get this coaching hire right. Saturday's 3-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins made it official: They've tied the NHL record by missing the playoffs for 10 straight years. This has to stop.

So Jason Karmanos was brought in as the associate general manager to provide another set of eyes for rookie GM Kevyn Adams. Karmanos has got three Stanley Cups in front-office roles. Terry and Kim Pegula never sniff the postseason. The owners and first-time GM can't make this call alone.

There's going to be a lot of chatter about veteran coaches to interview. I doubt ownership has the appetite for the long-term, big-money deal any of them would require. This time, maybe that's not a bad thing.

Granato gave quite a talk to reporters one day last week about how this team needed to have fun. And it was a window into the square-peg/round-hole world of Ralph Krueger, who wanted his defense-oriented system played even if the guys on the ice were better suited to skate and score.

"If we just play a system and you focus on trying to play that system, you're really not improving your skill or your ability at the NHL level," Granato said. "We play a system, we have a system. But our focus has to be on trying to become better individually and collectively. And that is fun. That's the first thing that players do in the offseason: They go try to get better. And then in-season, they just try to survive.

"And so we've flipped that and said, 'We're not trying to survive here. We're going to try to get better. And certainly we're going to focus on giving you ways that we can win this hockey game. But get better, hang on to the puck, make a play, don't just feel pressure and throw it (away).' So I think the guys find enjoyment in that."

For too long, the Sabres have been bad and boring. Granato says the Sabres should be fun and entertaining. Don't you want your coach to think that way?

Under Granato, Rasmus Dahlin has been reborn. Casey Mittelstadt – who Krueger said couldn't play center – is finally playing like a top-10 pick. Tage Thompson looks like he can finally lessen the blow of the Ryan O'Reilly trade. Henri Jokiharju, Rasmus Asplund and Jacob Bryson have claimed their spots. Dylan Cozens got the chance to go head-to-head with Sidney Crosby Saturday and make his mistakes. Krueger would not have done that.

Jack Eichel shouldn't get a vote. He should be told to get healthy and show up in September ready to lead Granato's team. Dahlin loves Granato and assistant Dan Girardi. At this point, his view should matter as much as Eichel's.

Thompson said Saturday the young core is playing with a chip on its shoulder and he's right. This team simply doesn't go away in games anymore. With so many veterans on the injured list, the young players have to take ownership.

"It's a key opportunity for them and they're doing a great job of pushing, fighting and scratching and clawing," Granato said after Saturday's game, where Buffalo battled from a pair of two-goal deficits and came within a goalpost of the tying goal in the final minute. "It's going to be helpful in the future, that's no question."

Granato took over and practiced this team hard, knowing he was sacrificing early game results. The Sabres, remember, started 0-5-1 under him but needed to improve their conditioning. Which team was better in the third period of every game on the road trip that just ended?

It was the Sabres, and not Philadelphia, Boston or Washington. That's how you have impact.

Watch for subtle things, too. In the first period Saturday, Pittsburgh defenseman Kris Letang failed to keep a puck in at the Buffalo blue line during a power play but the linesmen said to play on. Granato immediately turned to his left and pointed to assistant Matt Ellis, instructing him to check with video coach Myles Fee for a potential offsides challenge.

The puck stayed in the Buffalo zone for nearly 30 seconds but Pittsburgh didn't score and there was no need for a review. No matter. The head coach was on top of everything going on and was prepared to react.

The Sabres pounded the Capitals Thursday and that's probably why the Penguins' game was so sharp off the hop Saturday. Pens coach Mike Sullivan said Friday he senses the Sabres are playing with a "free spirit." Said Capitals coach Peter Laviolette of the Sabres after Thursday's game: "They were on their toes tonight. They were forcing the issue. We weren't at that speed or at that gear."

Granato is no Ron Rolston, who players talked behind the back of for much of his eight months here as nothing more than a college coach. He's coached at all levels and has been an assistant for Joel Quenneville in Chicago. He comes from an epic hockey family (sister Cammi, brother Tony and brother-in-law Ray Ferraro).

Pedigree matters for players. It should for coaches, too. It's easy to see why anyone would want the shiny new toy. But sometimes you go for the big name and you get Rex Ryan or Phil Housley. You go for the big talker and you get Ralph Krueger.

Sometimes the guy you should want – and perhaps the guy you might need most – is the one right under your nose. He's already standing behind the Sabres' bench.

And that makes 10: Where Sabres' decadelong playoff drought ranks in pro sports

The Buffalo News

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The Buffalo Sabres were officially eliminated from NHL playoff contention Saturday with a loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins, bringing their playoff drought to 10 seasons.

That would be tied for third-longest active streaks in the four major professional sports behind the Seattle Mariners' 19-season drought and the Sacramento Kings' 14-season run. The Kings could make it 15 this season as they are currently outside playoff position in the NBA with a 22-34 record.

1. Seattle Mariners MLB 2001 19 seasons
2. Sacramento Kings NBA 2005-06 14 seasons
3. Buffalo Sabres NHL 2010-11 10 seasons
3. Phoenix Suns NBA 2009-10 10 seasons
3. New York Jets NFL 2010 10 seasons
6. Philadelphia Phillies MLB 2011 9 seasons
7. New York Knicks NBA 2012-13 7 seasons
8. Los Angeles Angels MLB 2014 6 seasons
8. Detroit Tigers MLB 2014 6 seasons
10. Arizona Cardinals NFL 2015 5 seasons
10. Pittsburgh Pirates MLB 2015 5 seasons
10. Kansas City Royals MLB 2015 5 seasons
10. Denver Broncos NFL 2015 5 seasons
10. Cincinnati Bengals NFL 2015 5 seasons

The Wraparound: Sabres finish strong, still fall to Penguins, 3-2

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 17, 2021

When Dylan Cozens attempted to carry the puck into the offensive zone Saturday afternoon, the Buffalo Sabres rookie was quickly met by a Pittsburgh Penguins defenseman.

Rasmus Dahlin wasn't given the same room to find his teammates skating uncovered in the neutral zone. The Sabres' penalty kill was also exposed against Sidney Crosby and company.

The Sabres weren't going to catch the Penguins by surprise. A resounding victory over the Washington Capitals will have that effect.

Casey Mittelstadt's power-play goal in the third period highlighted the Sabres' latest pushback, but Crosby continued his dominance in Buffalo by leading Pittsburgh to a 3-2 win inside KeyBank Center.

The Sabres (11-26-7), still last in the National Hockey League with 29 points, are 4-14-4 at home this season. The loss officially eliminated Buffalo from the playoffs for a 10th straight season, matching the NHL record.

