



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*October 8, 2015*

## **Finally, the Eichel era dawns for Sabres**

By Mike Harrington  
Buffalo News  
October 8, 2015

There are all kinds of fresh faces around the Buffalo Sabres' lineup and even behind the bench. Optimism is flowing about as much as it can be for a team coming off back-to-back visits to the netherworld of 30th place in the NHL standings.

After months of hype, the big unveiling is here. It's the season opener Thursday night in First Niagara Center against the Ottawa Senators. And there's no way for the team to downplay it: This one is all about Jack Eichel.

The likeness of the No. 2 overall pick is one of four giant posters erected this week in the FNC atrium with its "Next Chapter" marketing slogan plastered on it.

Connor McDavid and Eichel will be forever linked by going 1-2 in the 2015 draft and this is their night, with Eichel skating in Buffalo and McDavid officially suiting up for the Edmonton Oilers for the first time in their game at St. Louis.

"You don't focus on that too much anymore but it was all part of the experience to get here," Eichel said after practice Wednesday on the eve of Buffalo's 45th NHL opener. "There were great times but they're over with now and it's time to play hockey."

Eichel said he expects plenty of electricity in a building that's been mostly devoid of any juice for several years.

"I think it will be pretty wild," he said. "I know Buffalo has been looking forward to this one and so have we. It's going to be a great experience."

New coach Dan Bylsma will direct a lineup with plenty of new big-ticket items. Up front, there's the star power of Ryan O'Reilly and Evander Kane as well as the steady veteran contributions expected from the likes of Jamie McGinn and David Legwand. Free agent signee Cody Franson is on defense. Trade acquisition Robin Lehner is the new starting goalie.

Bylsma, of course, used to coach Sidney Crosby in Pittsburgh. He knows the kind of attention Eichel is embarking upon.

"I hope he doesn't feel it. I hope he's kind of ignorant to all the talk," Bylsma said. "Even though it gets asked every day and is out there, it's really outside our sphere and his sphere and he doesn't really need to worry about it. His comparisons to Connor McDavid, his comparisons to his daily activity if he has a good game, bad game, good shift or bad shift. It's going to be analyzed but it's outside him and outside our group."

Bylsma talked to Eichel on Wednesday, officially informing him he had made the roster – as if that was ever in doubt – and confirming that Eichel would finally be switching to No. 15 from the 41 sweater he's worn through camp and exhibition play.

"It went fine. We talked a lot about training camp," Eichel said of the conversation. "I don't really think I want to ease into the season. No one wants to ease into anything. I want to get out there and make an impression, make an impact right away. From my first shift, I want to do something positive to help this team win. Whatever that is. They want me to make an impact and I'm going to do my best to do that."

There's precedence with this franchise for Eichel's first NHL shift to be one for history. Remember how Danny Gare (18 seconds in 1974) and Alexander Mogilny (20 seconds in 1989) rocked Memorial Auditorium with goals from the opening faceoff of their first games? Imagine if something like that happened in this one.

"I still get chills when I think of my first game," said Sabres forward Tyler Ennis, recalling his 2009 debut in Philadelphia. "Hopefully it would be nice if he could get the little bonus of putting one in during his first game."

"My first shift I missed a breakaway pass because I was so nervous and I would have been gone," a smiling Kane said of his 2009 debut for Atlanta against Tampa Bay. "I got my first point out of the way that game and scored in my second game. You're nervous, as much as you say you're not. It's different than preseason. It's full NHL rosters on the other side but he's played in quite a few big games and can draw from all that experience like I did."

It's already been a busy week for Eichel, aside from "making the team" Wednesday and finally making his NHL debut on Thursday. Just look at what he was up to on Tuesday alone.

Eichel's docket that day: After practice, the Sabres revealed his favorite egg-and-guacamole-topped cheeseburger that will be selling in the arena called the "Eike Daddy." Eichel then joined teammates visiting children at Roswell Park Cancer Institute. Then it was on to his first major autograph signing, at Dave & Adam's Card World in Williamsville. Several hundred people lined up for autographs and pictures.

"It was quite an experience," Eichel said of the signing. "So many people came out to see me and that was really nice. It speaks volumes of the fans here."

Eichel's linemates for the opener could be in flux. Captain Brian Gionta did not practice Wednesday after developing a lower-body injury in Tuesday's practice and Bylsma said he's day to day. Eichel was centering Kane and Sam Reinhart in Wednesday's practice.

Kane, making his Buffalo debut after last year's trade from Winnipeg, has been duly impressed.

"I had never seen him play live until I got to camp here," Kane said. "You hear about his skating and shot, the way he moves the puck. Now that you play with him, his skating is what drives him. He obviously has a big shot and great vision but it's when he's skating that he's at his best. We saw that with the breakaway in the Toronto game where he got a step and just pulled away to score."

"I think he has all the tools to make an impact this year. There will obviously be ups and downs. It doesn't matter how good you are or what the expectations are. There will be periods of time things don't go your way and you can get frustrated. It can be tough as a young guy but there are guys in here who will help him through that."

Eichel is expecting several friends and family members at the opener. His father will attend all three games on the opening homestand and then travel to Florida for the team's two games next week. Bob Eichel, in fact, will be celebrating his 55th birthday Thursday.

"He's dreamed his whole life of watching me play professional hockey," Eichel said. "It's exciting to share this moment with him. He's my best friend in the world. That's a special way to celebrate your birthday."

