



Buffalo Sabres

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Psyk looks ready to stick with Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

September 20, 2015

Mark Pysyk gets nervous sometimes when he looks at the Sabres' defense corps. Buffalo has bolstered its blue line, so the competition for playing time will be intense.

Then Pysyk gets on the ice. He reads the plays correctly, makes the right passes and looks like the bona fide NHL player he wants to be.

After three years of being a part-timer, the time is right for Pysyk to make a permanent home in Buffalo.

"That's the goal every training camp is to make the team and start the season up here," Pysyk said in First Niagara Center. "My focus is no different than the last few years, just come in and try to earn a spot.

"You sort of feel the same stuff every training camp. There's a little bit of uncertainty whenever you're out there and you see all the guys, then there's times when you feel pretty confident."

Pysyk should feel confident. For the first time in his career, the 23-year-old would need to clear waivers to be sent to Rochester. There's no chance Buffalo would risk losing its first-round pick from 2010.

That fact aside, Pysyk has what it takes to crack the Sabres' lineup. He's talented, smart and has learned a lot during his three years bouncing between Buffalo and Rochester.

"He's an extremely talented player in the way he approaches the game and his mindset the way he sees the game," said defense partner Mike Weber. "I probably have to say he's one of our higher IQ defensemen back there. It's a pleasure to be playing with him, even in camp. It makes my job easier when he's talking to me. He sees the game a little differently than I see the game when we're talking on the bench.

"It'd be nice for him to get in and be here."

Pysyk's hockey IQ has been evident since he was the captain of his junior team. The smarts allowed him to get 19 NHL games during his first professional season in 2012-13. He played 44 games for the Sabres in 2013-14, a run that seemed to set the foundation for a big season last year.

Pysyk, though, spent most of the campaign in the minors. General Manager Tim Murray said it was because Pysyk didn't receive call-up recommendations from the Amerks' coaching staff. Others suggested Pysyk was kept down so Buffalo wouldn't lose its shot at a top-two draft pick.

Either way, the No. 1 goal now is winning. Pysyk is in position to help the Sabres do that.

"There's good energy around, a lot of new talent," he said. "Guys are excited about the year coming up. I'm excited just as well as everybody."

Pysyk is in a competition with five other defensemen for three starting jobs. Zach Bogosian, Rasmus Ristolainen and Josh Gorges have a lock on the top three spots. Pysyk is in a group with Weber, Cody Franson, Carlo Colaiacovo, Chad Ruhwedel and Jake McCabe. Newcomers Matt Donovan and Bobby Sanguinetti also have NHL experience.

"We've got some big bodies. We've got some young talent," Weber said. "It's exciting. This organization in one standpoint, we've never been lacking in skilled defensemen and depth defensemen. I feel like there's obviously going to be some guys in the minors that can come up and stand up for us in a heartbeat.

"Our top seven here are going to be tough to play against every night, especially with the game plan that" coach Dan Bylsma "has drawn up for us."

Bylsma's system calls for the blue-liners to be aggressive in the rush and make clean passes out of the defensive zone. For the smooth-skating Pysyk, that philosophy is right in his wheelhouse. He had two goals and an assist in seven games with the Sabres last season, and he had three goals and 17 points in 54 games with Rochester.

The fans and organization are ready to find out what Pysyk can do during an entire season in Buffalo.

"I just want to show that I can be steady and consistent," he said. "It's a long season and you've got to bring it every day. You can't be a roller coaster. You can't be really good some games and then just terrible the others.

"You've got to bring it every night, and I hope that from here on out I can be consistent."

Sabres notebook: Lieuwen tries to put health woes behind him

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
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Nathan Lieuwen, in his polite and soft-spoken way, brushed off the question about last season and his brain.

"Let's just not talk about that," he said.

It makes sense. The Sabres goaltending prospect had a year to forget. He struggled with vision problems that a neurologist linked to the concussion issues he's faced since he was 16. His season ended in January, and his hockey future was once again in doubt.

Lieuwen, though, is back in Buffalo's training camp and eager to continue his career.

He will relieve starting goaltender Chad Johnson at some point Monday night during the Sabres' preseason opener in Minnesota.

"I just want to prove I'm ready to play at whatever level – and not just play but excel," the 24-year-old said in First Niagara Center. "That's what I want to do and that's what I want to prove here."

The Sabres drafted Lieuwen in the sixth round of the 2011 NHL Draft, and he made a quick impression on the organization. In 2013-14, he was 17-11-2 with a .922 save percentage in Rochester and earned seven games with the Sabres. The run came to a halt because of a concussion.