Though the setback exposed some possible weaknesses, one game does not spoil what's been a strong turnaround under interim coach Don Granato. Buffalo is 5-3-3 over its last 11 games and almost completed another comeback.

Crosby's tape-to-tape pass set up Bryan Rust for a power-play goal for a 3-1 lead in the second period, providing the Penguins with a much-needed cushion in preparation for a possible Sabres push in the third period.

The response came, as Mittelstadt's power-play goal on a one-timer from the slot cut the deficit to 3-2 at 11:44 into the third period. However, the Sabres were unable to score with an extra attacker on the ice.

Sabres winger Tage Thompson's sixth goal of the season came only 44 seconds after Pittsburgh's Evan Rodrigues made it 2-0. Jared McCann also scored for the Penguins, who are 10-2-2 in their last 14 games.

Dustin Tokarski started a second consecutive game in goal for the Sabres, stopping 38 shots with starter Linus Ullmark recovering from a lower-body injury. The Penguins were without injured forwards Evgeni Malkin, Kasper Kapanen and Brandon Tanev.

Going cold: Seconds into the game, the Sabres forced a Penguins turnover and a quick cycle got the puck to defenseman Henri Jokiharju, whose shot from the point created a rebound that Buffalo could not capitalize on. The shot, though, was not counted and the Sabres finished with only four during an ugly first period in which puck management was an issue.

Buffalo was outshot, 12-4, during the first period, not including Crosby's that rang off the post. Crosby is now 32-5-1 in his career against Buffalo.

Opening salvo: The Penguins took a 1-0 lead at 10:30 into the first period when McCann banked a shot from below the goal line off Tokarski and in. Entering Saturday, the Sabres were 5-20-2 when allowing the game's first goal. Pittsburgh, meanwhile, was 15-4-2 when scoring first.

Growing pains: Cozens' turnover behind the Sabres' net lead to Rodrigues' goal at 5:57 into the second period. Penguins center Teddy Blueger retrieved the loose puck and sent a backhanded pass to the slot, where Rodrigues made it 2-0 for his sixth goal of the season.

Response: Penguins goalie Tristan Jarry's failed clearing attempt sent the puck rolling in the Sabres' offensive zone. Thompson collected the puck at the left wall, regained possession after having a shot blocked and scored on a shot from the slot to cut the deficit to 2-1 at 6:41 into the second period.

Remarkable play: With Rust positioned in front of the Sabres' net on the power play, Crosby made a perfect pass in front to lead to a redirection and 3-1 Penguins lead at 12:15 into the second period. Crosby has 67 points in 46 career games against the Sabres. He's been held pointless only five times during that span.

Trending up: Mittelstadt's goal came after a power-play slump in which the Sabres went 3-for-52 over their previous 26 games. Mittelstadt, 22, has seven goals over his last 10 games.

Lineup: The Sabres are without Kyle Okposo, Jack Eichel, Jake McCabe and Zemgus Girgensons, all of whom suffered season-ending injuries. Defenseman Will Borgen (forearm) and goalie Carter Hutton (lower body) also remain out, although both have resumed skating.

Ullmark is considered week to week, while forward Riley Sheahan (upper body) is day to day. Prior to puck drop, the Sabres recalled forward Steven Fogarty and assigned top goaltending prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to the taxi squad.

History: This was the NHL's first joint Pride Game, as the Sabres and Penguins celebrated the LGBTQ+ community. Both teams wore commemorative pride jerseys and used rainbow-colored tape during warmups.

The Penguins and Sabres will co-host a seven-day online auction featuring pride tape sticks, commemorative warmup jerseys and pucks, various signed items from both teams. In Buffalo, fundraising efforts will benefit Pride Center of Western New York (Pride Center WNY) and GLYS Western New York.

Next: The Sabres are scheduled to play the Penguins on Sunday with puck drop at 3 p.m.

Okposo out for season, Sabres to go with Tokarski in goal again today

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

April 17, 2021

In the wake of his first victory in 5½ years, Dustin Tokarski will make his second straight start in goal for the Buffalo Sabres when they meet the Pittsburgh Penguins today in KeyBank Center. Faceoff is expected around 3:25 p.m.

A reminder that the game is nationally televised today on NBC (Channel 2 in Buffalo) and not on MSG. Coverage begins at 3 p.m. for the league's first joint Pride Game sponsored by two teams.

Players from both clubs will use rainbow-decorated pucks and have rainbow tape on their sticks during warmups. They will be wearing commemorative warmup jerseys featuring the Progress Pride Flag.

The Sabres will be without winger Kyle Okposo for this game and the rest of the season. The team announced a couple of hours before faceoff he has had surgery for a fractured cheekbone suffered Thursday in Washington when struck by an errant dump-in from defenseman Matt Irwin.

"It's a loss because he's a leader," interim coach Don Granato said in his pregame media briefing. "He's helped us as coaches with the transition. He's such a great communicator to us and his teammates. Everybody looks up to him and we definitely lose a big portion of that."

Okposo finishes with two goals and 11 assists in 35 games but he had been playing much better of late with seven assists in his last 10 games.

The Sabres have promoted forward Steven Fogarty from Rochester to replace Okposo and goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to the taxi squad. Luukkonen could get his first NHL start against the Penguins here Sunday.

"I don't have an answer for you on that but it could be," Granato said. "I don't have an answer. I haven't even given thought to tomorrow's game. I know it would be tough with Tokarski playing to go back to back but that's not out of the question either. We just haven't made a decision on it."

Tokarski (1-4-2, 3.32/.908) made 27 saves on 29 shots in Thursday's 5-2 win at Washington, capturing his first NHL win since Dec. 12, 2015 for Montreal against Ottawa. The win improved the Sabres to 5-2-3 in their last 10 games.

Today's game is the opener of a weekend back-to-back featuring a pair of matinees, as the clubs meet again here Sunday at 3. The Sabres are 0-4 against the Penguins this season and have been outscored, 17-4.

The last meeting was the 4-0 loss in Pittsburgh on March 25 that saw Sabres GM Kevyn Adams step behind the bench when interim head coach Don Granato was sidelined due to Covid-19 protocols.

Buffalo has lost five straight against Pittsburgh and is 5-18-2 against the Penguins in their last 25 meetings. The last nine have been won by the team that has scored first.

The Penguins, meanwhile, have points in 23 of those 25 games (20-2-3) – and have a 14-game point streak in KeyBank Center (12-0-2). They have not lost here in regulation since a 6-2 Buffalo win on Feb. 19, 2012.

Tristan Jarry (17-8-3, 2.77/.909) starts in goal for the Penguins and is 9-1-2 in his last 13 starts. Jarry is 4-1, 2.00/.931 against the Sabres in his career and 2-0, 2.01/.922 against them this season.

