



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

September 23, 2015

Hockey home openers still fun for Gionta

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

September 23, 2015

This isn't Brian Gionta's first training camp rodeo.

The 36-year-old has played in the NHL for 13 seasons. But don't dwell on age. Gionta is quick to point out that no matter how old you get or how long you've played in the league, the first game of the season is exciting.

There's a little added enthusiasm for Gionta and the rest of the returning Buffalo Sabres eager to turn the page from one of the most painful seasons in franchise history.

Gionta will make his season debut Wednesday night skating on a line with Sam Reinhart and Jamie McGinn as the Sabres host the Ottawa Senators for their preseason home opener at 7 in First Niagara Center.

"Every year you get that excitement. You get that anticipation," Gionta said. "I think even more so this year. Coming off the disappointment, you're really excited to get back at it and show what kind of team we're capable of being and what kind of team we're going to be."

What kind of team will the 2015-16 Buffalo Sabres be?

With a new head coach and an overhauled roster that includes some big-named veterans and sought-after prospects, the identity is still a work in progress. The direction, however, is one of pace and speed with player after player commenting about the structure of coach Dan Bylsma's systems.

"It's great. You know what's expected of you. You know what you're supposed to be doing. You know what your responsibilities are," Gionta said. "When a play is developing you know where you should be and what you should be doing, and you also know what your teammates are supposed to be doing. You know where your outs are. You know where your pressure is coming from and you know where your support is coming from."

"We're going to be a fast-paced, up-and-down-the-ice team," Gionta said. "We're going to use our speed. We've got some big bodies too, but our pace of play is where we want to do it. We want to be good on the forecheck. We want to be good on the pressure backcheck to shut teams down and kinda smother them. Be a team that's hard to play against that way so there's no time and space out there against you."

That's the direction. Bylsma knows that the team is not quite there yet and might not be for a few more weeks.

"You're trying to also build in a pace and a speed to your team and I'd like to, when a player goes offside, stop it every time but you don't get to do that if you're looking for pace and speed in a drill," Bylsma said. "You're looking for implementing systematically how we're going to play and that's not going to be perfect. It's not going to be perfect through the first three days. It's not going to be perfect in the first probably month of how we play."

"It is new for a lot of people and so you're building new habits in. You're pushing through some tired legs at times. You're pushing through some habits where they might not want to play with that pace and speed and you have to push through that. I'm expecting guys to do that."

Expectations are part of the package when it comes to starting Robin Lehner in goal Wednesday. It will be the first game action for the goaltender since suffering a concussion in a game in February and, fittingly, it will come against his former team. The Sabres traded their No. 21 pick in the NHL draft to Ottawa for Lehner and forward David Legwand.

Facing his former team is "a little weird," Lehner said, "but I've got to approach this like any other game and just do my best.

"Honestly I just go out and start getting into games. I have no expectations really. I just want to win like always but also realize that camp is a little different for me this year, getting back to things, getting back to games and game situations. I feel really good in practice, and I felt good last scrimmage, but every day is a little bit better."

Bylsma has no expectations either, saying that Lehner needs time in the net to face game-action shots.

It's also another chance for the Sabres defense, and coach, to become accustomed to Lehner's chatty style.

"I always wonder who the heck is talking on the ice. It's Robin all the time," Bylsma said. "He's engaged. He's talking to his defense and through the play. That's been the thing – I keep looking back there and saying 'Who's the guy yelling back there?' ... You can hear him talking. His voice is like his size – it's big."

Sabres notebook: Eichel will sit out preseason home opener against Senators

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

September 23, 2015

About this time last year, Jack Eichel was in Buffalo to kick off his hockey season. He was suiting up for the CCM/USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game before taking the ice with Boston University for his first, and only, season as a collegiate hockey player.

It's September and Eichel is once again kicking off his hockey season in Buffalo, this time as the No. 2 pick in the NHL Draft as a member of the Sabres.