"He's so impressive," Ennis said. "Being from Edmonton, I hear a lot about McDavid – and I have to keep telling people back home how good Eichel is."

## **Bylsma eager to step back behind an NHL bench**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

October 8, 2015

Counting the playoffs, Dan Bylsma has coached 479 games in the NHL. But the one he'll be directing Thursday in First Niagara Center will end a nearly 17-month wait to get his second chance behind an NHL bench.

Like many of his players, Bylsma makes his official debut with the Buffalo Sabres in the season opener against Ottawa. His last appearance in the NHL was on May 13, 2014, when the Pittsburgh Penguins suffered a 2-1 loss to the New York Rangers in Game Seven of a second-round series Pittsburgh once led, three games to one. Bylsma was fired a couple of weeks later and took last season off on a personal scouting mission.

There was some broadcasting work, travel to watch teams at several levels, a role as an assistant on Team USA at the World Championships and then his hiring by the Sabres in May to replace Ted Nolan. Now, nearly 17 months later, Bylsma is back.

"It doesn't feel like I haven't coached in a year and a half when you say it that way," Bylsma, 45, said after practice Wednesday. "I've had some experiences in the past year where I've been on the bench ... Someone asked me that question yesterday and there's just a high sense of anticipation and excitement going into the start of the season and," Thursday's "game. I probably started it a few days ago."

Bylsma has a 252-117-32 record in regular-season play and is 43-35 in the playoffs, leading the Penguins to a Stanley Cup in 2009 as a rookie head coach. He got to both 200 and 250 wins faster than any coach in NHL history.

"It's not quite like coaching your first game," Bylsma said. "But there is a high level of excitement, getting ready for this game and the season to start."

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With Jack Eichel officially taking No. 15 on Wednesday, he arguably becomes the most prominent Sabres player to wear the number. The two big notables are former 1970s captain and eventual general manager Gerry Meehan and 1990s star Dixon Ward.

Others to wear the number, listed chronologically, are Bryan McSheffrey, Michel Deziel, Gary McAdam, Mike Boland, former U.S. Olympian Rob McClanahan, Yvon Lambert, Geordie Robertson, Chris Langevin, Adam Creighton, Doug Smith, Kevin Haller, Lou Franceschetti, Randy Wood, Greg Brown, Sergei Petrenko, Milan Bartovic, Dainius Zubrus and Colin Stuart. It was Stuart who wore it last, in 2012.

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Former Sabres forward Clarke MacArthur returned to practice with the Senators Wednesday and said he intends to make the trip to Buffalo. MacArthur, who has totaled 40 goals for the Sens over the last two seasons, has yet to receive medical clearance to play after a collision with a teammate during Ottawa's exhibition finale but does not have a concussion.

"I took a little bump to the neck/chin area but I've been hit harder by my daughter with her toys," MacArthur joked to Ottawa reporters on Wednesday.

The Senators will be starting veteran Craig Anderson in goal.

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Thursday's game will mark the second time in three years Buffalo will play its first home game against Ottawa. The Sabres also met the Senators here on Oct. 4, 2013, losing a 1-0 decision on a goal by Ottawa defenseman Erik Karlsson early in the third period.

That game was not the season opener, as Buffalo began play two days earlier with a 2-1 loss to Detroit. The Sabres are 2-0 in season openers against Ottawa, both coming in the Canadian capital. Buffalo took a 3-1 decision there in 1995 and posted a 2-1 win in 2010.

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The Sabres will unveil their new goal song in the arena when they score their first goal at home this season. With input from players and staff and a fan vote on Sabres.com, the two finalists are D.J. Cool's "Let Me Clear My Throat" and Tenpole Tudor's "Swords of a Thousand Men." Voting closes Thursday at noon.

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The Sabres will host a party in the plaza from 5-6:30 p.m. Thursday. Alumni and Sabretooth will be on hand for autographs. There will be live music and food and beverage available for purchase, an interactive fan photo booth and all fans will receive a home-opener handout at the gate.

Those who did not attend preseason games are reminded that metal detectors are in use at the gates in the arena pavilion, as they are now in every NHL rink.

## 'Eich Daddy' burger highlights new Sabres concessions

By Ryan Nagelhout

Buffalo News

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Jack Eichel got a burger named after him before he officially made the Buffalo Sabres opening night roster.

Eat your brandless heart out, Connor McDavid.

Eichel's "Eich Daddy" was the highlight of a slew of new menu items shown off by Delaware North Sportservice on Tuesday at First Niagara Center. The concessions company hopes the burger, designed by the Sabres' first round pick in June's NHL Draft, will be as popular in concession lines as the Boston University standout is expected to be in the stands.

The burger modifies the classic combo of all-beef patty, American cheese, lettuce, onion and tomato by throwing on Thousand Island dressing, guacamole and a fried egg. Sitting on a brioche roll, the burger is one of the bolder taste options in the corrugated cardboard-bound world of stadium eats.

Eichel wasn't on hand to chow down like [Jerry Hughes did when announcing his chicken-and-waffle sandwich last month](#), but Delaware North said the rookie forward played a direct role in designing the burger.

Basically, if you don't eat it, Jack Eichel won't be your friend.

The burger itself is interesting. Putting egg on a meat patty is a popular trend these days, but chefs opted to fry the egg over hard instead of over easy. That makes it less messy and likely easier to prepare, but does give it more of a fast food vibe (think more Egg McMuffin than eggs and toast). The bottom bun of the brioche roll was a bit hard on the sample we were given, but I suspect the warming plate it was sitting on during the presentation was to blame there.