It's an unfortunate story line that has plagued Lieuwen since he suffered his first one in a bad car accident as a teen.

"It's awesome just to have the opportunity to be here," the goalie said. "It's something I've never taken for granted. Especially with what happened last year, it's a special feeling and I'm just dying to play hockey right now."

Lieuwen opened last year's camp third on the goalie depth chart, but it's tough to gauge where he fits in now. Robin Lehner will start in Buffalo, with Johnson as the prohibitive favorite to be backup. Andrey Makarov has impressed and will likely be the No. 1 in Rochester. Swedish import Linus Ullmark will make his North American debut this fall once he recovers from hip surgery.

"There's competition," Lieuwen said. "That's what I crave and that's what I love to see. You feel like you have an opportunity, and that's what you need to push yourself to be better."

Jack Eichel will be in the Sabres' lineup in Xcel Energy Center.

Coach Dan Bylsma says folks shouldn't read too much into what does or doesn't happen on the ice.

The Sabres will have just 10 players categorized as NHL veterans, a number that actually includes the 2015 first-round pick. Eichel will open the game alongside training camp linemates Matt Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons.

"I don't really think it's his pro debut," Bylsma said Sunday. "We're in the start of camp. There's 10 veterans out there. They've been through three hard days right now. It's not going to be their freshest legs in that game, so I'm not looking at this game as, 'Oh, we're going to see something,' or, 'What is it going to show us?'"

"He's going to get a chance with the scoreboard running and different colored jerseys in the National Hockey League."

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Linemates Nicolas Deslauriers and Marcus Foligno helped their group close the Sabres' round-robin scrimmage sessions with a 4-2 victory. Deslauriers scored twice, including an empty-net goal to seal it, while Foligno tied the game with just more than a minute to play.

In addition to their offensive outburst, the duo caught the eye of Bylsma with impressive physical play.

"Sometimes we get confused and we hit the same guy," Foligno said. "Whenever he's going, I can read off him that he's going for a big hit, or if he's pulling back I can go for a big hit. It's going to be tough for other teams to contain us. It's going to be a lot of fun."

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Foligno, who was slowed by offseason shoulder surgery at the start of last year, is in the best shape of his life. How'd he get that way?

"P90X," he said. "No, just kidding."

Though the infomercial workout system has its believers, Foligno simply had plenty of time and good health.

"It was just a long summer," he said. "I worked hard with my brother, Nick."

Kaleta trying hard to be himself, make Sabres' roster

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

September 20, 2015

Dan Bylsma is going to give Patrick Kaleta every chance to make the Sabres' roster - unless the coach kills him first. Given Bylsma's feelings, that's entirely possible.

Kaleta has long inspired passionate responses in people. While the reception is usually positive in Buffalo, Kaleta's reputation ranges from sewer rat to firing-squad candidate in other hockey cities.

During Bylsma's nine seasons in the Penguins' organization, he coached against Kaleta often. They're on the same team now, but competitive feelings die hard.

"I have a hard time not wanting to kill him," Bylsma said Saturday with a quick, pained laugh. "I've told him that. I let him know, 'I'm trying to like you. I'm trying to put it behind me.'"

"That's jokingly aside, but he still does inspire that in me when I see him."

Bylsma said he was joking, and the news conference certainly was comical. But emotions trump words when it comes to Kaleta. The coach gritted his teeth and vigorously shook his head while describing Kaleta's hits during practice. Bylsma gripped the interview podium so hard in restrained annoyance that his water bottle shook.

"You look at him and he smiles, he's got the shield," said Bylsma, grimacing as he pictured the sneer and tinted mask that can't hide the vicious intent in Kaleta's eyes. "You're like, 'Yeah, I'm supposed to like him. I'm supposed to like him.'"

Kaleta is aware a lot of people hold him in contempt and hope he fails in his quest for a 10th season in Buffalo.

"People doubt me all the time," Kaleta said in First Niagara Center. "I'm pretty sure I get people doubting me every single day, every single hour. Just look at my Twitter feed."

Indeed, the messages Kaleta receives in the social media world can be described, in family-friendly terms, as passionate. That's OK. The 29-year-old is a passionate guy himself, something Kaleta is eager to show Buffalo's new coaching staff as he skates through training camp.

"I've worked my whole summer for the opportunity to come here and make a team, and that's my goal," Kaleta said. "I was blessed for the chance and the opportunity. Now I've just got to make the most of the opportunity."

Kaleta is confident he can secure a role in Buffalo. The unrestricted free agent turned down offers from other teams and elected to sign a minor-league contract with Rochester. The deal came with a professional tryout in Buffalo.