He had a goal and an assist in his professional debut with the Sabres in a 3-2 preseason win at Minnesota on Monday night.

Buffalo coach Dan Bylsma said Eichel will not play Wednesday when the Sabres host the Ottawa Senators in their preseason home opener at First Niagara Center. In fact with perhaps one or two exceptions, Bylsma said he will use different players for Wednesday's game.

Eichel did not skate Tuesday but spoke with the media as part of a USA Hockey press conference to discuss the official site visit for Buffalo's bid to host 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship along with promoting Thursday's All-American Prospects Game.

Eichel was named Most Outstanding Player in the game held last year at First Niagara Center.

"Last year for me personally, it was unbelievable," Eichel said. "The event was a great kick off to my season with college just starting at the beginning of October. It was a good way to begin my year, get some exposure and it's a great event. Obviously I have a lot of great things to say about Buffalo and that was probably my first time visiting here.

"I think a lot of guys want to come in here and want to make an impression on all the scouts and personnel from the NHL that's going to be here. I think it's important for them to come in and just put their best foot forward and work hard and do whatever they do. That's what I tried to do last year and I was lucky to have a good game."

...

The CCM/USA Hockey All-American Prospects will be at 7 p.m. Thursday in First Niagara Center. The game will feature 42 of the top American-born prospects for the 2016 NHL Draft. Former NHL players Derek Plante and Jeremy Roenick will coach the teams. The game will be broadcast on the NHL Network.

Tickets for the event range from \$7 to \$10 and are available online through Tickets.com, the Buffalo Sabres website and at the First Niagara Center box office.

...

USA Hockey also conducted its official site review of Buffalo, one of three finalists to host the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championships.

USA Hockey is very familiar with Buffalo as the city hosted the All-American Prospects Game for two years and last season hosted the IIHF Women's U18 World Championships and the IPC Sledge Hockey World Championships. Incidentally both of those resulted in gold for Team USA.

Buffalo is up against Pittsburgh and St. Louis, with USA Hockey planning to make a decision before the end of the year. Buffalo hosted the event in 2011 and received good marks, but there is also a desire by USA Hockey to move the event to other locations to elevate the game across the country. That becomes a delicate balance.

"Certainly we've had a long-term relationship with Buffalo with all the events we've brought here ... the great success here obviously lends us to understand the experiences we've had here," said Mike Bertsch, the assistant executive director for marketing, communications and events for USA Hockey. "Yet at the same time the other parties that are finalists for this event also have great local organizations with great facilities and to spread it around creates a challenge for us to make sure we're doing the right thing for the event.

"The important thing for us is the pageantry of the event and the presentation of the event in the community, not just in the venue but in the community. That's a major factor for us in our decision making because we want to have the full engagement of those communities."

Pageantry was a word Bertsch used when discussing HarborCenter. In 2011 when Buffalo hosted, Dwyer Arena at Niagara University was the secondary site. Although Dwyer holds a few hundred more fans, the feel of HarborCenter along with being part of the First Niagara Center complex, makes not just a workable venue but an attractive one.

When HarborCenter was under construction "one of our conversations was could it adequately provide the seating for the secondary site for World Juniors in the future," Bertsch said. "There was a little bit of concern if there was enough seating. I think the end result, with the way it was designed and set up, it's a perfect setting for a secondary site."

Rodrigues isn't just 'the other guy from BU' for Sabres

By Kevin Oklobzija
Rochester D&C
September 23, 2015

BUFFALO — While you'll never get a second chance to make a first impression, Evan Rodrigues knows very well that you may have another chance to make a lasting impression.

He can be thankful for that, too.

Because of the tenacity and drive Rodrigues displayed in the two games of the Prospects Challenge Sept. 12 and 14, Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has a whole new perspective on the rookie winger.

Which is a good thing, since the initial evaluation of the Sabres' "other" rookie from Boston University wasn't all that positive.

