



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

April 8, 2016

Blue Jackets-Sabres Preview

By Jeff Bartl

AP

April 8, 2016

Dan Bylsma and John Tortorella have both hoisted the Stanley Cup as coaches and have expectations their players often have trouble meeting, leading to plenty of frustrating moments during their first seasons overseeing the rebuilding of fledgling clubs.

Buffalo's progression has been most noticeable lately, though, giving Bylsma plenty of hope for the future. Tortorella just witnessed one of Columbus' best performances since he took the job eight games into the season.

They'll meet in the NHL's only game Friday night as the Sabres look to sweep the season series from the visiting Blue Jackets by winning a season-high fourth straight.

Bylsma took over Pittsburgh with 25 games left in 2008-09 and guided the Sidney Crosby-led Penguins to the Stanley Cup months later. He recorded 100-point seasons in four of the next five, but he never came close to that postseason success again and was fired after last season.

Buffalo (34-35-11) hired Bylsma shortly after, trusting him to guide a young core that includes rookie Jack Eichel through a rough patch and into contention down the road. The Sabres have made strides and are riding their first three-game winning streak since Nov. 7-12 following Tuesday's 3-1 victory over New Jersey.

Eichel scored his 24th goal and assisted on Ryan O'Reilly's 21st in support of Chad Johnson, who made 18 saves.

"This shows how much we've grown," Johnson said. "Get rid of October with that learning curve as a group, with a new coach and new players. After that, we've showed we can be a good team."

Eichel and O'Reilly scored in Buffalo's 4-2 win over Columbus on Oct. 12, nine days before the Blue Jackets fired Todd Richards and hired the brash and demanding Tortorella.

Columbus (32-40-8) began the season with eight straight losses and dropped its first under Tortorella, but it also has shown some progress despite sitting at the bottom of the Metropolitan Division.

Tortorella won the Cup with Tampa Bay in 2004 and hasn't been shy about expressing his frustration with the inconsistency of the young Blue Jackets. They've won two of three, though, and dominated the third period of Wednesday's 5-1 win over Toronto.

Brandon Dubinsky, who also played four seasons under Tortorella with the New York Rangers from 2008-12, scored twice, and Brandon Saad added a goal and an assist.

Dubinsky's 17 goals are his most since a career-high 24 in 2010-11.

"If we're going to progress as a team, (Dubinsky) has to score," Tortorella said. "He's a guy that ends up with a lot of chances. He has more to give - he knows that - and if we're going to be a better team, he has to (score more)."

Sergei Bobrovsky made 26 saves and set a franchise record with his 97th victory since joining the club in 2013, when he won the Vezina Trophy in the lockout-shortened season.

"It's a great honor," Bobrovsky said. "I hope there are more to come."

Bobrovsky struggled against the Sabres back in October, though. He was out with an injury when Eichel finished with two assists in Buffalo's 4-0 victory Feb. 19.

Johnson won the first meeting and could be in net again for this one. He has a 2.13 goals-against average while winning five of his last seven starts.

Sabres call up forwards Rodrigues, Schneider from minors

AP

April 8, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — The Buffalo Sabres have called up forwards Evan Rodrigues and Cole Schneider from the minors.

Both players were called up on from AHL Rochester on Thursday and are in a position to make their NHL debuts during one of Buffalo's final two games of the season.

Rodrigues signed with Buffalo a year ago, and has nine goals and 19 assists in 68 games for Rochester. Schneider is from suburban Buffalo and has three goals and nine assists in 15 games with Rochester since the Sabres acquired him in a seven-player trade with Ottawa on Feb. 27.

The Sabres have already been eliminated from playoff contention. Buffalo hosts Columbus on Friday and closes the season at the New York Islanders on Saturday.

Ennis rejoins Sabres after missing 3 months with concussion

By John Wawrow

AP

April 8, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres center Tyler Ennis was grateful for the mere opportunity to return to the ice for practice Thursday after enduring several difficult months recovering from the effects of a concussion.

"It felt great. I mean, I can still skate. I figured that out," Ennis said with a wide-eyed grin. "Not playing hockey is strange. And it's the opposite: When I'm on the ice, it's the greatest feeling."

Though he's been ruled out from playing in Buffalo's final two games of season, Ennis took a major step in his recovery by rejoining his teammates for the first time since being hurt in the second period of a 5-2 loss at Washington on Dec. 30. The diminutive forward was going after the puck along the boards in his own zone, when he suddenly turned his back and was hit from behind by Capitals star Alex Ovechkin.

Ennis got up slowly, rejoined the play and checked Nicklas Backstrom into the end boards. Upon leaving the ice, Ennis went directly to the locker room after experiencing his second head injury in a little over a month.

The game against Washington was Ennis' fourth after he missed 12 games following a high hit by St. Louis Blues defenseman Robert Bertuzzo.

What followed was a frightening stretch, during which Ennis experienced seizures, had to be shuttled by Sabres staff because he was not allowed to drive, and, on the worst days, wondered whether he might ever play again.

"It's really a difficult thing. A lot of different emotions, a lot of ups and downs," he said. "To say I wasn't scared at some point would be probably a lie."

Ennis said he's symptom free, feels 100 percent, and excited to begin looking forward to resuming his career.