"My love for the Sabres and the organization and the city outweighed any other decisions," Kaleta said. "When you have a Plan A, you're focused and you're determined to pursue that avenue. When you don't focus on Plan A, Plan B and Plan C, you can really do what you need to do to get that Plan A."

"Buffalo, everyone knows, has been my Plan A since the day I was born."

Unlike previous seasons, when it was a given the hard-charging right winger would don the Blue and Gold, Kaleta has an uphill battle. The Sabres are split into three groups, and he's listed as the 11th of 11 forwards for Group

B. The Sabres' fourth line is penciled in as Nicolas Deslauriers, David Legwand and Marcus Foligno. Johan Larsson is in position to be the first extra.

Clearly, Kaleta has work to do. He's doing his best to draw attention. He had a goal and assist during Friday's scrimmage. He sent defenseman Brycen Martin careening into the boards after a dump-in Saturday, a hit that quickly drew an interference penalty.

"That's not a real game out there, but in a sense it is, and a goal is a goal," Kaleta said. "I'm happy to show that I'm able to contribute in that manner. Today I was able to show that I can still hit, and I think that just adds to everything."

As much as the competitor in Bylsma would like to drop the gloves and rack up his 13th NHL fight, the coach in him sees a player doing everything possible to turn the tryout into a contract.

"I think Pat has a legitimate chance to make it," Bylsma said. "We don't have a lot of opportunity, but as a veteran guy and as a guy in Pat's shoes, you have to come out and do exactly what he's doing in camp, which is play his style, play his game. He's done that right in our practices, he did that in our scrimmage."

Kaleta's going to continue to do it. The coming weeks will show if it's enough.

"Anything and everything that needs to be done I'm more than willing to do," Kaleta said. "Hopefully, when Oct. 6 or 7 rolls around, I'll be here in whatever role that's needed to help my team."

New Sabres goalie Lehner can count on a fair shot here

By Bucky Gleason

Buffalo News

September 19, 2015

Robin Lehner couldn't emphasize it enough Saturday. He loved Ottawa and will be forever grateful to the Senators. They looked after him as a young prospect and helped him develop into an NHL goaltender. He had close friends and started a family there, and it wasn't easy saying goodbye.

But ...

You can always count on a "but" when a player gets traded and begins making the mental transition from one team to another. The transaction in June came with mixed emotions. Shortly after the move was made, he turned to Twitter and thanked the Senators and their fans before dropping this little nugget:

"I'm excited for the future," he wrote, "and to get a fair chance to develop my game with my new team."

Keyword: fair.

"Ottawa was a class-act organization," Lehner said. "I owe them a lot, and I can't express that enough. But I kind of went into a weird cycle there. This is just my honest opinion. People might not agree with me. I don't really care. But every time I played good, I got benched. That happened on multiple occasions.

"Every time, I started off camp and the beginning of the season good. I never really got the opportunity to keep that rolling. It was frustrating. And when I would get into a slump, I played. It was hit or miss. I played when I didn't play good, and I didn't play when I did play good. It was a tough cycle."

Lehner will get more than a fair shake in Buffalo.

Tim Murray didn't trade the 21st pick overall to the Senators for Lehner and veteran forward David Legwand with the idea he would help Ottawa reload in the future. He was desperate for a goaltender, the bigger the better, someone who would provide stability while the Sabres evolved this season and beyond.

It was a hefty price considering the inherent risks. The 6-foot-5, 225-pound Lehner gave Murray the big body he wanted in net, but he remained largely unproven after failing to meet expectations in Ottawa. He's also coming off a nasty concussion that sidelined him for the final two months of the season.

Lehner has a career 30-36-13 record with a 2.88 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage. Last season, he was 9-12-3 with a 3.02 GAA and .905 save percentage before he was rocked in a collision with Clarke MacArthur. Andrew Hammond carried the Sens into the postseason with a 20-1-1 record, a 1.79 GAA and .941 save percentage.

In no time, the Hamburgler stole his job, not to mention the hearts of their fans.

"Hammond came in and had a fantastic run," Lehner said. "It was a lot of emotions during that time. I really loved my team up there, but seeing slowly but surely that someone is taking your job, of course it's hard. I'd be lying if I said it wasn't hard. I was very happy for the team. They were winning. But it was still tough."

Sabres fans will come to know Lehner. He grew up in Gothenburg, Sweden, along the shores of the Baltic Sea. His father was a goaltending coach who counted Henrik Lundqvist among his prized pupils. His easygoing personality contradicts his reputation for having a short fuse.