During the development camp blue-gold game in July, Rodrigues was mostly ineffective and his team, with Jack Eichel, lost 5-2.

"I was a little disappointed in what I saw," Bylsma admitted. "He wasn't able to get on the inside, he was mostly on the perimeter."

For a smallish guy who needs to produce points and track the puck, there can't be a less effective way to play. Nothing can be accomplished if you don't gain position on a defender and don't get to the net.

But along came September and Bylsma saw a new Rodrigues in the Prospects Challenge against the young players from the New Jersey Devils and Boston Bruins. He may be just 5-foot-11 and 176 pounds, but he always got where he wanted to go. He has continued to show that same desire since training camp opened on Friday.

"I'm a huge fan of what he's done so far in camp," Bylsma said after practice on Tuesday. "This guy loves to compete. He really set the bar for our team in those two games (of the challenge)."

Of course, those games were against players with essentially the same experience level. It wasn't the real NHL. On Wednesday, Rodrigues will play against seasoned pros for the first time when the Sabres face the Ottawa Senators in a preseason game at 7 p.m. at First Niagara Center.

"I'm really excited about watching him," Bylsma said.

The giddiness is tempered by reality, however. The rebuilt Sabres have depth at forward now. There is little chance that Rodrigues, Eichel's linemate a year ago, ends up on the opening-night roster.

But that won't stop him from trying to prove he belongs.

"I think I can play at this level, I think I can play in the NHL," said Rodrigues, a 22-year-old native of the Toronto suburb of Etobicoke, Ontario.

Never drafted, Rodrigues was signed by the Sabres as a free agent in April, shortly after his collegiate career ended. He produced 21 goals, 40 assists and 61 points in 41 games as Eichel's BU linemate.

Eichel, the second overall pick in the June draft, is a big believer in Rodrigues.

"I think he kind of flew under the radar last year but I think he's going to open some eyes," Eichel said.

That's precisely what Rodrigues intends to do. Eichel is incredibly skilled but he was no one-man show last season with the Terriers.

"I don't think either of us had the success we did if it wasn't for each other last year," Rodrigues said. "It seems like every time he had a great game, I always wanted to come back and have a good game in the next one."

Rodrigues, who earned a business degree at BU, chose the offer from the Sabres because he saw a depth chart lacking depth.

"I think the opportunity for me to play in the NHL is the best here," he said. "They seemed to really want me. That's what you want, someone that sees a lot of potential in you."

His game is one that combines smarts with skill, and over time his desire has become more resolute.

The one knock folks in Western New York will have with him: his football allegiance, the byproduct of four years on a campus in Boston.

"I have become a Patriots fan," he said. "It's hard to say here, but I am."

Some will say there's nothing wrong with aligning with a winner.

Sabres' Tyler Ennis lobbied for new linemate Ryan O'Reilly

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 23, 2015

BUFFALO – Their paths had never crossed until five months ago, when Team Canada chose Sabres winger Tyler Ennis and center Ryan O'Reilly to represent its world championship squad in the Czech Republic.

For three weeks, as the Canadians roared to a gold medal, O'Reilly's many talents, the little details in his game, wowed Ennis. By the end of the tournament, they had become good friends.

When Ennis got home, he spoke to Tim Murray. As a young veteran assuming a bigger role, Ennis felt comfortable giving his general manager an honest take on O'Reilly. Ennis knew O'Reilly was on the outs with the Colorado Avalanche.

"I just said, 'Maybe this guy's underrated,'" Ennis said Tuesday. "'If what I'm hearing is true with Colorado, he might be moved at some point. We should maybe try to get him somehow.'" He agreed."

On June 26, shortly after they spoke, Murray acquired O'Reilly in a blockbuster deal. Tonight, 89 days later, Ennis and O'Reilly will skate with Evander Kane in the preseason home opener against the Ottawa Senators inside the First Niagara Center, the first game for the Sabres' new No. 1 line.