"It gave me time to kind of reflect, appreciate what I have and give me that much more motivation and excitement for whenever I get back," he said. "I wish we could play 82 more games."

The second of Buffalo's two first-round picks in the 2008 draft, Ennis is a three-time 20-goal-scorer and known for his speed and being fearless in traffic despite his 5-foot-9, 160-pound frame.

He's been limited to just three goals and 11 points in 23 games.

Coach Dan Bylsma expressed relief to see Ennis return.

"It's been a long road. He's had significant improvement in the last two weeks," Bylsma said, noting Ennis eagerly took part in an optional skate a day earlier. "It's rare that at this time of year you get a guy who's so excited to be on the ice practicing with his teammates."

Bylsma and Ennis sidestepped questions regarding whether the center will be allowed to represent Canada at the World Ice Hockey Championships, which open in Russia next month.

Ennis focused solely on the present, and the significance of being back on the ice.

"It's important because I know I can play hockey. It's important because I feel great. It's important because I got to be with the boys," Ennis said. "But mostly, it's important because it means that I'm healthy."

NOTES: Earlier in the day, the Sabres called up forwards Evan Rodrigues and Cole Schneider from their American Hockey League affiliate in Rochester. Bylsma said both will make their NHL debuts on Friday, when the Sabres close their home schedule hosting Columbus. ... Bylsma hasn't ruled out the possibility of goalie Jason Kasdorf making his NHL debut in one of Buffalo's final two games. The Sabres close the season at the New York Islanders on Saturday.

Dark time and season end for Sabres' Ennis

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
April 8, 2016

Sabres fans are painfully aware of the uncertainty that accompanies concussions. Pat LaFontaine, Maxim Afinogenov and Tim Connolly suffered major ones. As their recovery time stretched from weeks to months to an entire season, folks in Buffalo realized how delicate and unpredictable the brain can be.

Tyler Ennis understands it, too. The 26-year-old has been riding through the dark concussion tunnel for much of the past five months.

He finally sees daylight.

As fans bid farewell to the Sabres with the home finale against Columbus on Friday night, Ennis is saying hello to normalcy. He skated with his teammates Thursday for the first time since December, ending a long bout of solitude that had him wondering if he'd ever take the ice again.

"I went through a lot of different emotions, a lot of ups and downs, so yeah, there's really bad days," Ennis said in First Niagara Center. "There's days where you feel great, and there's days where it's tough. To say I wasn't scared at some point would probably be a lie, but I feel so good right now. I feel great. I feel 100 percent.

"I wish we could play 82 more games."

Alas, only two remain, none for Ennis. He won't play Friday or in Saturday's season finale in New York against the Islanders, bringing the total of concussion-related absences to 57 games. He has played only four times since Nov. 23 and not at all since absorbing a hit from Washington's Alexander Ovechkin on Dec. 30.

"The timing, you could look at it as a positive and a negative," Ennis said of his recovery. "It's negative because the season's basically over, but it's a positive that I feel great. There's stories of guys that obviously never feel better. I feel fantastic."

The return to health, which took its major steps only in the past couple of weeks, has given Ennis a new outlook on life and his profession.

"I had a frustrating few months there," he said. "You go through a lot of different emotions, for sure, but it gave me a lot of time to kind of reflect, appreciate what I have and gave me that much more motivation and excitement for whenever I get back.

"It was so fun to be out there. It was good to joke around with the guys. This is what we all are born to do. Not playing hockey is strange. When I'm on the ice, it's the greatest feeling. I had a lot of time to reflect and be grateful for what I have, so I'm excited when I get back to take preparation, take every facet of the game to another level. I'm so excited about the future."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma had a behind-the-scenes look at the troubles that accompanied Ennis' concussion. The forward suffered seizures, according to the Associated Press, and needed to be shuttled to doctor's offices and the arena because he wasn't cleared to drive.

"It's been a long road," Bylsma said. "We've asked questions about the rest of the season and if he was going to play, and really it's been just a big factor getting back to full health.

"Today was a big step to that direction. It's not going to mean him playing in a game, but it does give you the confidence and the knowledge that he is back to full health and is going to go into the summer with that."

While skating in a noncontact role Thursday, Ennis showed the speed, agility and nifty moves that made him the Sabres' leading scorer last season.

"I can still skate," he said with a beaming smile. "Everything else is a little rusty."

Even on the days when Ennis skated a few laps in the arena by himself, he tried to avoid his teammates. He didn't want to interfere with their game preparations or daily routines.

He watched the games, though. He likes what he sees. The rookies are developing. The goaltenders are playing well. The core is coming together and bonding for what the team hopes is a bright future.

Ennis wants to be part of it when the puck drops next season.

"I would be optimistic as a fan base, and I am as a player," Ennis said. "I'm looking forward. When I watch the games, there's a lot to be excited about. I would love to be playing, and I can't wait for the future."

Sabres notebook: Schneider, Rodrigues move on up to close season

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
April 8, 2016

Once Cole Schneider learned he was headed to the NHL, he drove home to Williamsville to surprise his parents. He did, but not in the way he planned.

Schneider's parents weren't home, so he used the house phone to give them a call. They got a jolt when the caller ID showed up.

"They thought someone was in the house," Schneider said with a smile Thursday.