By all accounts, Lehner was a great teammate in Ottawa. He had his teammates in stitches after naming his pet piranhas after Senators beat writers. He turned a home he purchased from Daniel Alfredsson into, as he said, "a zoo" that included snakes. He sounded upbeat and energized about his opportunity in Buffalo.

"I'm going to do my best here," he said. "It's all I can expect from myself. I can't expect anything more. We'll see where it takes us."

Yes, we'll see soon enough.

The importance of his arrival was largely overlooked during a busy offseason, a ripple in a summer of big splashes. Murray hired brainy coach Dan Bylsma and picked Jack Eichel second overall. He spent a boatload in a bold trade to acquire Ryan O'Reilly and dipped into free agency to add depth and leadership.

Murray added some big names, but no player will have a greater direct impact on the Sabres this season than Lehner. No position in sports contributes more to the success or demise of a franchise than a goaltender.

For better or worse, and the Sabres couldn't get much worse, Lehner will be their No. 1 goalie this season.

Goalies tend to blossom later than those at other positions. Murray obviously believes Lehner hasn't reached his full potential, and more playing time can accelerate his development. He never started more than 30 games in any NHL season. His workload could double in his first year in Buffalo.

"We needed a goaltender that could be the main guy and be a backstop for our team," Bylsma said. "He's going to be a guy who we turn to to be a major part of this team in net. We knew what we were getting in Robin when we made the trade for him. He's a big part of this team going forward."

The Senators had similar plans when they took him in 2009 and began grooming him to become their franchise goalie. He was 19 years old when he made his debut in 2010, becoming the youngest Swedish goaltender in NHL history. The same season, he led Binghamton to the Calder Cup.

For one reason or another, he never established himself with the Senators. Flashes of greatness were interrupted by intermittent periods in which he was average or worse. He was short-tempered. Some wondered whether he had maturity and mental toughness required for the job.

At times, he couldn't get out of his own way.

The Senators ultimately decided to send him on his way. It may have been tough for him to say goodbye to the Senators but apparently they had an easier time bidding farewell to him. Whether it was fair or not doesn't really matter. The Sens didn't see him in their future.

But ... the Sabres did.

"To have that journey end, it was a little weird," Lehner said. "This is also a very good opportunity for me to start over."

Sabres notebook: Long-ago No. 2 Legwand providing insight to next wave

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

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Not sure if anyone's heard, but there's a No. 2 overall pick skating with the Sabres. His name is David Legwand.

Like Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, Legwand was taken second in his NHL Draft. Unlike Buffalo's top prospects, Legwand isn't trying to break into the league.

"I asked Jack the other day and he said he was born in '96," Legwand said Saturday. "I said I was drafted in '98. That makes me really old."

The 35-year-old is on the downslope of his career, but the Sabres hope he has enough left to be a contributor on the ice and in the dressing room. Legwand is centering the fourth line for left wing Nicolas Deslauriers and right wing Marcus Foligno, and he's also sharing tips he brings from 1,112 games in the NHL.

"I think I can still contribute and play key roles and do whatever the coaches ask of me," Legwand said in First Niagara Center. "Just to play in the league is fun. It's a great spot to be."

Ottawa insisted that any trade for Robin Lehner would include an unwanted salary, so Legwand and his \$3.5 million paycheck came to Buffalo with the goaltender in June. Legwand had nine goals and 27 points in 80 games with the Senators last season, but he totaled a respectable 14 goals and 51 points in 83 games with Nashville and Detroit the previous year.

"David's definitely into the veteran category of his career, but he's always been a guy who is kind of a straight-line-skating guy, up and down," coach Dan Bylsma said. "There's not a lot of flash and there's not a ton of — I know he's going to read this and comment on it tomorrow — but there's not a ton of playmaking, there's not a ton of hockey sense. He's a fast skater, an aggressive skater. He's a smart hockey player, and that's how he's got to play.

"He's got to bring that no matter how old his legs might be."

The 6-foot-2, 204-pounder, who is in the final year of his contract, adds leadership to the locker room. He's already warned Eichel and Reinhart how long the debut season seems and how quickly the following years zip past. He's explained that a short memory is essential in a league that plays games every night.

"These kids are coming up now, and the foundation's there for them to be great hockey players in this league for a long time," Legwand said.

The longtime center actually started his NHL journey in the Sabres' arena. Buffalo hosted the Draft in 1998, and Nashville traded up to select Legwand after Tampa Bay drafted Vincent Lecavalier with the No. 1 pick.

"I remember San Jose had the second pick, and my agent looked at me and said, 'You're going to Nashville.' I said, 'Whoa,' " Legwand said. "Other than that, it was pretty much a whirlwind day. It was exciting, obviously. It's like it comes full circle to get the chance to play where you're drafted."