Captain Sidney Crosby enters today's game in customary role of leading the Penguins in scoring with 49 points (17-32). In 48 career games against Buffalo, he has 23 goals, 47 assists and 70 points. He notched his 1,300th career point in the March 25 meeting.

Crosby's 70 points are the most in his career against any non-Metropolitan Division opponent. His 1.52 points per game against Buffalo are fourth-highest by a Sabres opponent (minimum 15 games). He's behind only Pens owner Mario Lemieux (1.75), Detroit's Steve Yzerman (1.63) and Vancouver's Pavel Bure (1.59).

The Penguins continue to be without injured forwards Evgeni Malkin (15 games), Kasper Kapanen (11 games) and Brandon Tanev (6 games).

OPINION: The Sabres come up short to Pittsburgh in the NHL's first combined Pride Game

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 17, 2021

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) – The Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins played in the first ever combined Pride Game in the NHL. It's an initiative that allows everybody, no matter what their beliefs or preferences be involved in our great sport.

This was a game for the Sabres where they were officially eliminated from the playoffs for the 10th straight year which ties a NHL record. Honestly, when I started covering the Sabres I always thought the playoffs were a given. I never could've dreamed that Buffalo would go 10 straight years without a playoff game.

Their very bad first period is why the Sabres dropped a 3-2 decision to the Penguins, but the kids on this team are taking ownership and they helped this team never give up and almost tie the game.

Late in the third period it looked like Sam Reinhart was going to tie the game. A very slow moving puck got by Tristan Jarry and I thought it was going in, but it nudged the post and came right back to Jarry.

Buffalo's goals were scored by two linemates, Casey Mittelstadt and Tage Thompson. Mittelstadt now has goals in four of his last five games, six of his last eight and seven in his last 10. The former first round pick has eight goals this season and if you take his totals over 82 games, it would equal 22 goals.

Thompson's goal gave him four goals in six games. His 82 game total would be 19.

The other player on that line is Rasmus Asplund. He's on a 26 goal pace.

Victor Olofsson is also scoring on a 22 goal pace, but much of his damage is done on the power play.

In the first period, Pittsburgh funneled the Sabres into areas of the neutral zone that forced them into numerous costly turnovers. Dustin Tokarski did allow Jared McCann to score from below the goal line, but his 11 saves were the only reason his team was only down by a goal.

You could see the Sabres starting to get their game back in the second period. Reinhart had a glorious chance off a rebound that he thought was going in, but Mark Jankowski got back and sprawled to make the save.

Dylan Cozens almost never makes the mistake he made behind the Sabres net handing to puck right to Teddy Blueger. He found former Sabre Evan Rodrigues alone in front for the goal.

Tokarski picked up his first NHL win since 2015 on Thursday in Washington. Other than the McCann goal, he made 38 saves on the afternoon and has raised his save percentage up to .910 in eight games played. Tokarski is facing almost 37 shots per game.

Buffalo is now 0-5-0 against Pittsburgh and has been outscored 20-6. The Sabres got the Penguins best game and showed they're not afraid of it. Back before the Penguins and Bruins started playing the Sabres I said it's going to be bad news for the New York Islanders and Washington Capitals because they have already played a majority of their games against Buffalo and picked up 12 points and 13 points.

Pittsburgh has already caught the Islanders and is three points in back of Washington. The Penguins have three games left against the Sabres while the Islanders have two. The Capitals are finished and the Boston Bruins still have five games left against Buffalo which could net them 10 points. They are four in back of the Isles, five behind the Pens and eight in back of the Caps with at least two games in hand on all three teams.

The Sabres and Penguins have another afternoon puck drop on Sunday. Join Brian Koziol and me for the pregame starting at 2:00.

OPINION: Three observations: Sabres hang with Penguins in 3-2 loss

By TJ Luckman

WGR 550

April 17, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres struggled to get things going early on Saturday afternoon at the KeyBank Center. The Pittsburgh Penguins took it to them early and found the lead early and kept it for practically the entire game.

The Sabres did a good job of battling back throughout the entire game, finding their legs in the second period and scoring a couple of goals to keep things close, but ultimately, all the Penguins had to do was ensure Buffalo doesn't tie things up. They never allowed the Sabres to get back into it.

Let's take a look at three observations from Saturday afternoon's game.

1. Thompson and Mittelstadt show up again

Surprise, surprise - the young guys kept the Sabres in this one.

That's becoming more of a common theme for the Sabres as of late. Pretty much all their offense lately has come from Tague Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt along with linemate Rasmus Asplund.

The trio of players came into the game with the highest icetime among current Sabres with 56:55 played at 5-on-5 and all have contributed at least two goals apiece along with a 53.4% expected goals for percentage and a 63.6% high-danger scoring chances for. They've easily shown the most chemistry of any Sabres line at this point of the season.

Mittelstadt, Thompson and Asplund are all young and all have a bright future with the Sabres, and they're making the most of their opportunity at the moment.

2. Crosby logs another point against the Sabres

What else is new? Sidney Crosby loves to play the Sabres.

Crosby managed to get on the score sheet of a game played against the Sabres once again. It's a thing he's become accustomed to doing since his NHL career began in 2006.

His assist on Bryan Rust's goal on Saturday afternoon increased his career points total against the Sabres to 71, scoring 23 goals and 48 assists in 46 total games against Buffalo. It's the most amount of points he has against an NHL team that isn't in the NHL's former Metropolitan Division.

The Sabres will get another chance to try to keep Crosby off the scoresheet soon enough, but it's doubtful they'll be able to do anything about him. Nothing seems to stop him when it comes to playing the Sabres.

3. Steven Fogarty replaces Kyle Okposo on a line with Cody Eakin and Tobias Rieder, which went about as expected

Over and over again, whether it's former Sabres head coach Ralph Krueger or interim head coach Don Granato, the Sabres continue to ice a Cody Eakin-led line as it's defensive shutdown unit.

Over and over again, it continues to go poorly for the Sabres.

Tonight, the pair of Eakin and Rieder had a new linemate in Steven Fogarty, with Kyle Okposo's season over after suffering a fractured cheek on Thursday night after taking a Matt Irwin puck dump-in to the side of the face.

Fogarty's inclusion on the line did nothing for the defense.

The trio of Eakin, Okposo and Rieder had played 139 minutes at 5-on-5 - the most often played forward line on the Sabres all season. In those minutes, they generated just a 30.8% expected goals for percentage, going along with an actual goals for percentage of 27.3%, indicating things are going worse than what they should be going.

If there's a bottom to how low this line can go, it may not have even hit yet, but with Okposo out, it's likely not going to get any better.

Against the Penguins, the trio of Fogarty, Eakin, and Rieder generated just 22.2% of the shot share to go along with 12.84% expected goals for percentage. While we can't take everything from such a small sample size, it's actually a worse performance than what that line typically brings.