It's a safe bet no one will be home Friday night, either. The Sabres host Columbus in First Niagara Center, and Schneider will make his NHL debut for his hometown team. Thursday's practice was the first time Schneider had been in the arena since playing for Buffalo in the Bowman Cup high school showcase in 2007 and 2008.

"I had season tickets growing up, so it's always fun coming to games," the 25-year-old said. "It was a little different this morning."

Schneider's first big-league opportunity was a long time coming. After two years of junior hockey and two seasons at the University of Connecticut, he spent parts of five seasons with Ottawa's minor-league team in Binghamton. Despite recording 83 goals and 191 points in 263 games, he never got the call from the Senators.

Sensing he wouldn't ever get a shot, especially after scoring 29 times last season, he asked for a trade. Buffalo granted his wish in February. He's recorded three goals and 12 points in 15 games with Rochester.

"I was pretty excited when I got traded, and to get the call yesterday felt really good," Schneider said. "I was just trying to play down there, and luckily it happened for me."

The 6-foot-1, 199-pound winger practiced alongside center Ryan O'Reilly and left wing Zemgus Girgensons. Before starting his junior career, Schneider played youth hockey for Amherst, Wheatfield, the Buffalo Regals and St. Joe's Collegiate Institute.

"He's paid a lot of dues to get here," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Want to see if he can do it at the National Hockey League level and rise up to the pace and the speed of the game and still contribute like he has been at the American Hockey League level."

Schneider won't be alone in playing for the first time. The Sabres also recalled left wing Evan Rodrigues, the Boston University linemate of Jack Eichel who is in his first professional season. Rodrigues practiced with center David Legwand and right wing Matt Moulson.

"It's obviously a dream come true just to be here, so I'm going to take it all in and enjoy it," the 22-year-old said. "You have to put the work in, and now that the time's come I'm just going to make the most of it."

Rodrigues got the call after figuring out the intensity of the pro game. After a slow start with Rochester, he has six of his nine goals and 19 of his 28 points during the 2016 calendar year.

"It's been an adjustment, obviously, going from the college game to the pro game," Rodrigues said. "Over the last 20, 30 games, I've really come along and got back to playing the way I can. I'm looking forward to the opportunity here."

Bylsma said there's also a chance Jason Kasdorf will make his NHL debut this weekend. The goaltender, who joined the Sabres out of college last month, is recovered from a groin injury. After playing the Blue Jackets in the home finale, the Sabres close the season Saturday at the New York Islanders.

...

Bylsma will feel good about the Sabres' closing kick even if the team doesn't finish with a .500 points percentage. But, since it's within reach for the 34-35-11 team, he wants to go for it.

"We're shooting for it," he said. "We're taking pride in it. We want to get there."

The Sabres were just 15-22-4 at the midpoint of the season. They're 19-13-7 during the second half, which includes runs of 13-7-5 since Feb. 12 and 7-2-2 in the last 11 games.

"The way we've played the last 10 games, 20 games, 30 games, our record and what that would put us on point-wise if we could continue that for 80 is playoff picture, it's playoff hockey," Bylsma said. "You feel a little bit like the season's running out of time on us."

Eichel can't believe how fast the time has flown.

"It's pretty weird to think there's only two games left," he said. "It went by so fast, and before you know it you've already went through your entire rookie season. It's been a whirlwind, and I've definitely enjoyed it."

"Looking back, there's definitely a lot of goals you wish you scored or plays you wish you made and things you wish you did to try and help your team win games, but it's all in the past. You really can't control what's behind you. We have two games remaining, a chance to get to over .500. I think that's pretty exciting for us as a group."

Sabres host Blue Jackets in home finale

NHL.com

April 8, 2016

BLUE JACKETS (32-40-8) at SABRES (34-35-11)

TV: 7 p.m. ET; NHLN, FS-O, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: The Buffalo Sabres will go for a three-game sweep of the Columbus Blue Jackets. Four players scored in Buffalo's 4-2 win at First Niagara Center on Oct. 12, and Robin Lehner made 38 saves in a 4-0 victory at Nationwide Arena on Feb. 19.

Blue Jackets team scope: Columbus plays the first of a back-to-back set; a disappointing season will end Saturday with a home game against the Chicago Blackhawks. The early loss at Buffalo was part of a season-opening 0-7-0 stretch that resulted in the firing of coach Todd Richards and the hiring of John Tortorella. "It's been tough," goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky told The Columbus Dispatch. "But usually you learn the most when you're down. We have to take good lessons from this and move forward. It's been tough for a lot of us in here." Columbus will try to sweep a two-game road trip after defeating the Toronto Maple Leafs 5-1 on Wednesday.

Sabres team scope: Rookies Cole Schneider and Evan Rodrigues each will make his NHL debut for Buffalo after being recalled Thursday and taking part in practice. Rodrigues could find himself on a line with Jack Eichel; the two played together last season at Boston University, where they led the Terriers to the NCAA championship game. "He had a big part in my success last year," Eichel said of Rodrigues, an undrafted free agent. "He's one of the reasons that our team was so good and he was a big part of it." Rodrigues had nine goals and 28 points with Rochester of the American Hockey League. Schneider signed with the Sabres last summer after four seasons in the Ottawa Senators organization. Buffalo, which finishes its season Saturday against the New York Islanders in Brooklyn, is 25 points ahead of its finish last season with two games to play.