The avocado gave the burger some good texture and the Thousand Island dressing was strategically placed under the burger to let the flavors work on their own for a bit. It's not my favorite burger in Buffalo, but it's a fine stand-in if you don't have time for dinner elsewhere before you're trapped in a windowless concrete enclosure with 18,000 other hockey fans for three hours on a cold winter's night.

It is important to note there was some discrepancy when it came to the name of the actual burger. The official release given to media spelled it the "EIKE Daddy," while the "how to assemble" placard clearly read "EICH Daddy."

No one from Delaware North was willing to declare a proper spelling of the menu item, but a spokesperson promised that "no matter what you're going to... 'Eich' it."

Personally, I'm not sure why they needed to throw parentage into this in the first place. Why not name it the Eichelburger and just call it a day? Hopefully it's what the starving masses will be shouting for over the crowd during intermissions anyway.

### NEW TO THE STANDS

**Poutine** — Delaware North described this with one word in its release: "traditional." Well, mission accomplished. It seems like poutine is often lost in translation across the US/Canadian border. You know what I'm talking about here: bad (American) cheese, limp fries and weak gravy plague the American poutine scene. But DNC was faithful with this. A good portion of fries, gravy and cheese curds. They did it.

**Greek Pita Wrap** — I suppose this could also be called “traditional.” It’s chicken wrapped up with feta cheese, lettuce, tomato, and onion and topped tzatziki sauce. The end game is serviceable, but it was odd to me that the pita itself stood out in this one, as the tzatziki tasted a bit muted. It’s a faithful recreation, though. Nothing crazy hidden inside here.

**Street Taco Trio** — Three chances for glory here with chicken, beef, or pork tacos. Each dish comes with two tacos served with nacho chips and cheese sauce, so choose wisely. My pick here is the pork tacos, which had more flavor and a lot more texture than the other two.

The chicken tacos were exactly what you’d expect. Again, cooking for a few thousand people usually means toned down flavors and a wide appeal, so you might want to sneak in your own hot sauce if you’re looking for some more fire.

The beef tacos sort of looked like a Taco Bell soft shell number, but the sauce had a bit more going on than I expected. Still, a distant third to the pork and chicken. Also, I suspect many people will get confused by the wording of this dish. It’s a trio that gives you two tacos. Lots of questions left to answer there.

## **HARBOR CLUB 200 OPTIONS**

The higher price point seats have new menu options as well. First Niagara gets its own chicken-and-waffle sandwich with its own twist: loganberry syrup. It’s topped with coleslaw and cheddar cheese and served with fries. I was honestly thrown a bit by the loganberry, but conceptually it’s an interesting idea. It’s a chicken-and-waffle world, man. I’m just living in it.

The Harbor Club gets its own taco trio, but with the premium seating comes premium ingredients: smoked pork belly, braised beef and chili-lime shrimp. The chefs on hand mentioned the influence of food trucks on their menu this year, so these should look pretty familiar to taco truck enthusiasts.

One standout on the menu, though, is the beef on weck mac and cheese. Hear me out now: it’s a bit weird to have shells and cheese underneath beef, horseradish, cheddar cheese, and caraway seeds. But it’s an interesting mix. I was skeptical when ordering beef on weck sushi at Seabar, too. But it worked out. The lesson here is that we should add beef on weck to more dishes.

A “loaded” hot dog featuring pork belly, pickled onions and Weber’s mustard was also a favorite.

## **IN THE SUITES**

Delaware North decided to bring a new approach to the fancy seats this season, focusing on “shared plates” and adding a bit more complexity to their menu. That includes the healthier option of a granola bar (with two granola flavors!).

The Buffalo Cheese Steak is the highlight here. It’s great—ribeye topped with onions, bleu cheese, and hot sauce on small hoagie rolls. This is a stinger that’s missing the chicken, but the rib-eye more than makes up for it.

Other new options in the suites include vegan quinoa spinach bites, fried bologna sliders and smothered sriracha chicken sandwiches.

## **AT THE LEXUS CLUB**

If you can afford it, check out the poached pear harvest salad or seared scallops, which were great. The meatballs were also tasty, served with ricotta cheese and fried basil. Sadly I neglected to try the Tennessee hot chicken here, missing a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for a working writer with student loans.

## **DRINKS AND DEALS**

The Sabres also announced partnerships with beer companies Flying Bison and Southern Tier as well as an agreement with pizzeria La Nova. Southern Tier's One Buffalo beer was on hand, which I gave a brief review in the Bills food post linked above. Fancier booze will be available in the suites, of course, and Coca Cola soft drinks and Dasani water remain the norm at First Niagara concessions.

## Don Cherry is liking new look of Buffalo Sabres

By Leo Roth  
Rochester D&C  
October 8, 2015

Don Cherry, the star of Coach's Corner on *Hockey Night in Canada* and the former player, coach and general manager of the Rochester Americans, is bullish on the Amerks' parent team.

For two seasons, the Buffalo Sabres have finished last in the National Hockey League. But a feverish rebuilding project is in full swing with general manager Tim Murray overhauling the roster.

With additions like veterans Ryan O'Reilly and Evander Kane, followed by Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel, the second overall picks in the last two NHL drafts, and a new coach in Stanley Cup winner Dan Bylsma, Cherry envisions a Sabres team that can win and win now.