Ultimately, the Sabres need to find a way to mitigate the negatives that the line brings to the game for the Sabres. Even in just 6:25 of ice time, the Sabres struggled.

The Sabres and the Penguins will be right back at it tomorrow at the KeyBank Center in downtown Buffalo. Buffalo is now officially eliminated from playoff contention, but they still have some games left to go, and they're not entirely meaningless with young talent needing just an opportunity and to get as many minutes as possible before the season draws to a close.

We'll convene once again at 2 p.m. ET with the Paul William Beltz Postgame Show hosted by Brian Koziol. He'll take you through the hour along with Paul Hamilton and Pat Malacaro all the way to puck drop, scheduled to take place just after 3 p.m. ET. We'll have all the action along the Sabres Radio Network from the radio flagship station of the Buffalo Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550!

Sabres come up a goal short to Penguins

By Kyle Powell

WGR 550

April 17, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres showed late fight, but were did in by a troubling first 26-minutes of the afternoon against the Pittsburgh Penguins. The blue and gold lost by a final score of 3-2, as the visiting Penguins emerged victorious inside KeyBank Center on Saturday.

The visitors scored first in the opening period, when with 10:30 gone forward Jared McCann banked a goal in and off the backside of Dustin Tokarski. McCann took the shot from below the goal line, good for his 12th of the season.

In the second period, the Penguins doubled their lead thanks to a goal from a former Buffalo Sabre. Evan Rodrigues was in the right place at the right time following a Dylan Cozens defensive zone turnover, and scored glove-side on Tokarski.

45-seconds later, though, the Sabres quickly cut their deficit in half. The Rasmus Asplund-Casey Mittelstadt-Tage Thompson line went to work immediately, resulting in the sixth goal of the year for Thompson.

Pittsburgh extended their lead back to two goals with 12:15 gone in the middle stanza. On a powerplay, it was forward Bryan Rust re-directing a Sidney Crosby pass into the Buffalo net to make it 3-1.

The Sabres pulled to within one just past the midway point of the third when the blue and gold capitalized on a powerplay. Red-hot Casey Mittelstadt ripped his seventh goal of the last 10 games in behind Jarry on the man advantage.

Unfortunately, that would end up being the last goal of regulation. Buffalo applied pressure and had Tokarski pulled for the last 2:20 of the game, but could not solve Jarry in their search for the game-tying goal.

STATS OF THE GAME

Losi and Gangi Three Stars of the Game:

- 1.) Tristan Jarry - PIT
- 2.) Jared McCann - PIT
- 3.) Tage Thompson - BUF

What's Next:

Same time, same place for these East Division foes, as the Sabres and Penguins run it back on Sunday afternoon. Puck drop inside KeyBank Center is set for 3 p.m. EST, and the Paul William Beltz Pregame Show with Brian Koziol starts at 2 p.m. EST on the radio home of the Buffalo Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Kyle Okposo done for season with broken bone in cheek

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

April 17, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres announced just before Saturday afternoon's matchup with the Pittsburgh Penguins at KeyBank Center that forward Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the 2020-21 season after undergoing successful surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek.

Okposo suffered his injury halfway through the first period of Thursday night's 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals when he took a puck to the face on a dump-in attempt from defenseman Matt Irwin.

The 33-year-old veteran was having a nice bounce-back stretch to his season, producing two goals and 10 assists for 12 points over the last 16 games played. Through the first 18 games of the season, Okposo registered just one assist.

Okposo joins Jack Eichel as players who will miss the final 13 games of the regular season due to injury. Meanwhile, goalie Linus Ullmark will be out on a week-to-week basis with his lower-body injury, but there are only four weeks left in the 2020-21 season, as of Saturday.

Faceoff on Saturday between the Sabres and Penguins gets underway just after 3 p.m. ET with Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray on the call on the radio home of the Sabres - WGR Sports Radio 550.

Tage Thompson, Sabres' other young players grab starring roles

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO – The Sabres are finally playing meaningful late-season games.

Of course, the outcomes won't affect the standings. Saturday afternoon's 3-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins officially eliminated them from the postseason for a record-tying 10th consecutive season.

Still, the final weeks of this campaign will shape the Sabres' future. Interim coach Don Granato has handed the keys over to some of his young players, and so far, they've seized their opportunities.

On Saturday, for example, center Casey Mittelstadt, 22, and winger Tage Thompson, 23, scored the Sabres' goals. Right now, they form two-thirds of the team's hottest line beside Rasmus Asplund, another young player recently thrust into a regular duty.

Earlier this season, Mittelstadt and Thompson struggled to earn spots in the lineup. Now, with several veterans injured, they've taken leading roles under Granato, playing the best hockey of their young careers.

The Sabres' arduous late-season schedule offers their young a special chance to develop against prime competition. They close the season against East Division heavyweights, playing only Pittsburgh, the Boston Bruins, New York Islanders and New York Rangers over their final 12 games.

"It's obviously a great opportunity, not only for myself but all the young guys," Thompson said on a Zoom call. "I think the team in general, when you to play against better teams, learning how to win these games, obviously, we didn't get the result we wanted tonight, but I thought we played a really well-rounded game."

On Saturday, the Sabres continued their trend of roaring back. After Mittelstadt's power-play goal 11:44 into the third period, center Sam Reinhart's redirection in the waning minutes slid by Penguins goalie Tristan Jarry but hit the post inside KeyBank Center.

Mittelstadt has developed into the Sabres' best offensive threat, scoring seven goals and nine points in his last 10 games. Remember, he mustered just one goal and four points in his first 19 games, mostly as a third- or-fourth line winger.

Thompson, meanwhile, enjoyed one of his best NHL outings, scoring his fifth goal in nine games in the second period shortly after the Sabres fell behind 2-0. He also pumped six shots on goal, tying his career high.

"I think with opportunity you gain confidence," Thompson said. "I think the more you touch the ice or touch the puck you realize you can make certain plays out there and you're not gripping your stick to tight. In the past, you're maybe just focused on trying to stay in the lineup. Now I'm really just going out there and playing and not really thinking. I think that's good for me."

Granato wants the young players to take ownership of the situation they're experiencing.

"It's key opportunity for them and they're doing a great job pushing and fighting and scratching and clawing," he said. "It's going to be helpful in the future, there's no question, the effort they're putting in right now."

Injuries have also created extra opportunities for rookie center Dylan Cozens, who shadowed superstar Sidney Crosby much of the afternoon. In Thursday's 5-2 win over the Washington Capitals, Cozens often played against top center Nicklas Backstrom.