Long recovery from concussion worried Sabres' Tyler Ennis

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
April 8, 2016

BUFFALO – After experiencing a “strange few months” recovering from a scary concussion, Tyler Ennis can smile now. But at times throughout the past 13 weeks, as his health constantly changed and the emotional toll wore on him, the speedy Sabres winger feared for his future.

“There’s days where you feel great and days where it’s tough,” Ennis said Thursday following his first practice since he was injured Dec. 30. “To say I wasn’t scared at some point would probably be a lie, but I feel so good right now. I feel great. I feel 100 percent.”

Wearing a red non-contact jersey and a special tinted visor, Ennis, 26, skated with his teammates for the first time since Capitals star Alex Ovechkin leveled him in Washington.

Ennis savored every minute of the session inside the First Niagara Center.

“It’s rare that this time of year you get a guy who’s so excited to be on the ice practicing with his teammates,” Sabres coach Dan Bylsma joked.

After practice ended, the Sabres’ longest-tenured player couldn’t stop smiling.

“Today was a great day,” an excited Ennis said. “It was fun to be with the team. It’s so fun to be out there, joke around with the boys. I’m in a good mood.”

Only two games are left this season, starting with tonight’s home finale against the Columbus Blue Jackets. Ennis, of course, won’t play in either. The Sabres want to be cautious.

“I want to see him get back to health and get back to 100 percent, and I think today was a big step toward that direction,” Bylsma said. “I don’t want to see (problems) July 1. It’s been a long road. He’s had a lot of significant improvements in the last two weeks, 20 days.”

Ennis, who played only 23 times this season, said he wishes the Sabres had 82 games remaining.

“There’s probably a lot of sore guys who are looking forward to having a little time off, but for me, I wish we could play,” he said.

Ennis said he turned a corner in the last few weeks. His return to practice – he had been working out and skating on his own – just happened to fall two days before the season ends.

“It’s important because I know I can play hockey,” Ennis said. “It’s important because I feel great. It’s important because I got to be with the boys, be with the team. ... Mostly, it was important because it means I was healthy.”

When the popular Ennis hit the ice Thursday morning, the Sabres had “big smiles,” winger Marcus Foligno said.

“It’s just good to see him kind of getting back to healthy,” he said. “It kind of put a smile on our faces. He’s a great teammate.”

In the more than three months Ennis spent recovering, he reflected on and developed a greater appreciation for what he calls “such a great job.”

Despite Ennis' small stature – he's generously listed at 5-foot-9 and 160 pounds – he showcased remarkable durability during his first six seasons, missing only 41 games (34 came when he sprained his ankle twice in 2011-12).

But injuries have ravaged Ennis this season, helping stymie what was supposed to be a breakout campaign following consecutive 20-goal seasons. Two early injuries sidelined him 16 games.

When Ennis' season abruptly ended 100 days ago, he hadn't scored since Oct. 27, a 14-game drought. The freewheeler struggled to adapt to Bylsma's new system, mustering only three goals and 11 points.

Still, Ennis is optimistic about the future. Having joined the Sabres late in 2009-10, he's experienced a bit of everything, and after consecutive 30th-place finishes, the team's new direction excites him.

The Sabres have won three straight games and seven of the last 11 contests (7-2-2), upping them to 34-35-11 this season.

"I think the last month or two we've taken our game to a new level," Ennis said.

To the Sabres, reaching .500 would be *very* significant. They went 44-102-18 in the previous two seasons. They were seven games under .500 at three points in the winter.

"We want to get there," Bylsma said. "I don't know if winning one more game or two more games is going to be different than just winning 34 games. I don't know if you can attach too much significance with it, but I think you can say the way we've played hockey over the last 30 games, 40 games, we feel like we're a good hockey team."

Foligno added: "To be .500, that's something we battled to get and we want."

For many non-playoff teams, the season can't end soon enough. Not for the Sabres.

"We feel a little bit like the season's running out of time on us," Bylsma said. "Guys have been excited to play these games."

Williamsville's Cole Schneider paid dues to reach Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
April 8, 2016

BUFFALO – When Williamsville native Cole Schneider walked into the First Niagara Center on Thursday morning, it marked the first time the new Sabres winger had been in the building since he competed in a showcase of local high school players in 2008.

A lot happened to Schneider, 25, in between his trips to rink.

Schneider, who grew up cheering for the Sabres, will make his NHL debut in tonight's home finale against the Columbus Blue Jackets after playing 287 AHL games.

"He's paid a lot of dues to get here," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday.

After playing high school hockey at St. Joe's, Schneider spent two years in the junior North American Hockey League and two years at UConn before the Ottawa Senators signed him in 2012 for their AHL affiliate in Binghamton, which was run by Sabres general manager Tim Murray.

The 6-foot-1, 198-pound Schneider quietly developed into a strong AHL scorer, compiling 83 goals and 191 points with Binghamton, including a career-high 29 goals and 58 points last season.

Despite Schneider's success, the Senators repeatedly bypassed him for recalls. He requested a trade earlier this season, and Ottawa eventually dealt him to the Sabres organization in a seven-player AHL swap on Feb. 27.

"I was there a while, nothing was really happening for me," Schneider said.

Schneider compiled three goals and 12 points in 15 games with the Rochester Americans before the Sabres summoned him with rookie winger Evan Rodrigues on Thursday morning.