"Tim's been very receptive," Ennis said. "I think that's a good quality."

Hearing Ennis, who spent 33 seconds Tuesday rattling off O'Reilly's qualities, lobbied his GM to acquire him was special.

"To be wanted like that and be seen like that from a guy I respect, who I think is a fantastic player, I think it's a good start of things to come," O'Reilly said.

On paper at least, the trio could possess enough talent to become a top scoring line. The speedy Ennis, 25, has scored 20 goals in all three of his full NHL seasons, including the last two. O'Reilly, 24, has hit the 55-point mark three times and had 28 goals and 64 points two seasons ago. Kane, 24, scored 30 goals four years ago. Tonight will be Kane's Sabres debut and first game since Feb. 2.

"There's two guys there, you give them the puck, they're going to make something happen," O'Reilly said. "For me ... I think if I'm a responsible center and do good in my own end, if I get the puck up to those guys, we're going to create a lot. There's also going to be things we figure out. It's still so early."

Putting the slick Ennis beside the playmaking O'Reilly was a no-brainer.

"I view him as our best puck-distributing guy," new Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said about O'Reilly. "I think he's a guy who needs and thrives off ... having somebody (talented) to play with, and I think Tyler fits that extremely well. I've seen it in the first four days of them being on the ice together reading off each other, playing off each other. I'm pretty excited about seeing it in a game."

Ennis added: "We got some chemistry. (O'Reilly and I are) similar players in how we think offensively. He makes a lot of little plays."

Bylsma noticed one of Ennis' little plays when training camp opened Friday.

"We're in Day One of training camp and we're in a scrimmage, and he's the guy blocking a shot," Bylsma said.

That tenacity, the way Ennis showcases, mixes well with his slick skill. Bylsma knows Ennis from his days coaching the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"I think Tyler's one of the guys that you look at being a dynamic guy, and you see that in the highlights, you see that in a (scouting report), you see that from Tyler," he said. "I've been thoroughly impressed with how much skill and passion this guy plays the game with, and that's been evident. ...

"He can dance, he can make a play and he's got some real hockey sense. I don't look at a lot of heights and weights, because you can be 6-4 and play like you're 5-10 and you can be 5-2 like Tyler is (he's listed at 5-9) and play like you're 6-foot-2, and that's impressed me a lot."

Ennis appreciates Bylsma's respect and wants to earn more.

"It's time to take charge, be a leader," he said. "But Dan, so far, from what I've gathered, he's been great. He's been implementing structure, implementing pace in practice and combining the two, so we have to think while we work, which is great. Guys like all the coaches. So it's early, but the optimism and the excitement is building, for sure."

Goalie Robin Lehner to start against Senators; Jack Eichel out

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 23, 2015

BUFFALO – The voice is so loud, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma keeps looking back on the ice and wondering who the heck is yelling.

"His voice is like his size, it's big," Bylsma said about 6-foot-5 goalie Robin Lehner, who will start Wednesday's preseason home opener inside the First Niagara Center against his old team, the Ottawa Senators.

Lehner, as anyone who has watched a training camp practice quickly learned, loves to communicate on the ice.

"I try to be a third eye for the defenseman," he said.

Bylsma has never been around a goalie who's so vocal, something he's still getting used to.

"It's Robin all the time," he said. "He's engaged in talking to his defense and talking through the play."

Lehner, who's expected to be the No. 1 netminder, hasn't played a game since a scary concussion ended his season Feb. 16. Slowly, he's getting back to normal.

"There's a few things left, but I feel like I'm kind of ahead of what my expectation was," he said. "I feel pretty good."

Playing against Ottawa, his team for five seasons, will be "a little weird," Lehner said.

"But I've got to approach it as any other game," he said.

The Sabres sent a 2015 first-rounder to the Senators for Lehner and center David Legwand on June 26.

By the way, Lehner likes his name to be pronounced "Lenner."

