



Buffalo Sabres

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'Swagger,' reliability help Jacob Bryson carve out role on Sabres' blue line

By Lance Lysowski

The Buffalo News

April 2, 2021

Jacob Bryson had a split second to decide where to pass the puck.

With Philadelphia Flyers winger Michael Raffl applying pressure near the blue line, Bryson faked a pass to his right to Casey Mittelstadt before sending the puck down the left-wing boards to Steven Fogarty. Mittelstadt then darted from the blue line toward the net, receiving a cross-ice pass from Fogarty and all-but-sealed the end of the Buffalo Sabres' 18-game skid with a shot between the legs of goalie Brian Elliott on Wednesday night in KeyBank Center.

The poise shown by Bryson in his 18 games with the Sabres would not surprise his college coach, Providence's Nate Leaman. Bryson showed that same resolve when Leaman first recruited the then-unheralded, 5-foot-9 defenseman.

"He makes hard plays look really simple," Leaman told The Buffalo News during a recent phone interview. "That's the biggest thing for him. Plays other defensemen would struggle with, whether it's a quick breakout read or a tight-area play, he made them look really easy. Almost so much that you would overlook a little bit how well he plays because he generally plays a really smart game."

Bryson is no longer overlooked. The 23-year-old rookie has averaged 19:28 of ice time while totaling one goal with three assists this season. He was on the ice for 22:31 on Wednesday, assisting on two Sabres goals and playing a top-pairing role alongside Rasmus Ristolainen in a 6-1 victory that snapped the franchise's historic winless streak.

While some scouts once viewed Bryson as nothing more than an undersized prospect, his blend of top-end speed, unteachable instincts, and ability to forecheck above his weight class have led to this ascent from fourth-round draft pick to reliable NHL player.

"I think a big thing is execution," said Bryson, a left-shot defenseman. "Making sure every pass is on the tape. And I've gotten used to the game more over these five weeks. I've learned a lot from a lot of guys on the ice and especially, I played a lot of games with (Ristolainen). So, we've been playing well together. I've taken in everything. But I think the biggest thing is execution. And I'm just trying to learn how to use my feet and my hockey IQ to play the game to my best ability."

Bryson did not have a clear path to Buffalo when the season began. The Sabres still had a surplus on defense and supplemented their depth on the left side by signing veteran penalty-kill specialist Matt Irwin as a free agent in October.

Numbers and versatility had Bryson approximately 10th on the depth chart. While Bryson's play with the puck was ready for the NHL, he still needed to round out his game in the defensive zone. It was fair to wonder if a high-event defenseman such as Bryson would fare well under former coach Ralph Krueger, who was always quick to bench players for lapses away from the puck.

Then the Sabres were hit with a series of injuries after exiting the two-week Covid-19 pause in February, most notably to defensemen Jake McCabe and Will Borgen. Bryson was thrust in to the top six when Irwin and taxi-squad veteran Brandon Davidson were inconsistent in spot duty.

His willingness to leave the blue line to support the Sabres' forwards was a boon to the worst 5-on-5 offense in the NHL. He has also been unflappable when pressured on the breakout, making life easier for whomever he's skating alongside. According to Evolving-Hockey.com, Bryson ranks second behind McCabe among Sabres defensemen in generating on-ice shot quality at 5-on-5.

"I coached him three years and I never saw him rattled," added Leaman, who was with Bryson at Providence from 2016-19. "He's smart, he can park any type of good play or bad play and just play the next shift one at a time. ... He's got a good swagger, but it's an earned swagger."

This wasn't always the case, though. In fear of making a mistake, Bryson was hesitant to join the play offensively early in his college career. He focused on quick breakout passes instead of using his speed to carry the puck through the neutral zone. Learning how to unleash that skill turned Bryson into one of the top defensemen in NCAA.

"We pushed him to kind of take games over at times because he had that ability," added Leaman.

In three seasons at Providence, Bryson totaled 11 goals with 62 assists in 121 games. He was a key cog in the Friars' run to the Frozen Four in Buffalo two years ago. He then turned pro and spent last season in Rochester, appearing in 61 games and learning the nuances needed to thrive at that level. Winning puck battles, making tape-to-tape passes and shutting down opponents created confidence entering the long offseason.

Bryson was the Amerks' best player through five games this season before he was called upon to join the Sabres.