With two games left, the Sabres want to examine some young talent.

"We want to see if (Schneider) can do it at the National Hockey League level, if he can rise up to the pace and the speed of the game and still contribute like he has been," Bylsma said.

Schneider's family had season tickets when he was growing up, so he has made countless trips to the FNC.

"It was a little different this morning," he said.

Schneider practiced beside center Ryan O'Reilly and Zemgus Girgensons. Rodrigues skated on the fourth line with center David Legwand and Matt Moulson.

The 5-foot-11, 174-pound Rodrigues, 22, has nine goals and 28 points in 68 AHL games. The Boston University graduate played beside Sabres rookie Jack Eichel last season, scoring 21 goals and 61 points in his senior year.

"I've really come along, got back to playing the way I can," Rodrigues said about his season.

In recent weeks, Rodrigues has showcased some of the same tenacity he did in development camp and training camp.

"Evan is a guy who in the last 20 games has maybe been the most tenacious and relentless worker down there for the Amerks," Bylsma said.

Right now, the dressing room is so packed Schneider and Rodrigues changed at plastic chairs instead of lockers.

Bylsma also said rookie goalie Jason Kasdorf could play this weekend. Kasdorf has been practicing after suffering a groin injury last month in his last NCAA appearance at R.P.I.

Sabres' Ennis is thankful

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

April 8, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tyler Ennis is back with his teammates for the first time since being hit by Alex Ovechkin causing a concussion. He was wearing the red non contact jersey, but did all the drills.

Ennis suffered his first concussion on November 23 against St. Louis. He returned on December 19 and played four games before Ovechkin put him out for the season on December 30.

Ennis missed 59 games this season and was all smiles on Thursday. He won't get back into games this season, but he also is more thankful these days for what he does have, "Today was a great day. I was with the team, it's so fun to be out there and to joke around with the boys." Ennis added, "I'm now on the ice and it's the greatest feeling so, I had a lot of time to reflect and be grateful for what I have, so I want to take preparations and every aspect of the game to another level because I'm so excited for the future."

Severe concussions are scary business and it was no different for Ennis the past three months, "It's a really difficult thing. I went through a lot of different emotions, a lot of ups and downs, so yes, there are really bad days, there's days that you feel great, so to say that I wasn't scared at some point would be a lie, but I feel so good right now, I feel 100 percent."

"This is such a great job, I can't wait to take things to a new level, there's things I can do better in preparing myself for games and practices," Ennis said. "There's stories of people that never feel better, so I feel fantastic, I wish we played another 82."

There were times in the past three months where Ennis couldn't drive and couldn't get around. He said, "There were complications, it was a strange and difficult few months, so yes, there were a lot of technicalities and things I couldn't do, but that's in the past."

In the past 39 games the Sabres are 19-13-7. The worst they can finish is 24th place and Ennis said, "I like what I see, we're playing good hockey, we're not giving up chances, our goalies are playing well. We seem to have some nice chemistry throughout the lineup, but the last month or two we've taken our game to another level or two, so I would be optimistic as a fan base."

I've had fans ask why Ennis is out there. He's doing it because he needs to ease his mind, "It's important because I know I can play hockey, it's important because I feel great, but mostly it's important because I know that I'm healthy."

The lines today were:

Girgensons R.O'Reilly Schneider
Foligno Larsson Gionta
Deslauriers Eichel Reinhart
Rodrigues Legwand Moulson
Ennis C.O'Reilly Fasching

Dan Bylsma said both Cole Schneider and Evan Rodrigues will play Friday. He said he would reveal his goalie Friday, but added there's still a chance Jason Kasdorf will play.

WNY native Schneider to make NHL debut w/Sabres

By Shawn Stepner

WKBW

April 8, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - After 278 games in the American Hockey League, Williamsville native Cole Schneider is finally getting his chance to pull an NHL sweater over his head. Better yet, that uniform will be of his hometown team.

Schneider will make his NHL debut on Friday when the Sabres host the Columbus Blue Jackets. He was called up from AHL Rochester Thursday morning.

On coming to the First Niagara Center today for practice Schneider said: "I had season tickets growing up so it was always fun coming to games. But it was a little different this morning."

The 25-year-old forward was acquired by the Sabres from the Senators as part of a seven-player trade in late February. He had requested a trade from Ottawa after never getting the callup with the Sens over five seasons.

"I was pretty excited when I got traded. To get the call (to come to Buffalo) yesterday it felt pretty good," said Schneider.

Schneider has 20 goals and 34 assists this season between Binghamton (AHL) and Rochester.

He is the second Western New York native to make his NHL debut with the Sabres this season. Williamsville native Justin Bailey played for Buffalo as well.

Also called up with Schneider was forward Evan Rodrigues. He played with Jack Eichel at Boston University and has 9 goals and 19 assists in his first pro season in Rochester.

Dunleavy: Messier's words can resonate with Sabres young core

By Dan Dunleavy

Sabres.com

April 8, 2016

I couldn't help but think of the young core of Buffalo Sabres when listening to Mark Messier and other former Edmonton Oiler greats talk about the reasons for their success.

Messier is widely known as perhaps the best leader or captain the game has known. I have spoken with many who have played with Mark and all share the same sentiments when it comes to leadership.