In other news, rookie center Jack Eichel won't play Wednesday, Bylsma said. The second overall pick had a short-handed goal and an assist in Monday's 3-2 win in Minnesota.

Eichel downplayed his exhibition debut.

"It makes you feel comfortable playing with Zemgus (Girgensons) and Matt (Moulson)," he said. "They make it pretty easy and are really good players. It's exciting to be able to have a goal in your first game and kind of get that off your back. But I think it's more exciting to win and get some confidence going as an organization and as a team."

Bylsma said center Ryan O'Reilly and winger Evander Kane will make their Sabres debuts beside Tyler Ennis. Center Sam Reinhart, who's battling for a roster spot, will also play. Lehner will play two periods before Andrey Makarov relieves him.

With a couple of exceptions, anyone who played Monday will sit against Ottawa.

Facing Ottawa Senators 'weird' for Lehner

By Bruce Garrioch
Ottawa Sun
September 23, 2015

The Senators won't have to wait until opening night to see a familiar face in the Buffalo Sabres' net at the First Niagara Center.

Though Dave Cameron was working on his lineup Tuesday, goaltender Robin Lehner confirmed to reporters in Buffalo he'll make the start Wednesday against his former teammates for the first time since being dealt to the Sabres in June with centre David Legwand in exchange for the No. 21 pick in the draft.

Lehner admitted it won't just any other game.

"It's a little weird, but I've got to approach it as any other game and just do my best," he said Tuesday.

And, yes, he sees the irony in the fact he'll face the Senators in the opener in two weeks in Buffalo.

"I'm just here in camp trying to get better every day and work on a few things. I was away from the ice for a while and I feel really good on the ice so I feel like I'm making progress every day. That's all I'm worrying about right now in camp and trying to prepare myself for the first game," Lehner said.

The Sabres won't dress No. 2 pick Jack Eichel, who scored the winner in a 3-2 win over the Minnesota Wild Monday. The Sabres will have newly-acquired forwards Evander Kane (Winnipeg) and Ryan O'Reilly (Colorado) in the lineup against the Senators as well.

AROUND THE BOARDS

Defenceman Chris Wideman is ready for the next step. He was happy to be in the group of Ottawa players that took the ice Tuesday morning at the Canadian Tire Centre but he's well aware this list will mean nothing on opening night and there's a lot of racetrack ahead. "I'm excited to be here. It's a fun day of practice when the competitiveness is that high and the skill level is that high it's a real test. I'm definitely happy to be a part of it," said Wideman, the AHL's top blueliner last season. "It's just the first step and there's plenty of hard work left." Wideman said if he's going to be part of the Senators he has to play well defensively ... The Senators are hoping Jared Cowen can be a top four defenceman this season but he was in the last pairing for Tuesday's skate and he had a difficult game in the club's 4-3 loss to Toronto.

OFF THE GLASS

A lot was made of the fact winger Alex Chiasson was skating on the left side in practice Tuesday when the line combinations were being run because he had noted recently he hasn't played there since college. Coach Dave Cameron said that if you want to play in the league you'd better be flexible so Chiasson, who was a healthy scratch at the end of last season, will have to adjust his game if that's where the club decides to use him. "To me, if you're an NHL player, once you do it enough and get familiar with it, the adjustment is not that hard," said Cameron ... The plan was to only use Andrew "The Hamburglar" Hammond for 30 minutes against the Maple Leafs Monday in Toronto but he wasn't happy with the fact he gave up two goals on 18 shots in 31:33 before being replaced by Chris Driedger. "It was one of those things where it was the first game of the season and I didn't really feel comfortable in the first period," said Hammond. "The second period I felt like I settled in, played really well and made some big saves for us."