"Great opportunity," Granato said of Cozens playing against Crosby. "As a player entering the NHL, any player entering the league or the NHL, it's gonna take a while to accept that they're an NHL player and move past that being in awe phase. ...

"The sooner we can move on and not worry about who that is, certainly respect their skill set, but not worry about it, the better. I think Dylan was good in that regard tonight and only get better as all of them will."

The Sabres, who host the Penguins again Sunday afternoon, gave up 41 shots, a heavy workload for goalie Dustin Tokarski. Prior to the game, Granato said he hadn't thought about Sunday's goalie plan. Michael Houser, who has never played an NHL game, backed up Tokarski.

The Sabres summoned top goalie prospect Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to taxi squad before the contest. Granato said the Finn will play at some point.

But Luukkonen has been recovering from a lower-body injury, so it seems unlikely he would play his first NHL game without some practice time.

Kyle Okposo undergoes season-ending surgery; Sabres make recalls

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO – Sabres winger Kyle Okposo has undergone season-ending surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek, the team announced this afternoon.

Okposo, 33, left the ice bleeding 9:27 into Thursday's 5-2 win against the Washington Capitals after teammate Matt Irwin's shoot-in struck him around the left ear.

His loss could be significant for the Sabres, who have 13 games left this season. The alternate captain has been one of their prominent leaders for years.

Interim Sabres coach Don Granato said Okposo helped his staff in their recent transition after coach Ralph Krueger was fired March 17.

"He's such a great communicator to us, to the teammates," Granato said on a Zoom call prior to this afternoon's game against the Pittsburgh Penguins at KeyBank Center. "Everybody looks up to him. So we definitely lose a big portion of that. He's a guy that's around all the time and I'm sure he'll still be helping us in many respects.

"And then the other side of it is, you think about it, I'm glad this didn't happen any sooner. It's bad that it's happened and he's missing the season, but certainly I'm grateful we've had him to this point, because he's done an awful lot for us."

He compiled two goals and 11 points in 33 games this season. After a slow start – he suffered a lower-body injury in training camp and missed the first five contests – he recorded 10 points in his last 13 outings.

In other news, the Sabres this afternoon recalled winger Steven Fogarty from the Rochester Americans to the active roster and goalie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen to the taxi squad. Granato said Fogarty will replace Okposo.

With Linus Ullmark week to week after suffering a lower-body injury, the Sabres needed to add a goalie to the taxi squad.

Granato said Dustin Tokarski will start this afternoon. Tokarski earned his first win Thursday since Dec. 12, 2015.

Granato said he hasn't thought about Sunday's starting goalie against the Penguins. He said Luukkonen, the Sabres' top goalie prospect, "will get in there at some point."

"I haven't even given it thought as to tomorrow's game," Granato said. "I know it would be tough with Tokarski going tonight to play back-to-back, but that's not out of the question, either. So just haven't made a decision on it, I'm not even thinking that far ahead yet."

Sabres eliminated from playoff contention with 3-2 loss to Penguins

By Jenna Callari

WKBW

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, NY (WKBW) — The season has been "over" for a while, but on Saturday, the Buffalo Sabres were officially eliminated from playoff contention after a 3-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins. This now marks the 10th straight season where the Sabres haven't made the postseason, extending the longest playoff drought in the NHL.

With the loss, Buffalo falls to 11-26-7 with 12 regular season games left on the schedule.

The Sabres got off to a sluggish start, getting just three shots on goal compared to the Penguins' 12. At that point, they were lucky to only be down 1-0 after the first twenty minutes of play.

The energy picked up in the 2nd period with the young guys continuing to step up and make plays when the team needs them to. Tage Thompson scored his 4th goal in his last five games to cut the Penguins two-goal lead to one. In the 3rd period, down 3-1 at that point, Casey Mittelstadt, found the net, also for his 4th goal in his last five games to make it 3-2. The Sabres couldn't capitalize with the extra man, dropping to 5-3-3 in their last 11 games. Dustin Tokarski made 38 saves in net.

The Sabres are back on the ice tomorrow when they host Pittsburgh again. Puck drops at 3pm.

Sabres forward Kyle Okposo out for rest of the season due to broken cheek bone

By Paul Ross

WKBW

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres announced on Saturday that forward Kyle Okposo is out for the rest of the season due to a broken cheek bone.

Okposo got hurt off an errand shot during Thursday's game against the Washington Capitals.

The 33-year-old had two goals and 11 assists in 35 games this season with the Sabres, recording two goals and eight assists in his last 13 games.

The team says Okposo underwent a successful surgery.

Sabres eliminated from playoffs, fall to Penguins 3-2

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – It's cliché to say hockey, or sports in general, is a game of inches. That was literally the case Saturday for the Sabres. Down 3-2, Rasmus Dahlin's shot went off the Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry. Sam Reinhart tried to chip it in, but the puck bounced off the post and landed just short of the goal line, allowing Jarry to cover it and prevent the equalizer from reaching the net.

It still goes down as a loss, but this team battled back after trailing 2-0 in the second and nearly took a point from a playoff team. A better start may have led to a better result.

"We struggled early to get into our rhythm a little bit," Casey Mittelstadt said. "I thought we got better throughout the game. I think we gave them too much time early and ticker made some good saves for us and just a little bit too little too late I guess. Obviously there's some things we can build on and take going into next game, but most of all we've got to be ready to go from the start."

Pittsburgh scored first when Jared McCann shot one from behind the goal line. Evan Rodrigues added another one in the 2nd period to give the Penguins a 2-0 lead.

"They were willing to put pucks to the net evident of their first goal," Interim Head Coach Don Granato said. "They shot below the goal line so they knew they were very willing to just put a puck to the net. We were the opposite."

Buffalo came back with a goal from Tage Thompson in the 2nd to make it 2-1. After giving up another goal to the Penguins, they closed the gap with a Mittelstadt score to make it 3-2.

"Obviously we didn't get the result we wanted tonight, but I thought we played a really well rounded game," Thompson said. "I think a couple of times we can get the puck in deep and make their D turn. But I thought for the most part we worked really hard and I think that's the trend we've seen the past little while now."

Once again the Sabres will miss the postseason after this loss today. Officially eliminated from playoff contention for the 10th straight year. That ties an NHL record. They'll face Pittsburgh once again on Sunday afternoon at the KeyBank Center.

Kyle Okposo to miss remainder of season

By Paul Stockman

WIVB

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – More injury woes for the Buffalo Sabres. Forward Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the season after having surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek, the team announced Saturday.

Okposo left Thursday's game against the Washington Capitals after he appeared to take a puck to the cheek. His surgery to repair the broken bone was successful, according to a release from the Sabres.