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With the Bills set to play the most anticipated early season game in recent memory, the frenzy in the Buffalo sporting world is off the charts.

"Being at the Bills game, you see the hype around the Bills and they get a big first win," left wing Matt Moulson said. "You could feel the energy just being in that stadium, and you see the excitement around the city.

"This city's dying for a team to win. Hopefully, we can both accomplish that. I don't think there's a much more fun city to win in than Buffalo."

While the Sabres experienced the opening win against the Colts, they'll miss the start of the showdown with the Patriots. The Sabres are scheduled to practice from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Sunday in the arena.

"Hockey first," Moulson said.

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Ryan O'Reilly has quickly made an impression in Buffalo with his on-ice skills and off-ice demeanor. The players on the other side of the blockbuster trade are getting comfortable in Colorado.

Former Sabres first-round picks Nikita Zadorov and Mikhail Grigorenko are skating in their first camp with the Avalanche. Grigorenko opened in a highly coveted spot as the center for right wing Nathan MacKinnon and left wing Alex Tanguay. Zadorov skated with longtime NHL defenseman Francois Beauchemin.

"I'm really happy we finally started," Grigorenko told the Avs' Website. "I think I've got the skill level and all the tools. I just need to work and compete as hard as I can every time I step on the ice, and I should be fine."

Zadorov gave a glowing review of his time in Buffalo.

"It was the best time of my life, a great two years," he told the Denver Post. "It was the greatest organization, great people there, great teammates, and I always will be thankful to them for drafting me. They made a hockey player of me. I learned a lot there and had some bad lessons, too, but everything else was great."

While praising the Avs' combination of General Manager Joe Sakic and coach Patrick Roy, Zadorov may have taken a shot at Sabres GM Tim Murray.

"As soon as I heard 'Colorado Avalanche,' I was happy," Zadorov told the Post. "It's always nice to play for a GM who's actually been here and knows what it's like for the players when you're playing and working hard."

Sabres hope to begin putting rebuild behind them

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

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The Buffalo Sabres head into the 2015-16 season with a much different look and feel about them compared to the recent past.

Since February, Buffalo has added high-end players in trades, through free agency and at the 2015 NHL Draft, and the fruits of a rebuild that began in earnest in 2013, the Sabres hope, will start to show this season.

After having the worst record in the NHL each of the past two seasons, hopes are high in Buffalo that wins will outnumber losses and the days of missing the Stanley Cup Playoffs will come to an end in the near future.

The Sabres scored 303 goals during the past two seasons, 70 fewer than the 29th-ranked New Jersey Devils, leaving general manager Tim Murray with some serious work to improve the offense.

The Sabres acquired left wing Evander Kane in a trade with the Winnipeg Jets on Feb. 11. Then on June 26 they acquired center Ryan O'Reilly and left wing Jamie McGinn in a trade with the Colorado Avalanche; that same day they selected center Jack Eichel with the second pick of the 2015 NHL Draft.

"It's been awesome. I think everyone's excited; everyone should be excited," Sabres forward Tyler Ennis said. "I think Tim did a great job putting together a lot of great pieces that we needed. He was aggressive and knew what he wanted and got some pieces. The guys look really good out there right now and we're kind of jelling, getting to know each other. At the same time, we know that there's a lot we need to improve on. There's a lot we need to get better at. It's not just going to happen."

Adding Kane, O'Reilly and Eichel to a forward group that already included Ennis, Matt Moulson, Zemgus Girgensons, who played in the 2015 NHL All-Star Game, and Sam Reinhart, the second pick of the 2014 draft, has the Sabres feeling good about the potential of their offense.

"It's an exciting time," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "I think the moves we made [have] made us a stronger team, but a more character [driven] team. I think that's going to go a long way. We brought in some guys who are real professionals that have been around the game. They know what it takes to prepare, they know what it takes to win, and I think that those sorts of things, they go a long way. Not to mention they're pretty good hockey players on top of it, which will help as well."

Important for the Sabres is their depth at forward. Captain Brian Gionta leads the way, and Marcus Foligno, Johan Larsson, Nicolas Deslauriers, Cody McCormick and newcomer David Legwand give new coach Dan Bylsma a lot to work with entering the season.

"Just from skating with the guys here, our top six, maybe even our top nine, look really good," defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo said. "We've got a lot of skill and a lot of elite talent, and that's a great thing to start with every year."

The Sabres will have several players competing at training camp for a few spots on defense. Gorges, Zach Bogosian, 20-year-old Rasmus Ristolainen and Mike Weber return from last season, and Cody Franson was signed to a two-year contract Sept. 10.