Now success breeds a certain attitude, but it had to start somewhere for those young and old WHA-to-NHL Oilers. From the top down, the Oilers build got it right. Once the ways of then-President, GM and coach Glen Sather crept down to his players, the mantle was in good hands.

Wayne Gretzky mentioned how Sather would make a habit of having the young stars' fathers around the rink on game days. The reason being? Well, if the player wouldn't have it in him to play for the coach on any given night, Glen knew the player would play for Dad sitting in the Northlands Coliseum.

After the final night of NHL hockey at what is now known as Rexall Place, I hope all the young Sabres star players in the making heard Messier's message as well.

"It's very simple. No individual can win a championship on his own. It's just that simple. You need a lot of support, you need a lot of people thinking the same way, all in alignment. You need the heart and the dedication and the character to make it happen.

"We realized that. Like I said today at City Hall, when you win, the stage is big enough for everybody. You've got to make everybody feel that their contributions are just as important as the next guy's no matter whether it's 30 minutes a game or two minutes a game. Everybody's got to feel that they're important.

"If they don't bring their best every game, you have zero chance of winning there. We were able to convince everybody that came here that they were important and we needed them."

-Mark Messier

Here in lies the not-so-secret secret to what the Sabres have to accomplish as a group of young men as they take steps towards hopefully being crowned a champion.

Now you can cheer all you want, you can predict playoff positions after back-to-back 30th place finishes in the NHL all you want. I understand being a fan, and I am one with you.

However, what Messier spoke of is not something that happens overnight. The Oilers journey to where they got to took some work and some huge disappointments came along the way. There were star players, supporting cast players and smart hockey people running the hockey ops and back of the bench.

Based on what I have seen this season and how this team has played since the Christmas break, the Sabres, I feel, are on their way now. The Young "Stars" are here or on the horizon: Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Rasmus Ristolainen. Built in and around these players are The NHLers with top-six or top-four credentials: Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane, Tyler Ennis, Zach Bogosian, Josh Gorges. There are The Hopefuls, be it due to youth or injury that has hampered their rise to "star": Robin Lehner, Jake McCabe, Mark Pysyk, Hudson Fasching and Casey Nelson.

That's just my account of who is here in Sabreland now. Who comes next is up to GM Tim Murray as this is his ship to steer. But whomever Tim Murray decides to add to this current mix of players, it's now on the guys here

today to make sure every new face feels accepted in Buffalo – to ensure every player who wears a Sabres jersey knows they have a role and that they are part of a close knit family.

And to make it a family that will make sure every player – star or rookie – spends his time in the barrel at some point. (Glenn Anderson, another former Oiler, said on that special closing night at Rexall, “You’d better have had thick skin in our room because there were enough darts being thrown daily and nightly.”)

So as your Sabres close out another season, I urge you to spurn the desire to say, “Here we go again, missing the playoffs.” We all have a part in building this franchise.

You are the loyal fans that the players and people who work for the organization count on. We are all grateful for you! Going forward, let’s fill First Niagara Center with as much energy and noise as we can. Let’s be part of this new crop of Sabres players' quest for glory, while empowering them when they are having a sluggish night or adding fuel to the fire when they are taking it to the opposition.

Like Messier said, everybody has a role to play.

Optimistic Ennis used recovery time to reflect

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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Tyler Ennis wore a red no-contact jersey when he finally made his return to practice with the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday morning. It was the team's final practice of the season, but Ennis' first since sustaining a concussion on Dec. 30.

When it was all said and done, Ennis found himself wishing the team had another 82 games on its schedule.

"You can look at it as a positive or a negative," he said. "It's negative because the season's basically over. It's positive because I feel great. There are stories of guys that obviously never feel better. I feel fantastic. "

Whether or not he'd become the subject of one of those stories was a thought that may have crept into Ennis' mind as he rehabilitated from his concussion, a roller coaster of emotions marred by its ups and downs. Some days he'd feel great, and then the next day his symptoms would return.

After three months of uncertainty, Ennis was ready to focus on the positives on Thursday.

"To say I wasn't scared at some point would probably be a lie," he said. "But I feel so good right now. I feel 100 percent. It gave me a lot of time to reflect and appreciate what I have. This is such a great job. I can't wait to take different facets of my game and my profession to the next level.

"... Today was a great day. It was fun to be with the team. It's so fun to be out there, joke around with the boys. Yeah, I'm in a good mood."

While Ennis led the team in scoring last season, he talked about improving his game going forward with the same optimism that he began this season with, when it still remained to be seen how he might mesh with some of the new faces on Buffalo's roster.

In some ways, the answer to that question still isn't known. Between his concussion and an earlier injury, Ennis has played just 23 games and tallied 11 points (3+8). Meanwhile, the rest of the team has begun to mesh dramatically over the past two months.

Buffalo is already a full 25 points better than they were last year, and Ennis is one of the holdovers who remember those tough times. Of course, he's disappointed he hasn't gotten to join his teammates on the ice as they've begun to reverse their fortunes.

"Totally, 100 percent," he said. "But I watch the games and I like what I see. We're playing good hockey. We're not giving up chances ... We seem to have some nice chemistries throughout the lineup, young guys are playing well, we're gelling.

"I know there are only two games left, but I think the last month or two we've taken our game to another level in my opinion."