"I'm picking on *Hockey Night in Canada* that Buffalo will be the most improved team in the National Hockey League," Cherry, 81, said. "I love all the moves. I give Murray a tough time for a few things, but I've got to give him credit. If he gets Evander Kane straightened out, every guy he's got is a character guy. So I'm picking the Sabres to be the most improved and as you know, I'm never wrong."

Cherry criticized the controversial Kane last season after Kane subjected himself to discipline by the Winnipeg Jets for showing up for a meeting in a tracksuit, violating a dress code.

"Smarten up and don't be a jerk," Cherry said on his segment.

As for Eichel, Cherry can't say enough good things about the American-born former Boston University star who went second in the draft after Toronto-area native Connor McDavid (Edmonton Oilers).

Eichel accompanied a group of draft prospects to last year's Stanley Cup finals and during an appearance on *Coach's Corner*, he and Boston College's Noah Hanifin playfully handed Cherry — as proud a Canadian as there is — a box with a gift inside. It was a Team USA golf shirt.

Cherry got a great kick out of the gesture.

"He's got a good sense of humor and talk about confidence," Cherry said. "He's a cocky guy and I like cocky guys. Buffalo didn't get Connor McDavid, but, by golly, they got a guy who's going to be in the NHL for 15 years. They made a good choice there and those Buffalo fans are good fans, always packing them in. So I'm predicting they'll be the most improved team and will be knocking on the playoff door."

The Sabres were 45 points out of a playoff spot, so the climb back into contention is incredibly steep, particularly with questions on defense and in net.

"It's not impossible," Cherry said. "It's a whole new team and it will be a whole new attitude. Dan Bylsma has been there before and he won't put up with too much losing. I think they'll be a really exciting team to watch, too."

## **Jack Eichel just one big piece for Sabres**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 8, 2015

BUFFALO – Rookie Jack Eichel felt the anticipation building for his NHL debut long before the Sabres drafted him second overall 104 days ago. The center knows the excited Buffalo fans see him as the future of the franchise.

But to Eichel, 18, the new chapter the revamped Sabres will begin tonight against the Ottawa Senators, the so-called "Eichel Era," is about much more than one player.

"We have a pretty young team," Eichel said Tuesday. "There's a lot of young guys that are going to be here for a while, so I think the fans can look to a lot of people."

Eichel then looked around the dressing room and rattled off a list of four players 25 years old and under: Zach Bogosian, Evander Kane, Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart.

"They're still pretty young," Eichel said. "I think we're the future, if I could say it better."

At least six players, including Kane and O'Reilly, will make their Sabres debut tonight inside the First Niagara Center. Dan Bylsma, meanwhile, will coach his first NHL game since May 14, 2014.

"It's not quite like coaching your first game, but there is a high level of excitement getting ready for this game, this season," said Bylsma, who won the 2009 Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Most of that excitement can be traced to Eichel, a player so talented the Sabres basically threw away last season for the opportunity to draft him. His debut is the most anticipated by a Sabres rookie in recent memory.

"It's going to be a special moment for me," Eichel said. "It's something I've dreamed of my whole life, stepping foot on that ice, (making) the NHL. I'm trying to soak it all in right now, like everything that's going on in my life. It's all happened really quickly. ..."

"It's kind of been a whirlwind, but you're finally playing hockey for a living. Everything you've done for your whole life is to get to this point. So it's pretty special."

Win or lose, three goals or zero, Eichel will be a story each game. To Bylsma, Eichel hasn't quite grasped all the expectations around him.

"I'm not so sure he feels it just yet," he said. "So I hope he doesn't feel it. I hope he's kind of ignorant to all the talk, because it really is outside his sphere, it really is outside our team."

Eichel hasn't bought into the hype surrounding him. He often deflects questions about himself and talks about the team.

Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges figured as one of biggest prospects in years, Eichel might be a little full of himself.

"You almost expect a little cockiness," Gorges said. "But he hasn't been that way at all. Everything he's done is the right way to do things. He's been very professional about his attitude."

Still, to play in the NHL, Gorges believes "you have to have a little bit of swagger, you have to have confidence."

"He's got that great mix of confidence but he's very humble in it," he said about Eichel. "He's not boastful, he's not going to throw it in people's faces. He's an honest, good player."

And a "pretty cool kid," Gorges said.

"He's very laid back, very easy going, but very driven at the same time," he said. "You watch his mannerisms and the way he prepares and the way he plays, he's a special talent. But you can see this fire in him that pushes him to want to be better, to want to be great. I think that's what separates the good players from the great players, is that desire to want to be great."

Eichel said he just wants to be treated like anyone else.

"I don't deserve any special treatment," he said. "Nobody else does. That's what makes a team. Everyone has the same mindset and everyone's treated the same way. Nobody's above the team."

Bylsma informed Eichel on Wednesday morning he had made the team, news he had been waiting to hear.

Eichel, who has been wearing No. 41, a camp number given to him, picked No. 15 in July. He refused to switch it, however, until he was officially on the roster.

He will change his number reluctantly, Bylsma said.

"He's going to change, although he thought maybe he had done pretty well in training camp and he shouldn't change," he said. "I told him he played bad last game and freed him up to change."

## **Sabres' Jack Eichel ready to switch to No. 15**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 8, 2015

BUFFALO – When Sabres coach Dan Bylsma spoke to center Jack Eichel this morning, the two chatted about the phenom's first NHL training camp and where his game was at a day before his debut.