Franson, 28, who played for the Toronto Maple Leafs and Nashville Predators last season, provides something a bit different than most of the incumbents.

"I would like to sit here and say he's a complete defenseman and he's going to excel at all aspects of the game, but what we want him to excel at is moving the puck, skating the puck and shooting the puck," Murray said. "Whatever he does after that, to me, is a bonus, because we have some guys that are hard to play against, we've got some guys that are good defensively, block shots. So I think he adds to the mix that we have on the blue line."

The competition figures to be stiff throughout training camp to see who else will make the opening-night roster. In addition to Franson, Matt Donovan, Bobby Sanguinetti and Colaiacovo were signed as free agents, and 2010 first-round pick (No. 23) Mark Pysyk, 2012 second-round pick (No. 44) Jake McCabe and Chad Ruhwedel also will be in camp.

"It's always good to have competition; it brings the best out of players," Colaiacovo said. "We've got some really good players here. It's a long season. Things change all the time during the season, whether you start with it, or you go to the middle of the season, or you finish with it; things always change."

Goaltender has been a fluid position in Buffalo the past two seasons, with Ryan Miller, Jonas Enroth, Michal Neuvirth and Anders Lindback, among others, taking starts. So Murray acquired a player familiar to him to try to solidify the position, getting 24-year-old Robin Lehner from the Ottawa Senators on June 26.

"He fits with what we're trying to do," said Murray, who was an assistant GM with the Senators when they drafted Lehner in the second round (No. 46) in 2009. "And if it takes this year only to get his feet back under him, I'm fine with that. Because if we become a competitive team in two years or three years and he's found his game and becomes what we think he is, it's the perfect fit."

Lehner sustained a concussion Feb. 16 and didn't play again last season. He's since been cleared to return and is eager to prove himself in Buffalo.

"When I got traded I had a lot of emotions running through [me]," Lehner said. "I'd been with the guys in Ottawa for a few years and had a lot of good friends there. Coming here and talking to the organization and seeing the changes they're making and how much they're putting into a fresh start, it's really exciting."

Lehner and backup Chad Johnson, 29, should give the Sabres a steady tandem. Johnson, who was acquired at the NHL Trade Deadline last season from the New York Islanders for Neuvirth, will push Lehner to stay on his game.

Fixing special teams will be vital to the Sabres' success this season, but it also won't be difficult to improve on their 2014-15 performances.

Last season the Sabres had the worst power play in the NHL (13.4 percent), scoring on 30 of 224 man-advantage chances; they also allowed eight shorthanded goals, tied for the third-most in the League. The penalty kill also was the worst in the NHL (75.1 percent).

Bylsma had great success coaching special teams with the Pittsburgh Penguins. From 2009-10 through 2013-14, the Penguins were in the top five in the League in power play and penalty kill three seasons each. During that span the cumulative power-play efficiency was 19.6 percent, and the penalty-kill rate was 84.9 percent. If the Sabres can come close to those numbers, wins will happen more frequently.

Bylsma was hired May 28 to replace Ted Nolan and help lead the Sabres out of its rebuild and into the postseason. In his five-and-a-half seasons with the Penguins, he won the Stanley Cup in 2009 and led them to the playoffs every season.

"He's been through it," Murray said when Bylsma was hired. "Stanley Cup Final as a player, winning the Stanley Cup as a coach. To me, he's a winner. He knows what it takes to get there, how to perform when you are there. So there's a lot of lessons he can give to young players. That's part of the culture. We've been trying to change the culture here every day, but this is a big swing to the positive."

The Sabres' 37.5 shot-attempt percentage (SAT%) last season at 5-on-5 was the worst in the League since the 2002-03 season, according to war-on-ice.com. In Bylsma's first three-and-a-half seasons with the Penguins, their SAT% was at least 52.0 percent at 5-on-5; in his final two seasons it was at least 48.0 percent. Bylsma's system should help turn around that aspect in Buffalo.

Bylsma's staff also has experience. He hired former NHL coach Terry Murray, longtime NHL assistant Dave Barr and Dan Lambert, former coach of Kelowna of the Western Hockey League. That group will look to change not only the Sabres' style of play, but also adjust their culture.

"The developing, the winning, the culture of winning and developing that with your group and your team is going to be something I learned with the Pittsburgh Penguins, something you developed," Bylsma said in May. "It wasn't something that we had because you had certain players on your roster, and that's something that we have to immediately get into the Buffalo Sabres organization, get into our DNA, get into who we are and how we play and develop that culture with this group."