It's been an up-and-down year for Okposo. He had a slow start to the season, as he didn't record a point until the 11th game of the year. He only had four total points, all assists, until Ralph Krueger was let go as head coach.

Okposo saw a resurgence after Don Granato took over. He had points in seven of the next eight games, including two goals. He's picked up points in eight out of the 12 games before getting injured. He'll finish the season with two goals and 11 assists.

Penguins hold off Sabres, run point streak to five

By Heather Engel

NHL.com

April 17, 2021

BUFFALO -- Tristan Jarry made 28 saves for the Pittsburgh Penguins, who held off the Buffalo Sabres for a 3-2 win at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

"[Jarry] was solid. He made some big saves down the stretch," Penguins coach Mike Sullivan said. "I think our goaltending tandem (with Casey DeSmith) has been really solid for quite some time now. These guys are making timely saves for us. Today was no different."

Jared McCann, Evan Rodrigues and Bryan Rust scored for Pittsburgh (28-13-3), which is 4-0-1 in its past five games and moved one point ahead of the New York Islanders for second place in the eight-team MassMutual East Division. The top four teams will qualify for the Stanley Cup Playoffs.

"We're focused on where we are in the standings and trying to put ourselves in the best position moving forward and into the playoffs," Rodrigues said. "I think we're taking it one game at a time. Our mentality is the next game, and we're just trying to get better as a team so we can be going strong the rest of the season into the playoffs."

Tage Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt scored, and Dustin Tokarski made 38 saves for Buffalo (11-26-7). The loss eliminated the Sabres from playoff contention.

"We didn't get the result we wanted tonight, but I thought we played a really well-rounded game," Thompson said. "I think a couple of times we didn't get the puck in deep and make their [defense] turn, but I thought for the most part we worked really hard. I think that's the trend we've been seeing the last little while now. So it's good. I think we've got to learn from that and keep building."

McCann gave the Penguins a 1-0 lead at 10:30 of the first period when he got the rebound of Mike Matheson's shot and banked the puck off Tokarski from below the goal line.

"It may look like it's a lucky play, but it's real calculated play," Sullivan said. "And it's a heads-up play to try to take advantage of a goalie when he's in that situation, where he's got some separation from his post and there's some light there. He used the goalie himself to bank it off of and put it in the net. So I thought it was a real smart play on Jared's part."

Pittsburgh outshot Buffalo 12-6 in the first period.

"It was puck management initially," Sabres coach Don Granato said. "We were a little bit messy again, and it was just a process to get into the game for us for whatever reason. It took us a process to get into the game and absolutely part of it was a credit to them. They played hard, they closed ice well, specifically on entry. We complied too much on that. We needed to get pucks behind them a little bit, at least a little bit early to pressure, and we didn't do that."

Rodrigues made it 2-0 at 5:57 of the second period. Teddy Blueger intercepted a pass attempt by Dylan Cozens behind the net and sent the puck to Rodrigues in the bottom of the left circle.

Thompson got to a loose puck and scored from the slot to cut it to 2-1 at 6:41. Rust redirected a centering pass from Sidney Crosby at the top of the crease on the power play to push the lead to 3-1 at 12:15.

Mittelstadt scored a power-play goal with a one-timer from the slot to get Buffalo to within 3-2 at 11:44 of the third period.

Sam Reinhart nearly tied it with 2:21 remaining, but his shot hit the post and Jarry was able to turn around and cover the puck in the crease.

"We struggled early to get into our rhythm a little bit," Mittelstadt said. "I thought we got better throughout the game. I think we gave up too much time early. [Tokarski] made some big saves for us. Just a little too late I

guess. Obviously, there are some things we can build on and take into next game. Most of all, we need to be ready to go from the start."

NOTES: Pittsburgh is 13-0-2 in its past 15 games in Buffalo. The Penguins are 17-5-2 since March 1, which is third in the NHL behind the Colorado Avalanche (19-3-3) and Vegas Golden Knights (18-7-1). ... The Sabres have not qualified for the playoffs since 2010-11, tied for the longest drought in NHL history. The Florida Panthers (1999-2000 to 2011-12) and Edmonton Oilers (2005-06 to 2016-17) also had playoff droughts lasting 10 seasons.

Sabres, Penguins join forces for Pride game

By Pat Pickens

NHL.com

April 17, 2021

In the spirit of Hockey Is For Everyone, the Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins participated in the NHL's first joint Pride game at First Niagara Center on Saturday.

The Penguins and Sabres each wore unique Pride game jerseys for warmups and auctioned them off along with game-used sticks, pucks and other apparel, with proceeds generating You Can Play. They also teamed up to create a video where team members detailed the initiative's importance.

Jason Zucker, the Penguins forward known for his philanthropic efforts, also produced a limited-edition hat that is for sale until May 1 with proceeds benefiting the Penguins Foundation and its LGBTQ+ charities.

The Sabres also asked the Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus to sing the national anthems.

Performing virtually and outdoors, the chorus donned blazers and Sabres jerseys for fantastic performances of "O Canada" and "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Okposo out for season for Sabres with broken cheekbone

NHL.com

April 17, 2021

Kyle Okposo is out for the season for the Buffalo Sabres because of a broken cheekbone.

The forward had surgery Saturday after he was hit in the head by an errant shoot-in during the first period of a 5-2 win at the Washington Capitals on Thursday.

"It's a loss," Sabres coach Don Granato said Saturday. "He's a leader, he's helped us as coaches in the transition, he's such a great communicator to us, to the teammates. Everybody looks up to him. So we definitely lose a big portion of that.

"He's a guy that's around all the time and I'm sure he'll still be helping us in many respects. And then the other side of it is, you think about it, I'm glad this didn't happen any sooner. It's bad that it's happened and he's missing the season, but certainly I'm grateful we've had him to this point, because he's done an awful lot for us."

Okposo scored 13 points (two goals, 11 assists) in 35 games this season. The 33-year-old has two seasons remaining on a seven-year contract he signed with the Sabres on July 1, 2016.

Buffalo (11-25-7) is last in the eight-team MassMutual East Division and will be eliminated from playoff contention with a regulation loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday (3 p.m. ET; NBC, NHL.TV) or a loss of any kind combined with a New York Rangers win of any kind against the New Jersey Devils on Saturday.

Sabres officially miss playoffs for 10th consecutive season

By Adam Gretz

NBC Sports

April 17, 2021

The Sabres playoff drought has officially reached a decade.

With their 3-2 loss to the Penguins on Saturday afternoon, the Sabres were eliminated from playoff contention. With 12 games remaining on their schedule the maximum number of points the Sabres could reach this season is only 53. The Bruins, the fourth place team in the East Division, already have 54 points.

They are the first team to be eliminated from playoff contention this season.