Bylsma then informed Eichel, 18, he had made the Sabres, something the rookie had been waiting to hear.

“Then I asked him if he wanted to switch from 41 to 15,” Bylsma said inside the First Niagara Center. “Obviously, the season's starting to today. I told him he was going to be with the Sabres starting today and (asked) whether he wanted to change from 15 to 41.”

Eichel, who has been wearing No. 41, a camp number given to him, picked No. 15 in July. He refused to wear it, however, until he had officially made the team.

The second overall pick in June will change his number reluctantly, Bylsma said.

“He's going to change, although he thought maybe he had done pretty well in training camp and he shouldn't change,” he said. “I told him he played bad last game and freed him up to change.”

Check back later for more on Eichel's debut Thursday against the Ottawa Senators.

In other news, captain Brian Gionta developed a lower-body injury at the end of practice Tuesday and sat out today. He's day-to-day and questionable for the Senators. Sam Reinhart subbed for him on the right wing beside Eichel and Evander Kane today.

“I like the possibility of Evander, Jack and Sam on the same line if that's what we end up going with tomorrow,” Bylsma said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Josh Gorges, who missed most of the preseason with a lower-body injury, practiced again today and plans to play Thursday.

Bylsma said goalie Robin Lehner will start against his old team.

## What to expect from every Sabre in 2015-16

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

October 8, 2015

Hockey is back, ya'll.

The Buffalo Sabres open their season on Thursday night against the Ottawa Senators. They come into the season with expectations that are much higher than last season. Rightfully so considering the Sabres have added four top-six forwards, a "franchise" goalie and a top-four defenseman in the offseason.

How will each player perform this year? Using Hockey Prospectus's VUKOTA projection system mixed with some common sense adjustments based on likely playing time, linemates etc., we look at what to expect from every player on the opening roster. (Here is a look at last year's article, which had some hits and \*cough Cody Hodgson\* misses)

### Forwards

#### LW - Nicholas Deslauriers

**2014-15 stats: 82 games, five goals, 10 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 60 games, six goals, nine assists**

The hard-nosed depth forward made a strong impression in his first full season with the Sabres in 2014-15, adding a few points and showing that he's willing to play a physical game. For a big man, the former King prospect is a good skater who has more skill than most fourth-line forwards. With an improved forward group, it will be harder to get into the lineup than it was last season, so he may see some time in the press box if there are the same inconsistencies in his game that existed last year.

#### LW - Tyler Ennis

**2014-15 stats: 78 games, 20 goals, 26 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 80 games, 24 goals, 28 assists**

Most seem to expect a huge season from Ennis because of the additions of Jack Eichel, Evander Kane and Ryan O'Reilly. It's not illogical to think the 26-year-old winger will get more out of his dynamic offensive skill than in the past. But consider this: The last time the Sabres made the playoffs, Ennis averaged 16:10 per game, while last year he played 19:07 per game. Ted Nolan had no other choice than to play Ennis all the time – that will change this year and some of the pressure will be off the 5-foot-9 winger. That's a good thing overall, but it may mean the jump in points won't be as big as some expect.

#### C – Jack Eichel

**2014-15 stats (NCAA): 40 games, 26 goals, 45 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 76 games, 24 goals, 40 assists**

Rookies are *really* hard to project. They tend to have serious issues with inconsistency and often end up being given protected minutes by their coaches. Jack Eichel is a different kind of rookie. Not only did he play in the NCAA against harder competition than most high draft picks, he also played in the World Championships against many NHL players and turns 19 on Oct. 28. So his chances of stepping into a top-six role and making a big impact are higher than most first-year players. Eichel will get tons of power play time and offensive minutes with good players that should set him up for an impressive rookie year. Will he match Sidney Crosby's 100-plus point rookie year? Probably not.

#### LW - Marcus Foligno

**2014-15 stats: 57 games, eight goals, 12 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 65 games, 10 goals, 14 assists**

The past three seasons have seen Marcus Foligno's role adapt from being a top-line power winger to a bottom-six "energy" player. The 24-year-old improved his scoring rate from 0.26 points per game to 0.35 last year. With any physical forward, it is hard to expect 82 games, but as Foligno continues to mature and understand where he fits in the NHL, he should continue to grow this season and be a valuable depth forward.

#### **RW – Brian Gionta**

**2014-15 stats: 69 games, 13 goals, 22 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 65 games, 13 goals, 20 assists**

The Sabres' captain was one of their most effective forwards last year – which, of course, isn't saying that much – but overall he played to expectations. At 36, he is no longer the same player that scored 48 goals for the New Jersey Devils, but Gionta is still a smart, hard-working player with enough skill left in the tank. Wait, don't say tank. Anyway, we will see Dan Bylsma give plenty of ice time alongside the young stars they have up front, which will result in another solid point-producing year for the Rochester native.

#### **C/LW – Zemgus Girgensons**

**2014-15 stats: 61 games, 15 goals, 15 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 75 games, 20 goals, 22 assists**

The Sabres' versatile forward can play either center or wing and add a goal-scoring touch and exceptional defensive play. Girgensons uses his size and strength to power to the front of the net – which, not sure if you've heard, but a lot of goals are scored there. If he ends up on the wing, you will see the former first-round pick winning battles in the corners, chasing opponents down from behind and hitting. We can expect to see him all over the lineup, but getting plenty of ice time with good players and possibly in front of the net on the power play.