THIS N' THAT

Signed as a UFA on July 1, C Eric O'Dell, an Ottawa native, took the fact he was skating with the Binghamton group in stride and certainly believes he'll be able to contribute with the big team this season. "It's not up to me. I've just got to play my game," said O'Dell. "I thought I had a good game (Monday). I was out there for two goals. That's my side of the game and I'm pretty happy about it. Every time I get on the ice they're watching. I've just got to keep playing well. I can't really take a day off. I have to keep performing." ... Not only did the Senators split the groups in camp, they also sent three prospects back to junior which leaves 55 healthy players. Blueliner Marcus Crawford (Saginaw, OHL) along with forwards Filip Chlapik (Charlottetown, QMJHL) and Francis Perron (Rouyn-Noranda, QMJHL) were all sent back ... Don't forget the Binghamton Senators will play an exhibition game against the Carleton Ravens at the Ice House on campus on Sept. 28 at 7 p.m. By then the club's AHL affiliate should have a group close to its opening night roster.

Eau Claire's McCabe pushing for spot on Sabres' roster

By Mike Klees

Eau Claire Leader Telegram

September 23, 2015

ST. PAUL — "You gotta stick to the process."

That's what a wise-beyond-his-21-years Jake McCabe said Monday before lacing up his skates for the Buffalo Sabres in a 3-2 preseason victory over the Minnesota Wild.

The Eau Claire native and former Badger, who captained Team USA to gold at the 2013 world juniors, has had two tastes of the National Hockey League — seven games fresh out of Wisconsin at the tail end of the 2013-14 season and two last year, when he spent almost all his time in Rochester with the American Hockey League's Americans.

The Sabres opened training camp Friday and the defenseman, who turns 22 in a few weeks, was viewed by many as a player who with a great camp could crack the roster but more likely would spend another year in Rochester. As for McCabe, while he'd love to start the season with the big club, he knows it's all about getting better and more consistent.

"You want to succeed and you obviously want to make an NHL team, but you've got to be patient," McCabe said Monday after the team's morning skate at the Xcel Energy Center. "You really can't beat yourself up about it too much about it if you're not on the roster opening night. I'm very young. You've got to be patient, you gotta stick to the process, and that's what I've been doing."

Veteran defenseman Mike Weber, who is going into his sixth full season with the Sabres, said that's exactly the attitude young players need going into camp, especially when fighting for a job.

"I've been in that position. This is my ninth year pro. I spent three years up and down from the minors. It's one of those things where ... you read into everything, you're trying to read into who you're playing with tonight, what partner they got you with tomorrow," he said. "It almost comes to a certain point where you have to kind of not pay attention to that and just play your game. Focus in on what you want to do and what got you to this point to stand out."

Weber had high praise for McCabe, who had five goals and 24 assists last season in 57 games for the Americans.

"He's one of those guys who his hockey IQ is off the charts," Weber said. "His skating ability, it's pretty to watch. I mean for a guy like me, where every stride is a working stride, it's nice to watch him and it seems like it's effortless out there."

McCabe said he grew by leaps and bounds spending last year in Rochester, adjusting to the speed of the game, learning to shake off bad shifts and just getting more consistent.

"The jump from college to the pros, the biggest thing is the amount of games you play and the pace of play," he said. "I couldn't string together games — two, three games — to save my life. Come Christmas time I kind of started figuring it out, and being able to play at a consistent level every night is huge at the pro level."

Dan Bylsma, who won a Stanley Cup on the Penguins' bench and is in his first season coaching the Sabres, said McCabe was Buffalo's best player on the ice recently at the Prospects Challenge.

"It's another chance for him," Bylsma said before Monday's preseason opener. "He's just gotta keep playing like he is for now — playing strong, steady, skating is really good. He's been real good defending-wise, but he's also been one of our better guys at moving the puck and moving the puck up the ice. It's a big opportunity."

McCabe played a team-high 31 shifts Monday against the Wild and will have more opportunities throughout training camp and the preseason to show the Sabres coaching staff what he's got. But for now it's all about blocking out all the talk of where he'll start the year and just play his game.

"The only thing I control is how I play," he said, "so that's what I focus on."