Given the way this season started for Buffalo, with an 18-game winless streak in the middle, this was a foregone conclusion but it is still noteworthy to see this organization go 10 straight years without a trip to the playoffs. They have changed general managers and coaches multiple times, tried to rebuild, and may have to rebuild again.

This now has the Sabres tied with the Panthers (2001-11) and Oilers (2007-16) for longest playoff droughts in NHL history.

If you are a Sabres fan looking for a positive in all of this, it is that even with Saturday's loss they still showed a lot fight late in the third period and nearly tied the game in the closing seconds after entering the period facing a two-goal deficit. They have looked like a different team since changing coaches more than a month ago and are no longer a pushover for the rest of the teams in the East Division.

Even with that, they still did not have enough to match up with the Penguins on Saturday.

Pittsburgh finished the game with 41 shots on goal and carried the play for long stretches, especially in the first period where the Sabres looked a little overmatched.

The Penguins continued to get great contributions from its depth forwards as Jared McCann and Evan Rodrigues scored goals in the win. Bryan Rust's power play goal late in the second period proved to be the game-winner.

The most impressive thing about Pittsburgh's season, and maybe even the biggest surprise, is just how good its depth has been. If you go back to the start of the season that might have been one of the biggest questions about this roster. It has exceeded all expectations, and one of the best ways to illustrate that is looking at what they have done when neither Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin is on the ice. This season the Penguins actually have a plus-eight goal differential when neither of their top-two superstars are on the ice. That speaks volumes as to just how good the rest of the roster has played this season.

5 takeaways | Mittelstadt, Thompson continue to contribute in loss

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 17, 2021

It was a fight until the end once again, but this time a third-period comeback effort by the Sabres fell short in a 3-2 loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

The loss snaps a three-game point streak for the Sabres, who entered with a 5-2-3 record in their previous 10 contests. They will have a chance at a rematch when the two teams meet again at 3 p.m. on Sunday.

Tage Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt scored goals for Buffalo. Dustin Tokarski made 38 saves.

Here are five takeaways.

1. Penguins take control early

Pittsburgh was able to stymie Buffalo's transition attack early, leading to long stretches spent by the Sabres in their own zone. The Penguins played to an 8-3 advantage in scoring chances during the first period (according to Natural Stat Trick) and took a 1-0 lead on a bad-angle goal from Jared McCann.

"They were coming at us hard," Mittelstadt said. "They're an old, experienced team. They know how to play. I think we felt it out a little bit too long and you saw once we got going, we started making plays and getting pucks behind them and getting them back."

The biggest difference in the game in the eyes of interim head coach Don Granato was Pittsburgh's willingness to shoot, evidenced both by their 41 shots and by the first goal of the game. McCann retrieved the puck near the corner of the offensive zone and surprised Tokarski with a shot from below the goal line.

"They were very willing to just put a puck to the net," Granato said. "We were the opposite. We wanted to make one more play before we put it to the net. And that makes the game really hard. You expend a lot more energy. You end up chasing the game."

2. Thompson, Mittelstadt continue to produce

All that being said, the Sabres continued to display their no-quit attitude and nearly completed a comeback on the strength of two players who have become regular contributors of late.

Thompson put the Sabres on the board at 6:41 of the second period, just 44 seconds after Evan Rodrigues had scored to give the Penguins a 2-0 lead. The goal was his sixth of the season, five of which have come since April 1.

Sidney Crosby made a dazzling pass to set up a Bryan Rust power-play goal to increase Pittsburgh's lead to 3-1 during the third period. This time, it was Mittelstadt who responded by dropping to a knee and burying a one-time shot on the power play for his seventh goal and ninth point in 10 games.

"It's key opportunity for them and they're doing a great job pushing and fighting and scratching and clawing," Granato said. "It's going to be helpful in the future, there's no question, the effort they're putting in right now."

3. Another key matchup for Cozens

Dylan Cozens and his linemates turned in a dominant effort against Washington on Thursday despite spending the majority of the game matched up with either Nicklas Backstrom or Alex Ovechkin.

Granato kept the experience coming for Cozens, whose line saw more of Crosby than any other trio on Saturday.

"Great opportunity," Granato said. "As a player entering the NHL ... it's gonna take a while to accept that they're an NHL player and move past that 'being in awe' phase. So, for our guys, it was Ovechkin the other night, Backstrom. Tonight, obviously Crosby.

"The sooner we can move on and not worry about who that is - certainly respect their skillset, but not worry about it - the better. I think Dylan was good in that regard tonight and only get better as all of them will."

4. Sabres move forward minus Okposo

The Sabres announced prior to the game that alternate captain Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the season after having surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek. Okposo left the game Thursday after being hit by a shot on the left side of his face.

Okposo had been a consistent contributor under Granato, tallying 10 points (2+8) in his final 13 games of the season. Granato also credited the veteran as a leadership presence that eased the transition for a young team learning a new system over the past month.

"He's such a great communicator to us, to the teammates," Granato said. "Everybody looks up to him. So, we definitely lose a big portion of that. He's a guy that's around all the time and I'm sure he'll still be helping us in many respects."

Added Mittelstadt: "He's been everyone's rock pretty much. It hurts to see, for sure."

Steven Fogarty stepped into the lineup in place of Okposo and skated on a line with Tobias Rieder and Cody Eakin.

5. Up next

Same teams, same time tomorrow. The position to keep an eye on will be in goal, where the Sabres could either start Tokarski again on back-to-back afternoons or turn to rookie Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen for his NHL debut. Luukkonen was reassigned from Rochester to the taxi squad on Saturday.

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

At The Final Horn: Penguins 3 - Sabres 2

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 17, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres battled to the end, but Pittsburgh Penguins goaltender Tristan Jarry stayed strong until the end.

Buffalo's comeback efforts fell short in a 3-2 loss at KeyBank Center on Saturday. Jarry made 28 saves to earn the victory.

Tage Thompson and Casey Mittelstadt scored for Buffalo. Dustin Tokarski made 38 saves in net.

Jared McCann, Evan Rodrigues and Bryan Rust were Pittsburgh's goal scorers.

Buffalo went 1-for-1 on the power play and 1-for-2 on the penalty kill.

What happened

Right after Tokarski steered a shot into the corner, McCann fired it back toward the net from behind the goal line, where it leaked in shortside to put Pittsburgh ahead 1-0 with 9:30 remaining in the first period.

Rodrigues gave the Penguins a 2-0 lead when, waiting in the slot, he one-timed a behind-the-net pass from Teddy Blueger at the 5:57 mark of the second period.

Thompson made it a one-goal game with his tally 44 seconds later. After his first attempt was blocked, he tracked the puck down and beat Jarry for his sixth goal of the season.