#### **LW – Evander Kane**

**2014-15 stats: 37 games, 10 goals, 12 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 70 games, 27 goals, 25 assists**

Sabres GM Tim Murray sent one of his best prospects and top-four defensemen to the Winnipeg Jets for the dynamic winger. Kane has an eye-popping speed/power/skill combination, making it no surprise that he was picked fourth overall. The 24-year-old has scored 30 goals before and has a chance to repeat that feat if he is healthy. His tendency to play physical means there's a strong likelihood there will be bumps and bruises. Expect Kane to be an impact player at even strength, power play and even the penalty kill.

#### **C/LW – Johan Larsson**

**2014-15 stats: 39 games, six goals, 10 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 70 games, 14 goals, 21 assists**

For a good percentage of last season, Larsson was dominating the AHL and wondering why he couldn't crack a very poor NHL lineup. When he was finally given regular NHL time, the young Swede showed he is a highly-intelligent, hard-working, two-way forward who can play either center or wing. Larsson is a good passer with a bit of a scoring touch, too. He may start on the bottom six, but work his way into the top six as injuries happen.

#### **C – David Legwand**

**2014-15 stats: 80 games, nine goals, 18 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 50 games, six goals, 10 assists**

As a throw-in to the Robin Lehner trade, it appears Legwand will get a chance to see fourth-line ice time. The long-time Nashville Predator was brought to Ottawa last season with the expectation he would be a quality third-line center, but he struggled with the assignment. While the veteran still has some skill, he shouldn't be asked to play more than a handful of minutes per night. Anything in the double digits for points would be good.

#### **LW – Jamie McGinn**

**2014-15 stats: 19 games, four goals, two assists**

**2015-16 projection: 72 games, 15 goals, 10 assists**

After missing most of the season with back surgery, the veteran winger is back to 100% and ready to play a solid depth role for the Sabres. McGinn doesn't do anything extraordinarily well, but has a little bit of scoring touch, some passing skill and some grit to his game. He should make for a huge upgrade from the bottom six players the Sabres have run out for the last two years. There is also a possibility his size will lead Dan Bylsma to put him in front of the net on the power play.

**LW – Matt Moulson**

**2014-15 stats: 77 games, 13 goals, 28 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 75 games, 18 goals, 24 assists**

Some players make everyone else better, some players help get the most out of the top skill guys. Moulson is one of those complimentary forwards who can make top skill players look better. When he was asked to carry the load last season, Moulson was not as successful as he was when playing alongside John Tavares with the Islanders (shocker, right?). Now that the team is back to having talented forwards, expect a bounce-back year for the veteran.

**C- Ryan O'Reilly**

**2014-15 stats: 82 games, 17 goals, 38 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 82 games, 20 goals, 34 assists**

There is a reason Tim Murray traded a top defensive prospect for ROR: He's good. O'Reilly is a top-notch two-way forward who has been playing against the likes of Jonathan Toews and Ryan Getzlaf in the Western Conference on a nightly basis. The underrated part of O'Reilly's game is his passing skill. He can win battles and create breakouts as well as operate in tight spaces in the offensive zone to set up teammates.

**C – Sam Reinhart**

**2014-15 stats: Nine games, zero goals, one assist**

**2015-16 projection: 60 games, eight goals, 20 assists**

Reinhart is the toughest one to project. He may take the next step to becoming a superstar or he may struggle out of the gate to get going. He has the talent to put up 50-plus points when he gets to his prime, but right now the former No. 2 overall pick is still getting his feet wet. There is also only so much power play time to go around.

**Defensemen**

**RD - Zach Bogosian**

**2014-15 stats: 62 games, three goals, 17 assists**

**2015-16 projection: 68 games, five goals, 15 assists**

The former top draft pick of the Atlanta Thrashers made a good impression on Sabres fans after joining the team at the trade deadline last season. For his size, you won't find many more gifted skaters. Bogosian is also very willing to hit, sometimes to his detriment. The 6-foot-3, 215-pound defender isn't elitely skilled offensively but should contribute some points on the second power play unit or by being able to rush the puck up ice.

**LD – Carlo Colaiacovo**

**2014-15 stats: 33 games, two goals, six assists**

**2015-16 projection: 37 games, two goals, seven assists**

As a fill-in player, the veteran defenseman has been pretty solid throughout his career. In 64 games over the past three years, he has a terrific 53.9% Corsi Percentage – though coaches understand he is not capable of taking on too many minutes.

**LD – Matt Donovan****2014-15 stats: 12 games, 0 goals, three assists****2015-16 projection: 40 games, three goals, 10 assists**

Often stuck in the press box with the Islanders last season, we can expect to see more of Donovan this time around. The offensively-talented defender posted strong AHL numbers with 21 points in 27 games for Bridgeport in 2013-14 and 45 points in 72 games in 2011-12. He won't see much power play time, but could contribute some assists at even strength.

**LD – Cody Franson****2014-15 stats: 78 games, seven goals, 29 assists****2015-16 projection: 74 games, five goals, 25 assists**

Get used to seeing Franson on the power play because he will be on the point all the time. The 6-foot-5 defenseman can distribute the puck at a high level. He also has a shot that finds its way through to the net more often than many blueliners. At even strength, Franson excels on breakouts and finding passing lanes in the offensive zone, but there are some drawbacks to his defensive game due to a lack of speed and physical play.