"Day One of camp I was impressed, just his speed, his smarts," said Fogarty, captain of the Rochester Americans prior to joining the Sabres. "Just an all-around solid player. He was playing a lot of minutes, all situations down in Rochester and was earning his opportunity here. And once that came, he's taking full advantage of it. So, to see what he's doing the minutes he's earned and the production he's had so far doesn't surprise me at all."

Mitigating risk is one area in which Bryson will need to improve if he's to continue receiving a heavy workload. Among all Sabres defensemen, Bryson ranks second-to-last in suppressing on-ice shot quality at 5-on-5. However, his willingness to join the play fits well with how interim coach Don Granato wants Buffalo to attack in even-strength situations.

Usage will also be important. Bryson has benefitted from playing with Ristolainen, a veteran 6-foot-5 defenseman who can clear the front of the net. With McCabe out for the season and Rasmus Dahlin trying to rebound from bad performances under Krueger, Bryson has an opportunity to grow in his new role over the season's final weeks.

"He's a fierce, intense competitor with a very high personal standard, which pushes players around him," Granato said of Ristolainen. "His standard is pushed to them and Bryson embraces that. (Bryson's) got a lot of confidence. He's got a lot of ability and he's another player that has some dynamic qualities. There are pieces of the game he knows he can excel at and he's learning the other pieces of the game through a guy that's one of the best, I would say, to learn from, so it's a really good combination in that regard."

Steven Fogarty impressing Sabres, has opportunity to stick in Buffalo

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 2, 2021

BUFFALO – There was no wild celebration. Not even a fist pump.

When Sabres winger Steven Fogarty scored his first NHL goal on Wednesday, he reacted as if he had done it 100 times. A smiling Fogarty simply raised his stick, pointed to defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and shared a few fist bumps with his teammates.

By the time he started skating back to the bench, his grin had disappeared.

"It just happened so quick and you're kind of in the moment," Fogarty said on a Zoom call of scoring the Sabres' third goal in their 6-1 win over the Philadelphia Flyers. "It is something that you envision and dream of your whole life but once it happens, it does happen quick. It was a good point in the game to get a goal so that's what I was thinking."

Rochester Americans coach Seth Appert wasn't surprised Fogarty, his captain, remained so calm after scoring. Appert said Fogarty's father is a Navy admiral.

"So stoicism, I think, is in the family," Appert said. "He is a serious person. It doesn't mean he's not having fun. Don't mistake it, he loves the game of hockey. But he is serious, he is business. I really like the way he's playing up in Buffalo right now."

Fogarty, 27, might have an opportunity to stick in Buffalo the rest of the season. He has played two straight games and four of the last five entering Saturday's contest against the New York Rangers at KeyBank Center.

The Notre Dame product has recorded his first three NHL points in the last week. About five minutes after scoring, he assisted on center Casey Mittelstadt's goal.

Fogarty has mostly skated at right wing this week on the fourth line beside center Cody Eakin and Tobias Rieder.

Interim Sabres coach Don Granato clearly trusts Fogarty. He played him a career-high 13 minutes, 31 seconds in Thursday's 3-2 overtime loss to the Rangers.

When Sabres winger Tage Thompson scored the tying goal with 3.6 seconds left in regulation, the 6-foot-3, 204-pound Fogarty was screening goalie Igor Shesterkin.

"I think he probably feels the most comfortable that he's felt in the NHL," Appert said. "I think a lot of times when he's been in the NHL, he's felt he's had to run around and go hit everything in sight. He seems to be finding his game right now and finding a balance between having to be a bottom-six type player at that level, having to bring that energy and physical competitiveness, but also using the intelligence that is an underrated asset in his game."

The Rangers drafted Fogarty in the third round in 2011, 72nd overall. He spent most of the last four seasons with their AHL affiliate, the Hartford Wolf Pack. He earned 18 NHL games over that stretch, often playing short minutes during his occasional recalls.

"I loved my time in that organization," Fogarty said. "They're the organization that drafted me and believed in me and gave me opportunities along the way. Nothing but respect for that organization."

But so far, the Sabres organization has offered him the opportunity he wanted when he signed a one-year, two-way contract Oct. 19.

Fogarty enjoyed a leading role with the Amerks, scoring five goals and eight points in 10 games. He made his Sabres debut Feb. 15 and has also spent time on their taxi squad.

A rash of injuries over the past two weeks created a chance Fogarty wants to seize.

"Every year I've been a pro so far I've started down in the minors and I just had a few stints in the NHL," he said. "Once you get a taste of it, you just want to keep getting back up here."