Sidney Crosby set up Rust for a power-play goal with 7:45 remaining in the second to make it 3-1.

Mittelstadt scored with the man advantage with 8:16 left in regulation to put Buffalo back within one. He one-timed a feed from Rasmus Ristolainen shortly after Victor Olofsson rang a great chance off the post.

Worth mentioning

-The Sabres and Penguins co-hosted the NHL's first-ever joint Pride Game on Saturday with the goal of bringing together two cities to celebrate LGBTQ+ communities by sharing stories of inclusion, hope and allyship.

Players from both teams taped their sticks for pregame warmups with rainbow tape and took the ice wearing commemorative pride warmup jerseys featuring the Progress Pride Flag. Official Pride Game warmup pucks with a distinct colorful design were used by both teams in pregame warmups.

The Penguins and Sabres are also co-hosting a seven-day online auction featuring pride tape sticks, commemorative warmup jerseys and pucks, various signed items from both teams and more. The auction is now live and runs through April 24 at 12 p.m. To view the pride auction, [click here](#).

In Buffalo, fundraising efforts will benefit Pride Center of Western New York (Pride Center WNY) and GLYS. Pride Center WNY is a health promotion organization specializing in LGBTQ+ health and HIV prevention.

The Sabres and Penguins will donate 100 tickets for the game to LGBTQ+ organizations and each fan in attendance will receive a Pride Game rally towel on their seat.

Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus sang the anthems before the game.

You Can Play hosted a panel discussion focused on hockey from the perspective of LGBTQ+ participants with ties to Buffalo and Pittsburgh. The discussion was hosted by Jonas Worth from You Can Play and the panel featured Buffalo referee Alex Valvo, Pittsburgh Tigers manager Adam Knoerzer and NHL player agent Bayne Pettinger.

-Before the game, the Sabres announced that alternate captain Kyle Okposo would miss the remainder of the season after undergoing successful surgery on a broken bone in his cheek. Linus Ullmark is also week-to-week with a lower-body injury and his season is also in jeopardy.

Buffalo's injury list also includes forwards Jack Eichel, Riley Sheahan and Zemgus Girgensons, defensemen Jake McCabe and William Borgen, and goaltender Carter Hutton.

-With the loss, the Sabres were mathematically eliminated from playoff contention.

Coming up

The two teams will meet again at 3 p.m. Sunday afternoon at KeyBank Center. Catch the action on MSG and WGR 550. Pregame coverage on MSG begins at 2:30.

Morning Skate | Fogarty to step in for injured Okposo vs. Pens

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 17, 2021

Steven Fogarty will step into the lineup for the Sabres against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday afternoon, interim head coach Don Granato said.

Fogarty has three points (1+2) in eight NHL games this season. He will replace Kyle Okposo, who had season-ending surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek after being hit by a shot on Thursday.

Okposo had tallied 10 points (2+8) over his last 13 games.

"It's a loss," Granato said. "... He's a leader. He's helped us as coaches in the transition. He's such a great communicator to us, to the teammates. Everybody looks up to him. So, we definitely lose a big portion of that. He's a guy that's around all the time and I'm sure he'll still be helping us in many respects."

Dustin Tokarski will make his second straight start in goal coming off a 29-save performance against Washington on Thursday, his first NHL victory since 2015. He will be backed up by Michael Houser with Linus Ullmark out week-to-week due to a lower-body injury.

The Sabres reassigned Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen from the Rochester Americans to the taxi squad, opening the door for the 22-year-old to potentially make his NHL debut against the Penguins on Sunday. Granato said there had been no decision in that regard as of Saturday afternoon.

"I haven't even given a thought as to tomorrow's game," Granato said. "I know it would be tough with Tokarski going tonight to play back-to-back, but that's not out of the question either. ... I'm not even thinking that far ahead yet. But he will get in there at some point."

Scouting the Penguins

Pittsburgh added to its top six with the acquisition of veteran forward Jeff Carter from Los Angeles at the deadline. Carter took second-line center duties alongside Jared McCann and Jason Zucker in his debut against Philadelphia on Thursday. (Evgeni Malkin remains out due to injury.)

Carter, 36, has 19 points (8+11) in 41 games this season. He skated 17:54 and tallied two shots in his first game with the Penguins.

The Penguins are 7-2-1 in their last 10 games and sit in third place in the East Division, three points behind the first-place Capitals. Brian Dumoulin enters Saturday riding a career-best six-game point streak with two goals and four assists in that span.

Tune in

The game will be televised nationally on NBC beginning at 3 p.m.

Fogarty called up to Sabres active roster

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 17, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have recalled forward Steven Fogarty from the Rochester Americans. The team has also reassigned goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen from the Amerks to the team's taxi squad.

Fogarty has recorded the first three points of his NHL career (1+3) in eight games this season.

He signed a one-year contract with Buffalo in October and was named captain of the Amerks after spending three seasons in the New York Rangers organization.

Luukkonen, 22, was selected by the Sabres during the second round of the 2017 NHL Draft. In 14 games with Rochester this season, he's 7-5-2 with a .888 save percentage and a 3.60 goals-against average.

He has yet to appear in an NHL game.

Buffalo is currently dealing with injuries at both the goaltending and forward positions.

After yesterday's practice, Sabres interim coach Don Granato said that Riley Sheahan is considered day-to-day after sustaining an upper-body injury against Boston on Tuesday.

The team announced this afternoon that Kyle Okposo will miss the remainder of the season after having successful surgery on a broken bone in his cheek. He was hit in the head with a shot on Thursday.

Linus Ullmark and Carter Hutton. Ullmark sustained a lower-body injury during Tuesday's game and is out week-to-week. Hutton has been out since March 22 with a lower-body injury of his own.

Luukkonen is also recovering from a minor lower-body injury.

Dustin Tokarski made 27 saves in Thursday's win in Washington and is expected to start again this afternoon. Michael Houser served as the backup.

Granato will address the media with updates later this afternoon.

Buffalo opens up a five-game homestand with back-to-back afternoon games against the Pittsburgh Penguins today and Sunday.

Catch today's game on NBC and WGR 550 at 3 p.m.

Okposo to miss rest of season with broken cheek bone

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 17, 2021

Buffalo Sabres forward Kyle Okposo has undergone successful surgery to repair a broken bone in his cheek and will miss the remainder the season, the team announced Saturday afternoon.

The Sabres alternate captain sustained the injury when he was hit in the head by an errant shoot-in attempt during the first period of Thursday's game in Washington.

Okposo, 33, finishes the 2020-21 season with 13 points (2+11) in 35 games. He recorded 10 those points, including both goals, over his last 13 games.

The Sabres face the Pittsburgh Penguins today at 3 p.m. Watch the game on NBC or listen to the action on WGR 550.