**LD – Josh Gorges****2014-15 stats: 46 games, zero goals, six goals****2015-16 projection: 55 games, one goal, seven assists**

The stay-at-home defenseman is known much more for his shutdown capabilities and leadership than his offensive abilities. The biggest question is whether Gorges will stay healthy as he has already been dinged up in the preseason. The Sabres will need his calming presence on the blueline as they rely heavily on two young defenders in Mark Pysyk and Rasmus Ristolainen.

**RD - Mark Pysyk****2014-15 stats: seven games, two goals, one assist****2015-16 projection: 80 games, five goals, 10 assists**

Pysyk's value goes way beyond his ability to score. He is an exceptionally intelligent defenseman with top-notch skating ability, which will give Dan Bylsma the option of playing him against the Eastern Conference's best forwards. We didn't do projections of players' Corsi percentages, but it would not be a surprise to see Pysyk as one of Buffalo's best possession players. His patience and first pass coming out of the defensive zone is exceptional. Expect breakouts to look way better because Pysyk is in the lineup

**LD - Jake McCabe****2014-15 stats: two games, zero goals, zero assists****2015-16 projection: 55 games, three goals, seven assists**

After a slow start to his first full pro season, McCabe made leaps and bounds by the end of last season. He is a hard worker who can provide a physical presence on the blueline. The former second-round pick is still developing his decision making ability, so there will be mistakes, but if Bylsma eases him into The Show, we could see McCabe make similar strides at the NHL level.

**RD – Rasmus Ristolainen****2014-15 stats: 78 games, eight goals, 12 assists****2015-16 projection: 78 games, 10 goals, 22 assists**

After last season's performance, it is reasonable to believe Ristolainen will become the Sabres' franchise defenseman. That doesn't mean it will happen this year. Defenseman usually take longer to progress than forwards. We should still have high hopes for Ristolainen, who is a do-it-all defender with size, speed, skill, work ethic and physical play. The possibility of Franson playing the entire power play on the blueline could take away from Risto's points, but he should be involved in a good amount of offense for the Sabres.

**LD – Mike Weber****2014-15 stats: 64 games, one goal, six assists****2015-16 projection: 55 games, one goal, three assists**

Like Gorges, we can't expect much in terms of offense from Weber, but there is a chance he adds a few more points than projected. The last time the Sabres were a competitive team, he scored 17 points in 58 games. It will be interesting to watch Weber this season as it is the first time in several seasons in which he can fit into being a role player rather than being asked to play 20 minutes per night.

## **Goalies**

### **Robin Lehner**

**2014-15 stats: 25 games, .905 save %**

**2015-16 projection: 55 games, .914 save %**

The Sabres went all-in on Lehner as their future goalie when they dealt a first-round pick for the former Senators goalie. He is big and competitive, but has been known to have serious bouts with inconsistency. However, we have never seen Lehner as a No. 1 starter.

### **Chad Johnson**

**2014-15 stats: 19 games, .889 save %**

**2015-16 projection: 25 games, .910 save %**

Johnson has had good seasons and bad seasons as a career backup. With Boston, he was nearly as good as Tuukka Rask when he would get the nod, but with the Islanders he was one of the least effective goalies in the NHL. He will be looking for a serious bounce back.

## **Sabres Gionta is injured**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 8, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Brian Gionta missed practice on Wednesday and may not play in the opener on Thursday. Dan Bylsma said, "He is day to day right now. Really late in practice yesterday he had a lower body issue and we'll see tomorrow."

Josh Gorges is on the injury list sent out by the NHL despite practicing the past week or so. Bylsma said, "Gorges practiced again today and that's a good sign."

Gorges said last week he thought he's be ready for game number one. On Wednesday after practice he said, "I feel really good. I think we'll reevaluate things in the morning and we'll know more tomorrow, but I don't think there's any reason why I wouldn't be able to go, but we'll find out."

On Wednesday morning Bylsma told Jack Eichel that he was going to be on the team. The coach said, "We talked about how his camp has gone, we talked about how he's been playing, we talked about there I thought he was and then I asked him if he wanted to switch from 41 to 15 and I told him he was going to be with the Sabres starting today."

I wondered if Eichel wanted to make the switch and Bylsma cracked, "He is going to change although he thought maybe he had done pretty well at training camp and he shouldn't change, so I told him he played bad last game and that freed him up to change."

We all know by now that Eichel is going to be living with Matt Moulson's family this season. Gorges said he did the same thing for a young player in Montreal, "It's huge. A few years ago I had Gallagher stay with me. I know how important it is to take on a young player, it's a big change. You come from college and all of a sudden you have to pay bills and pay rent, there's a lot more to it than just playing hockey, so the ability of the Moulson's to take him in and treat him like one of their own, he gets to focus on just playing hockey."

Wednesday's lines:

Moulson O'Reilly Ennis

Kane Eichel Reinhart

Girgensons Larsson Foligno

Deslauriers Legwand McGinn

## **Sabres' Reinhart has a mentor on the team**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 8, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- As of now the Sabres have two rookies on their 2015-16 roster. The two guys that were picked second overall the past two seasons, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart have made the team. Brendan Guhle is on injured reserve.

Reinhart will be 20 in early November and did play in nine NHL games last season before being sent to junior.