Ennis won't be a part of either of Buffalo last two games this season, but don't let the brevity of his return to practice on Thursday undermine its importance.

"It's kind of just how the timing worked out, really," he said. "It's important because I know I can play hockey. It's important because I feel great and it's important because I got to be with the boys, be with the team and it was fun. But mostly it was important because I'm healthy."

#Duffalo: Earning points, smashing pumpkins and already looking ahead to next season

By Brian Duff

Sabres.com

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ON ICE

They had lost six games in a row – all in regulation time – and fallen to seven games below .500 for the first time this season.

It was Jan. 8, rolling into the wee hours of the 9th as the club made its way from Chicago to Winnipeg (you know, the city where the Sabres hadn't won since the days of Mogilny and LaFontaine?). After a day off on the 9th, a matinee awaited on a Sunday afternoon, and so too did Sam Reinhart's first NHL hat trick in a 4-2 Buffalo win.

Including that day/result, this team has gone 19-13-7 over its past 39 games. And with two games remaining, they have a chance to crest over .500 for the first time this season if they win out.

But extracting a win from the 'Peg may not have been the turning point.

Yes, the team won four of its next five, but they then proceeded to win only two of nine, capped by a 5-1 loss in Philadelphia.

The Sabres were 55 games in and still seven below .500. They were averaging only 2.2 goals per game and were allowing 2.75. In the 25 games since: 2.76 goals per game and 2.28 goals against.

Half a goal per game better in both categories, and they'd have had a 13-7-5 record. No wonder the cup doesn't feel half empty anymore.

We've spoken nearly every game night about the line of Marcus Foligno, Johan Larsson and Brian Gionta, and its value.

Here's how the point production has broken down these past 25 games:

PLAYER	GP	G	A	P
Jack Eichel	24	8	10	18
Zach Bogosian	25	6	10	16
Sam Reinhart	25	6	10	16
Evander Kane	20	7	7	14
Ryan O'Reilly	14	4	10	14
Brian Gionta	25	3	10	13
Marcus Foligno	25	6	6	12
Johan Larsson	23	8	3	11

Also complimenting the 13 wins would be the plus-13 ratings for both Foligno and Jake McCabe. And of course, the 13 appearances by Chad Johnson in goal in which he has posted a sterling record of 10-2-1 and a 2.21 goals-against average.

Eighty points was the target set by Coach Dan Bylsma a few weeks ago. A 7-2-2 run has them thinking of 83, which would mark a 29-point improvement from one year ago.

OFF ICE

He's off ice now due to injury, but there's a player down in Rochester that has shown tremendous growth in the eyes of regular observers, scouts, and teammates as well.

I was having a casual conversation with Nathan Lieuwen upon his recall from the Amerks recently, and the easy-going netminder reminded me why goalies make such great analysts.

Lieuwen effortlessly and thoughtfully provided insight into any name I threw his way, and we were a few minutes deep when he stopped and said, "You know, going back to your original question, Will Carrier is the most improved player on the team."

Carrier posted 13 goals and 17 assists for 30 points in 56 games prior to an upper-body injury on March 23 that put an end to his second season as a pro. And while 20 of those points came in his final 24 games, there was so much more to his game.

"He plays so hard at both ends of the ice," Lieuwen said. "He's so committed. No one backchecks harder, and believe me, from the goalie position you certainly notice that. And it's reflected in his plus/minus which is [at plus-14] – by far the best on the team."

We'll never know what Carrier might have shown had he received the late-season call up this year, but there is certainly every reason to look forward to seeing this 21-year-old again in the fall.

LIFE ON THE ROAD

Two reasons why concerts are such a draw for me when we are traveling with the team: the band and the venue.

We went 2-for-2 on this past road trip thanks to my first viewing (after all these years) of The Smashing Pumpkins in the truly remarkable and legendary Beacon Theatre on Broadway.

This video doesn't do the sound quality justice, but I hope you'll enjoy it all the same.

It was billed as the Pumpkins "In Plainsong" and **it was a pretty cool experience.**

Speaking of music, what did y'all think of this?

Ryan was pretty pleased with how this episode turned out and wanted to thank our entire crew.

To that we say, Thank you, Ryan and your family for the open door you took us through this year for two really enjoyable episodes of #BeyondBlueAndGold.

IN THE COMMUNITY

Almost every event we have ever written about in this section wouldn't happen without the passionate hard work of the Sabres Community Relations team.

Teresa Belbas is the manager of that team, and to say that she is a terrific colleague and great friend would be an understatement. Our hearts go out to Teresa and her family at this time, after the recent passing of her mom, Abby Harms. Abby was a big Sabres fan who fought a courageous battle with cancer.

But like all moms, I'm sure she was a bigger fan of her little girl.

She leaves behind a beautiful, caring, fun-loving daughter that was beside her for every step of that fight, and one that we are fortunate to work with every day.

May you rest in peace Abby, and may we all continue the fight to eliminate cancer in our lifetime.

There is just one home game to go, and whether you are in the building, or watching at home on MSG, we hope you are with us for **Fan Appreciation Night!**

DUFFALO THREE STARS

For the period ending April 7

1. Just two blocks over from First Niagara Center, **Lockhouse Distillery** on Columbia Street has a great vibe and almost literally fits the criteria of "hidden gem."