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Granato said no one texted him following his first six games as Sabres coach. Apparently, no one wanted to bother him after a loss.

"My dad doesn't even text me anymore because he's afraid to say something because we haven't been winning," he said Thursday morning.

However, after Wednesday's win, his first as interim coach, he said his phone "lit up pretty good."

"So I'd wondered if people were watching or stopped watching but apparently they didn't," Granato said. "All of the messages were great and very welcomed and it's always neat to see that."

Granato's sister, Cammi, a Hockey Hall of Famer, tweeted, "Congrats to my big bro, Donny, on his 1st win as an NHL head coach!"

Meanwhile, her husband, Ray Ferraro, who scored 408 goals over 18 NHL seasons, tweeted, "Super pumped for brother-in-law Don Granato on his 1st win as an #NHL head coach."

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Thompson's goal Thursday was the third-latest tying goal in Sabres history. Thomas Vanek scored with two seconds left Feb. 7, 2013 and Phil Housley scored with three seconds remaining Jan. 7, 1983.

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Amerks winger Jack Quinn, the eighth overall pick by the Sabres in 2020, missed Friday's 6-2 loss to the Syracuse Crunch for what Appert called a "maintenance day."

"He just need the day to look to take care of a few things from a physical perspective," Appert said.

Appert said he expects Quinn to play tonight in Syracuse.

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The Sabres had Friday off.

Sabres send two players to Amerks

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

April 2, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres this morning sent defenseman Brandon Davidson and forward C.J. Smith to the Rochester Americans.

They're expected to play for the Amerks tonight against the Syracuse Crunch in Rochester.

Davidson, 29, has played six NHL games this season, compiling zero points and a minus-4 rating. He has spent most of the year on Buffalo's taxi squad.

Meanwhile, Smith, 26, has shuttled between the Buffalo's taxi squad and Rochester. He has scored two goals and six points in five AHL outings. He went pointless in his NHL season debut March 25.

Buffalo Sabres and Pittsburgh Penguins to co-host the NHL's first-ever joint Pride Game

By Anthony Reyes

WKBW

April 2, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) — The Buffalo Sabres will be joined by the Pittsburgh Penguins to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community as they co-host the NHL's first-ever joint Pride Game.

The game will take place at 3 p.m. on April 17 and will be nationally televised on NBC.

"Together with the Penguins, we hope this joint Pride Game will represent the spirit of inclusion that we know exists in our organization and our community," Sabres vice president of community relations Rich Jureller said. "This will be a special day and we're thrilled that fans will be in KeyBank Center to celebrate with us. Hockey truly is for everyone and we encourage all of our fans to join us in our support of the LGBTQ+ community."

For pregame warmups the teams will tape their sticks with rainbow tape, wear commemorative pride warmup jerseys featuring the Progress Pride Flag and use Official Pride Game warmup pucks with a distinct colorful design.

The items used in warmups, along with other signed items, will be available during a seven-day online auction that begins pregame on April 17 and runs through April 24 at 12 p.m. You can find the auction [here](#).

Fundraising efforts in Buffalo will benefit Pride Center of Western New York and Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York.

The teams will donate 100 tickets for the game to LGBTQ+ organizations. Each fan in attendance will receive a Pride Game rally towel on their seat and Buffalo Gay Men's Chorus will sing the anthems before the game.

A panel discussion will be hosted by Jonas Worth from You Can Play leading up to the game. It will be focused on hockey from the perspective of LGBTQ+ participants with ties to Buffalo and Pittsburgh. Buffalo referee Alex Valvo, Pittsburgh Tigers manager Adam Knoerzer and NHL player agent Bayne Pettinger will participate in the panel discussion.

You can find tickets to the game and more information on the ticket buying process [here](#).

For more information on the Pride Game you can visit [this website](#).

Those who purchase a fan cutout between April 2 and April 9 can use code PRIDE to receive \$10 off and for each cutout purchased, \$10 will be donated to Pride Center WNY. You can purchase a cutout [here](#).

Fans return to KeyBank Center, but Sabres not serving up wins at home

By Julianne Pelusi

WGRZ

April 2, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — KeyBank Center will have fans back in the building on Saturday, in the first of four games Buffalo is allowing the Sabres faithful to come support their team against the New York Rangers.

Unfortunately for the fans, the Sabres have struggled at home all season, only winning three games so far at KeyBank.