The kid seems very mature for his age, but he needs to be shown the way too. He said Ryan O'Reilly has taken him under his wing showing him the way on the ice. That includes those two being the last ones off the ice each and every day, "You look around and there are older guys that you can look up to with Ryan being one of those guys. He's always the last guy off, he's always doing things, so I try to surround myself with him and go and do the things that those guys are doing."

"He's a great guy and there are a lot of them in this dressing room. This team coming in, there's no question that it's a lot closer and for a guy like him there's no question he's a reason why the team's close," Reinhart said.

One thing the rookie doesn't have to learn is to stay calm no matter what. His demeanor is in a straight line no matter what's going on. He said, "It helps I think. No matter how good of a game you're playing, things are going to go wrong, so I think in an instance like that, it helps."

Now that Reinhart has made the team he may be playing right wing with Jack Eichel and Evander Kane. That depends on Brian Gionta's health. He said, "First off I need to play with as much confidence as possible, no matter who I'm playing with. I'm playing with good players so I need to use them to my advantage and keeping things simple."

There were parts of the preseason that Reinhart didn't like with his game. He said, "I think I was playing a little bit too tense at times and I think I feel a lot more relaxed now."

Reinhart said he wasn't here long last season, but the change in the room is very obvious, "There's a lot of guys from last year that are a lot more energetic, a lot more happy at the rink and it makes it a lot nicer for a guy like me coming in."

If Gionta does return it'll be interesting to see if Reinhart goes back on a wing with Zemgus Girgensons and Marcus Foligno.

Wednesday's lines:

Moulson O'Reilly Ennis

Kane Eichel Reinhart

Girgensons Larsson Foligno

Deslauriers Legwand McGinn

## **Gionta day-to-day as Sabres hold final practice ahead of opener**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 8, 2015

The Sabres took the ice without their captain in their final practice ahead of Thursday night's regular-season opener against the Ottawa Senators at First Niagara Center.

Brian Gionta sustained a lower-body injury late in practice on Tuesday and is day-to-day, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma announced following Wednesday's practice. Sam Reinhart filled in for Gionta on the right wing on a line with Evander Kane and center Jack Eichel.

Other changes to the practice lineup on Wednesday included Johan Larsson centering Zemgus Girgensons on the left and Marcus Foligno on the right and Jamie McGinn playing the right wing opposite Nicolas Deslauriers with David Legwand as their center.

It remains to be seen whether or not Gionta will be ready to play against the Senators. If necessary, Bylsma said that he likes the potential for Reinhart to play alongside Eichel and Kane.

Reinhart will be ready regardless of the situation.

"I think first off, I'll play with as much confidence as possible," he said. "No matter who I'm playing with, I'm playing with good players, so [using] them to my advantage and I think keeping things simple in this league will benefit me."

In other injury news, defenseman Josh Gorges continued to practice with the team on Wednesday.

Bylsma said afterward that Gorges is a possibility to play on Thursday after missing all but one of the team's preseason games with a lower-body injury.

Gorges, who has been paired on the left side with Rasmus Ristolainen in practice, said he hopes to be ready for the season.

Pregame coverage Thursday begins at 6:30 p.m. on MSG-B. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for just after 7 p.m.

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### **LEHNER TO START AGAINST OLD FRIENDS**

Bylsma announced after practice that goaltender Robin Lehner will start in net on Thursday against his former team. The Sabres acquired Lehner from the Senators on June 26 in exchange for a first-round pick.

Lehner said that he'd be lying if he tried to make it seem like he wasn't thinking about the matchup.

"Of course I do. I have a lot of history there, a lot of good friends," he said. "I talked to a few of the guys yesterday from Ottawa. They want to score and I want to save it, so it's going to be fun."

Lehner played two periods against the Senators in a preseason matchup at First Niagara Center on Sept. 23, but Ottawa brought very few of their veteran players to that game. Thursday night will be his first chance to see most of his former teammates on the ice.

But as much as he's looking forward to seeing some old faces, he's equally excited about finally battling for two points with his new Sabres teammates.

"I feel really good in practice. I felt like I got better every day and I feel like our team is getting better every day," he said. "We're working every day to gel, to get to know each other, to start playing with each other. We expect to win every game we're going to play but it takes time to get that "click." Hopefully it starts tomorrow."

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## **BACK ON THE BENCH**

As excited as the players are to begin the season, Bylsma also expressed some of his own anticipation for Thursday's opener. It will mark his first regular-season game on the bench since leaving the Pittsburgh Penguins organization following the 2013-14 season.

"There's a high sense of anticipation and excitement going into the start of the season, tomorrow's game. It probably started a few days ago," he said. "A friend asked me that question and it's not quite like coaching your first game, but there is a high level of excitement."

While he didn't coach in the NHL, Bylsma's hiatus from the league wasn't quite a year off. He remained in the loop on the latest happenings by watching many games as both a fan and a TV analyst. He was then on the bench as an assistant coach for Team USA at the IIHF World Championship in May, where the Americans earned a bronze medal.

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## **WEDNESDAY'S PRACTICE**

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4 Josh Gorges – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
6 Mike Weber – 46 Cody Franson  
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65 Matt Donovan – 3 Mark Pysyk

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31 Chad Johnson

Power Play:

First Unit: Evander Kane, Sam Reinhart, Jack Eichel, Marcus Foligno and Rasmus Ristolainen  
Second Unit: Tyler Ennis, Jamie McGinn, Ryan O'Reilly, Matt Moulson and Cody Franson