1. Keeping with a close-to-home theme, gotta give a shout out to a local breakfast spot that has been around a while but is new for me - **Savory's** on Camp Road in Hamburg!

1. And if you are hitting one of the final three Amerks home games this season (or planning a nice dinner out once spring returns), you really need to check out **Fiorella** in the Rochester Public Market.

Thanks to all of you for checking out #Duffalo this season. Looking forward to the Sabres 2016-17 campaign already!

Schneider, Rodrigues to make NHL debuts on Friday

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

April 8, 2016

Cole Schneider hadn't yet checked his phone since he left the ice at First Niagara Center on Thursday afternoon, but he had a pretty good idea what would be waiting for him once he did. It'd been going off constantly since his first career recall was announced three hours earlier.

"I might turn my phone off," he said, smiling.

Schneider was recalled along with Evan Rodrigues on Thursday morning, and both joined the Buffalo Sabres for their final practice of the season. They'll make their NHL debuts on Friday night when the Sabres host Columbus.

For Schneider – a native of Williamsville, N.Y. – it will be his first time playing in the arena since he played in the Scotty Bowman Showcase as a senior at St. Joseph's Collegiate Institute. Growing up, he was a Sabres season ticket holder.

"It was always fun going to games but it was a little different this morning," he said.

Schneider's journey to the NHL has been a long one. Despite going undrafted, he joined the Ottawa Senators organization after spending just two years at the University of Connecticut and began his professional career with the Binghamton Senators, Ottawa's American Hockey League affiliate, at the end of the 2011-12 season.

He scored 35 points (17+18) in 60 games the next year with Binghamton and saw that number rise each of the following two seasons, scoring 54 points (20+34) in 2013-14 and 58 (29+29) in 2014-15. Yet through all of those years, he never got his chance in Ottawa.

He was on pace for similar numbers this season, posting 42 points in 54 games with Binghamton. When the call still didn't come, he decided it was time for a change.

"I think that's kind of why I asked for a trade," he said. "I thought I was playing pretty well in Binghamton. I'm glad it's going to be here."

He got his wish on Feb. 27, when he was sent to his hometown organization as a piece in a seven-player trade between the Sabres and Senators. Schneider has scored 12 points (3+9) in 15 games since for Rochester.

"He's paid a lot of dues to get here," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "He's been a point leader and a leader for us down there since the trade from Binghamton to here and we want to see if he can do it at the National Hockey League level, if he can rise up to the pace and the speed of the game."

Zemgus Girgensons played with Schneider this past summer in the Fattley Hockey League, a summer league organized each summer in Buffalo. The two developed a friendship and attended a few Bills preseason games together.

"He's a really skilled player," Girgensons said. "Good hands, good vision. He's got a lot of speed, a good shot. Summer leagues aren't really your full out, so we'll see what he brings tomorrow."

Rodrigues, meanwhile, also joins a room with some familiar faces. He spent time with the team as a whole at Training Camp – he played one preseason game – but his relationship with Jack Eichel goes back to last season, when they were linemates at Boston University.

"He had a big part in my success last year," Eichel said. "He's one of the reasons that our team was so good and he was a big part of it."

Yet while Eichel entered this season as the No. 2 overall draft pick, Rodrigues graduated as an undrafted free agent. He signed his first professional contract with the Sabres over the summer and made himself impossible to miss over at Training Camp due to his relentlessness.

The tough part was learning how to bring that consistently in the AHL.

"My message to Evan is he stood out at rookie camp and [Training Camp] because of his tenacious, relentless, hound on pucks and [he] did it in the hard areas," Bylsma said. "He came in not as a high-profile guy and you had to notice him with the way he played in rookie camps. That's something that he's been much better at the last 20 games, 18 games or so in Rochester."

Rodrigues admits to that adjustment, and it's one that's paid off. He's scored 28 points (9+19) for Rochester this season, ranking second among Amerks rookies in assists and points. His goal in Buffalo is simple.

"Just to continue to develop," he said. "I'm going to go out there and play as hard as I can and it's obviously a dream come true to be here so I'm just going to take it all in and enjoy it."

THURSDAY'S LINES

If lines at practice are any indication of what we might see against Columbus on Friday, then Schneider will slot in on the right wing alongside Girgensons and Ryan O'Reilly while Rodrigues will begin on the fourth line with Matt Moulson and David Legwand.

Hudson Fasching and Cal O'Reilly skated with Tyler Ennis, who returned to practice in a red non-contact jersey, on a fifth line, suggesting they may be healthy scratches to make room for the new recalls.

Here's how the Sabres lined up on Thursday:

28 Zemgus Girgensons – 90 Ryan O'Reilly – 10 Cole Schneider
82 Marcus Foligno – 22 Johan Larsson – 12 Brian Gionta
44 Nicolas Deslauriers – 15 Jack Eichel – 23 Sam Reinhart
71 Evan Rodrigues – 17 David Legwand – 26 Matt Moulson
52 Hudson Fasching – 19 Cal O'Reilly – 63 Tyler Ennis

4 Josh Gorges – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
29 Jake McCabe – 47 Zach Bogosian
25 Carlo Colaiacovo – 3 Mark Pysyk
34 Casey Nelson

31 Chad Johnson
50 Nathan Lieuwen
33 Jason Kasdorf