Sabres lineup against Ottawa to feature O'reilly, Kane, Lehner

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 23, 2015

An interesting storyline emerged between the pipes for the Buffalo Sabres following the early practice session of Training Camp at First Niagara Center.

Goaltender Robin Lehner announced that he will start in net against the Ottawa Senators on Wednesday, meaning his Sabres debut will come against the team that traded him over the summer.

The Sabres' top lines of Evander Kane, Ryan O'Reilly and Tyler Ennis and Jamie McGinn, Sam Reinhart and Brian Gionta will also make their preseason debuts, according to Sabres coach Dan Bylsma.

Most of the players who played in the victory over Minnesota on Monday, including Jack Eichel, will not play.

Puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m. The game can be heard live on WGR 550 with Brian Duff and Rob Ray on the call. The game will air on NHL Network on Wednesday at 10:30 p.m. and will be shown again Thursday at noon and 5 p.m.

Lehner played 86 games over parts of five seasons with the Senators. He'll play two periods on Wednesday prior to being relieved by Andrey Makarov, marking his first game action since sustaining a season-ending concussion in February that all but ended his hopes of claiming Ottawa's starting job.

Coming off of that injury, the goaltender said that he's not setting high expectations for his first outing other than to simply get back into the routine of game action.

"Honestly, just go out and start getting in games," he said. "I have no expectations really, I want to win like always, but also realize that camp is a little different for me this year, getting back into things and getting back into games and game situations. I feel really good in practice and felt good last scrimmage but every day, [I feel] a little bit better."

If you're sitting close enough, you might get a chance to hear Lehner, too. Throughout Training Camp, teammates have praised the goaltender's loquaciousness in net as an asset to their communication on the ice.

"I try to be a third eye for our defensemen," Lehner said. "Talking in our own zone is an important part of our game going forward, especially [because] we've got a lot of young guys. We're trying to be a good defensive team and it all starts with communication. I try to help them out a little bit."

Bylsma, too, noted Lehner's communication as one of his most standout qualities thus far.

"He's the most vocal goalie that I've been on the ice with. I'm getting used to that, [it's] weird, I'm always wondering who the heck's talking out there on the ice. It's Robin all the time," Bylsma said. "I think [it helps] a ton. We talk about it all the time, communication. You're always looking to get more of it from your players and Robin's now a guy who's talking to his D-men ... his voice is like his size, it's big."

While Lehner admitted it will be strange to play against his former team, it shouldn't take long for him to get adjusted – the Sabres open their regular season at home against Ottawa on Oct. 8, and Lehner could very well be the starting goalie in that contest.

REINHART'S EXPERIENCE TRANSLATING IN PRACTICE

Sam Reinhart had a strong summer while playing alongside his fellow Sabres prospects, but it remained to be seen how that improvement would translate to playing again with the NHL team. Reinhart was sent back to develop in junior last season after playing nine games in Buffalo to open the season.

Five days into camp, Reinhart said he is already seeing a difference.

"I think there's a lot that I built on. I think maturity and experience go a long way in this league especially, so I think the pace and skating has improved and I feel a lot more comfortable with that," he said.

Reinhart's veteran teammates agree. Coaches lauded Reinhart's ability to see the game as it develops during the Prospects Challenge, and so far it's translating in practice and in scrimmages.

"He's progressed a lot," said Sabres captain Brian Gionta, who's shared a line with Reinhart throughout camp. "It's just in his overall speed, not just in his straight-ahead skating speed but the way plays progress and how quickly he's making decisions and stuff like that. He's gonna be a special player."

The next step for Reinhart is to utilize his intelligence and apply it to, as Bylsma calls it, a "big man's game." He'll have that chance against Ottawa on Wednesday.

"He's got to be able to skate and he's got to be able to play with size in that game," Bylsma said. "I've seen his intelligence and I think you continue to see his intelligence and his hockey sense but he's got to be able to do it playing at a high level and out there with other men."