Young Sabres all optimism

By Stephen Harris
Boston Herald
September 20, 2015

The passionate, long-suffering sports fans of Buffalo were already in a state of euphoria after **Rex** Ryan's Bills defeated the Indianapolis Colts on Sunday, setting up a very interesting showdown today with the Patriots.

Seeing Sabres rookie sensation **Jack Eichel** make two terrific plays on Monday night against the Bruins' youngsters — a lovely pass to set up the late game-tying goal and the explosive sprint up ice during the 3-on-3 overtime to score the game-winner — just added to the sense of optimism and hope brimming in the city.

"Excitement? Oh yeah," said Sabres general manager **Tim Murray**. "I mean, they're passionate sports fans in Buffalo. We had the big win by the Bills. The fans here are talking hockey and football all the time. I think they're really excited about the possibilities with this hockey team."

It's been a while since that was true. The Sabres finished last in the NHL the past two seasons and missed the playoffs nine of the last 13 years, including the last four.

In the past four drafts, however, Buffalo has had six first-round picks (none lower than 16) and eight second-round picks, selecting the likes of Eichel, **Sam Reinhart**, **Zemgus Girgensons** and **Rasmus Ristolainen**. In February, Murray made a bold, blockbuster trade, acquiring forward **Evander Kane** and defenseman **Zach Bogosian** from Winnipeg. At the draft, Murray added forward **Ryan O'Reilly** from Colorado and ex-Ottawa goalie **Robin Lehner**.

One of the Sabres' better prospects is right winger **Justin Bailey**, a 20-year-old who grew up in Buffalo. (His dad, Carlton, was a Bills linebacker.) Justin understands how badly local fans want a winner.

"I grew up with it; this is definitely a passionate city when it come to sports," said Bailey. "I was fortunate enough to be drafted by (the Sabres) and I think we can have something special here. Look at the depth we have at every position; it's a dogfight at every position now."

"They've done a good job of bringing in prospects and other guys to make the whole organization competitive. That's what you want. No job is really secure here. It creates a real good atmosphere."

Former Penguins skipper **Dan Bylsma**, hired in May, will try to organize all these new faces into a winning team.

"We know it's a rebuild, but there's different ways to rebuild," said Murray. "We wanted to do it traditionally, through the draft. But also we wanted to speed it up a little bit, and I think we've made a couple of trades that makes that possible."

The result? Tremendous excitement among Sabres fans — who bought 16,000 season tickets before the team cut off sales, Murray said — that their team may finally make the fictional scene in "Bruce Almighty" come true: The Sabres win the Stanley Cup.

"That's the type of city this is right now. It's the whole vibe here," Murray said. "The downtown is going crazy. The HarborCenter (the Sabres' gorgeous practice facility) is great. I read in the paper that there's five new restaurants opening every week. It just seems to be really happening right now."

Murray is wise enough — and patient enough — to know not to expect instant results from his new-look club.

"Coming out the gate, we're not sure what we have," he said. "How quickly as we going to jell as a team? We have lot of new faces. We're going to have a pair of young guys (Eichel and Reinhart) at center ice. How quickly

are they going to become bonafide NHL players? We'll have a new goalie. We hope that stabilizes us there; that was the plan with the trade. We certainly have made a lot of improvements, but we acknowledge that we have a lot of questions.

"I've got lot of faith in our new coaching staff here to get some answers quickly. The players themselves, they're the guys who are going to answer those questions, and I think they're really hungry and excited."

David Legwand happy to be with Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 20, 2015

BUFFALO – The other day, veteran Sabres center David Legwand, a 35-year-old starting his 16th NHL season, asked rookie Jack Eichel when he was born.

“He said, ‘I was born in ‘96,’” Legwand recalled Saturday. “I said, ‘I was drafted in ‘98.’ That makes me really old.”

How old is Legwand? He played against Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, who turned 45 on Saturday and retired in 2004.

“He’s old enough that did happen,” Bylsma said inside the First Niagara Center.

The Nashville Predators drafted Legwand here second overall on June 27, 1998, one pick after Vincent Lecavlier, at what was then known as Marine Midland Arena. He made his NHL debut on April 17, 1999, two months before the Sabres played in the Stanley Cup final. No other current teammate played in the NHL until captain Brian Gionta, 36, debuted in 2001.

“It’s like it comes full circle to get the chance to play where you were drafted,” Legwand said.

These days, Legwand, fresh off a career-worst nine-goal, 27-point season with the Ottawa Senators, is graying, entering perhaps the twilight of what has been a solid 1,057-game career. The Sabres possibly absorbed his \$3 million salary on June 26 so they could acquire Robin Lehner, their new No. 1 goalie.