The Sabres are busy coming off of a 3-2 overtime loss to the Rangers on Thursday night, with Buffalo coming off back-to-back games. The Sabres snapped an 18-game winless streak, beating the Philadelphia Flyers 6-1 on Wednesday night.

Buffalo had a chance at a second straight win against New York, trailing 2-1, when Tage Thompson tied it up with a goal with four seconds remaining, sending Thursday night's game to overtime before Mika Zibanejad scored the game winner with overtime running down.

The Sabres lead 1-0 after the first period off of a goal from Rasmus Asplund just 2:06 in the game, but the Rangers tied it in the second and went ahead 2-1 in the third, with Colin Blackwell and Filip Chytil getting behind Dustin Tokarski.

The Sabres were showing fatigue from there back-to-back games and much more physical practices run by interim coach Don Granato, 15 days after he took over as the interim head coach.

"Fatigue is a factor certainly when you play back-to-back and the other team didn't. There's not way around it. The other team is going to be better rested, better prepared... When we spoke to the team after the second period, that was the number one message: 'What you're battling, fellas, is fatigue. All the signs show it. You know it, we know it, let's talk about the elephant in the room here,'" Granato said after Thursday night's game.

"A lot of it, we had to change our mindset and just find a way to surge and push through, get back to playing our game because we didn't in the second period. We played with a lot of hesitation, no puck pressure, and we chased it then. We had to understand that it's going to be a lot harder if we don't push."

Granato said earlier in the week, after Wednesday's morning skate, they've felt the energy from the fans in recent road games, in Boston and in Pittsburgh. Although they're excited to have the fans added back into the KeyBank atmosphere and want to give them something to be excited about in return - a Sabres win - they have to stick with the process of longer and harder practices, which might leave Buffalo fatigued during the games.

"Nobody wants to see wins more than players because they're taking the heat. The win's going to be the byproduct of doing things the right way. The process of it is gaining confidence. What are the right things that we do as a team, collectively? We're identifying better with that," Granato said.

"The stronger that becomes, wins follow... We want to try to get to a point where we feel like we win any night out and win with consistency. I'm not giving these guys extra rest so we can hope to win the next game and then we're right back to where we were. We're trying to push them harder to develop harder. We know we have to get better. The focus has to be on that, and we have to trust that wins will follow and be a byproduct of that... If you turn to just chasing one win, just for the sake of one win, and sacrificing becoming better, I don't believe in that... We have to stay on that path no matter what happens."

Sabres, Penguins to co-host NHL's first joint Pride Game

By Julianne Pelusi

WGRZ

April 2, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. — The Buffalo Sabres will host the Pittsburgh Penguins in the National Hockey League's first joint Pride Game, celebrating the LGBTQ+ community on Saturday, April 17 at 3 p.m., with the game broadcast available on NBC/Channel 2, locally.

According to a press release from the Sabres, the joint Pride Game "aims to bring together two cities to celebrate LGBTQ+ communities by sharing stories of inclusion, hope and allyship," as a part of the NHL's "Hockey Is For Everyone" campaign.

The Sabres vice president of community relations Rich Jureller said "Together with the Penguins, we hope this joint Pride Game will represent the spirit of inclusion that we know exists in our organization and our community... This will be a special day and we're thrilled that fans will be in KeyBank Center to celebrate with us. Hockey truly is for everyone and we encourage all of our fans to join us in our support of the LGBTQ+ community."

Players will use rainbow tape on their sticks for pregame warmups with Official Pride Game warmup pucks. They will also wear pride warmup jerseys, featuring the Progress Pride Flag, according to the Sabres.

The teams will auction off the tape sticks, jerseys and pucks between April 17 and April 24, with proceeds benefitting the Pride Center of Western New York and Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York.

The teams will also donate 100 tickets to LGBTQ+ organizations. Fans will also get a Pride Game rally towel with admission.

Sabres and Penguins to celebrate LGBTQ+ community with ‘Pride Game’ at KeyBank Center on April 17

By Patrick Ryan

WIVB

April 2, 2021

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) — The Buffalo Sabres will face off against the Pittsburgh Penguins on April 17 in Buffalo. Though they’re competitors, the two teams will come together to celebrate the LGBTQ+ community at KeyBank Center.

The Sabres and Penguins will co-host the National Hockey League’s first-ever joint Pride Game aiming to celebrate inclusion, hope and allyship while raising money for local LGBTQ+ organizations.

Both teams will hit the ice in commemorative pride warmup jerseys featuring the Progress Pride Flag. Their hockey sticks will also be wrapped with rainbow tape for pregame warmups, including Pride Game warm-up pucks.

A seven-day auction will run from April 17 through April 24 at 12 p.m. featuring pride tape sticks, commemorative warmup jerseys and pucks, signed items from both teams and more.

Proceeds from the auction will go to benefit the Pride Center of Western New York and Gay and Lesbian Youth Services of Western New York.

Both teams are donating 100 tickets to LGBTQ+ organizations for the April game. Each fan attending will get their hands on a Pride Game rally towel.

“Together with the Penguins, we hope this joint Pride Game will represent the spirit of inclusion that we know exists in our organization and our community,” Sabres Vice President of Community Relations Rich Jureller said.

“This will be a special day and we’re thrilled that fans will be in KeyBank Center to celebrate with us. Hockey truly is for everyone and we encourage all of our fans to join us in our support of the LGBTQ+ community.”

Prior to the game, a panel discussion will be held by You Can Play, an organization focusing on the inclusion and protection of LGBTQ+ athletes, discussing “hockey from the perspective of LGBTQ+ participants with ties to Buffalo and Pittsburgh.”

For more information about the Pride Game, [click here](#).

Tickets for the game can be purchased by [clicking here](#).

Patrick Ryan is a digital producer who has been part of the News 4 team since 2020. See more of his work [here](#).

Sabres fan's memory honored with purchase of 64 cutouts

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 2, 2021

Theodore "Teddy" Steeg III sat in the last row of the 300 Level wearing a Daniel Briere jersey for Game 3 of the Eastern Conference Semifinals in 2006. His friend, Nathaniel Roche, recalls Steeg revisiting the atmosphere in the arena when J-P Dumont scored the overtime winner for years and years afterward.

"I just remember that being one of the highlights of his life," Roche said.

Steeg passed away unexpectedly on Feb. 20. He was 38. The loss prompted Roche - a friend since fourth grade - and others in their longtime friend group to find a way to honor a man they affectionately describe as a "legend" with a kind soul and big personality.

"Let's find a way to give Teddy a tribute that he deserves," Roche said. "He's such a character in our group of friends, such a core piece to everything. We all thought about that. He's this core piece that ties us all together in a lot of ways. So, how do we provide a tribute that makes sense for him?"

They decided to put Teddy in the stands for a Sabres game one more time.

Steeg was featured on 64 cardboard cutouts in section 206 during Buffalo's game against the New York Rangers on Thursday. Roche and friends raised money for the tribute through an online fundraiser that quickly garnered support on social media.

The influx of donations, Roche said, was a testament to Steeg's ability to leave an impact on those he met. Roche recalled a spring break trip to Fort Lauderdale in high school when unknown strangers would pass on the street and call out, "Hey, Teddy!" The experience earned him the moniker "The Legend of Fort Lauderdale," one of several nicknames Teddy was given over the years.

Brian Duff and Martin Biron paid tribute to Steeg during the first intermission on the Sabres broadcast.

Roche wants people who notice Steeg's presence in KeyBank Center to know he was a true fan and a person who cared about others. In a note written with the purchase of the cutouts, Roche referred to his friend as "unapologetically Teddy."

"He just had no shame in his personality," Roche said. "He was the life of the party. He wasn't afraid to be himself around everyone and show his true emotions, his true color, his true character all the time. And he never needed to apologize for being Teddy.

"I think that's why everyone loved him, because he was just so genuine. He got along with people from all walks of life. That's something I really admired about him. He could jump into just about any group of people and mix right in and he would end up making friends."

Sabres reassign Smith, Davidson to Amerks

By Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

April 2, 2021

The Buffalo Sabres have reassigned forward C.J. Smith and defenseman Brandon Davidson from the team's taxi squad to the Rochester Americans (AHL).

Smith has appeared in one NHL games this season and has six points (2+4) in five games with the Amerks. Davidson has played in six games for Buffalo this year.

Rochester hosts the Syracuse Crunch tonight at Blue Cross Arena at 7:05 p.m. Catch the game live on The Sports Leader 95.7 FM/950 AM ESPN Rochester and AHLTV. The game will re-air at 10 p.m. on The CW in Rochester.

Then the Amerks will travel to Syracuse for another game against the Crunch on Saturday at 7 p.m.

Buffalo's next game is tomorrow against the New York Rangers at 7 p.m. at KeyBank Center.