Still, the 6-foot-2, 205-pound Legwand should enjoy a regular role with the Sabres, possibly as their third- or fourth-line center. He spent the first two days of training camp between Nick Deslauriers and Marcus Foligno.

“Now he’s definitely into the veteran category of his career,” Bylsma said about Legwand. “But he’s always been ... kind of a straight-line skating guy, up and down. There’s not a lot of flash and there’s not a ton of – I know he’s going to read this and comment on it tomorrow – playmaking. He’s a fast skater, an aggressive skater, a smart hockey player, and that’s the way he’s got to play.”

“He’s got to bring that game no matter how old his legs might be. That’s the kind of player he is and has been his whole career.”

Legwand added: “I think I can still contribute and play key roles and do whatever the coaches ask of me.”

The American earned a two-year, \$6 million contract from Ottawa in 2014 after a strong 14-goal, 51-point, season with Nashville and the Detroit Red Wings. But his role diminished last season after the Senators fired coach Paul MacLean.

On a team filled with young, raw talent, Legwand’s experience should help. With Eichel, Legwand and Sam Reinhart, the Sabres have three former No. 2 picks. Legwand recently told the teenage centers that by December they’ll be wondering, “Is this thing over yet?”

“Then it starts going your second, third, fourth, fifth years,” he said. “It starts going faster and faster and faster. I have enjoyed it. I got to play with some great players, great people.”

Legwand's one of hockey's last throwbacks to a different era. When he entered the league, the game was just beginning the dreadful Dead Puck Era, a stretch of seven or eight years in which clutching, holding and hooking sapped skill and goals from the game.

While goal scoring is still low, Eichel and Reinhart are beginning their careers in faster, tougher game.

"Sometimes it's going to take them a little while," Legwand said. "They're going to make mistakes. ... It's a quick game. You don't have next week to wait for a game. You have the next day. ... I think these kids are coming up now. The foundation's there for them to be great hockey players in this league for a long time."

Sabres' Dan Bylsma trying to like Patrick Kaleta

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 19, 2015

BUFFALO – Dan Bylsma's memories of winger Patrick Kaleta pestering his old Pittsburgh Penguins teams are too fresh. To the Sabres coach, the veteran agitator is still the enemy. Having him on his side is going to take some getting used to.

"I have a hard time not wanting to kill him," Bylsma joked this afternoon inside the First Niagara Center. "But I've told him that. I let him know I'm trying to like you, I'm trying to put it behind me. ... He still does inspire that in me when I see him."

Bylsma felt that Friday when Kaleta was "finishing checks and going hard through guys." He also feels it when the Angola native flashes his sly grin.

Through two days of camp, Kaleta, who's on a tryout with an AHL contract, has "stood out in how he practiced," Bylsma said. The Sabres don't have many open spots up front. But Kaleta, an NHL regular most of the past seven seasons, has a "legitimate chance" to make the big club.

"When you go into a season and look at contracts and you try to put people with those contracts into situations, we don't have a lot of opportunity," Bylsma said. "But I think as a veteran and as a guy in Pat's shoes you have to come out and do exactly what he's doing in camp, which is play his style, play his game."

That game, of course, is hard-nosed and ultra-aggressive with some occasional flashes of skill.

Early in today's scrimmage, Kaleta zoomed in down low, quickly extended his arms and earned a penalty by shoving prospect Brycen Martin to the ice. A day earlier, Kaleta scored a nifty penalty shot goal, assisted on Justin Kea's goal and also drew a penalty.

"It's not a real game out there, but in a sense it is, and a goal is a goal," Kaleta said. "I'm happy to show that I'm able to contribute in that manner. Today I was able to show I can still hit."

Camp practices have been brisk, something that favors Kaleta's style.

"I think it's guys wanting to show that they're here and they're willing to do whatever they can to make the team," Kaleta said. "When you're not a top-six player and you're in the bottom six battling, part of your game is going to have to be physicality. Teams cannot play without being physical nowadays. ... That's just guys going out there and doing what they need to do to succeed."

Kaleta trying to show he still is a Sabre

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 20, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Pat Kaleta has now participated in two scrimmages in training camp. He scored two goals on Friday and made many big hits on Saturday.

Kaleta is in camp on a PTO and a one year deal with Rochester. Kaleta said he had other offers, but that's not what he wanted, "When you have a Plan A, you're focused and determined to pursue that avenue. When you don't focus on Plan A, Plan B or Plan C, you can really do what you have to do to get that Plan A and Buffalo has been my Plan A since the day I was born."

Kaleta has already played on different lines as he works into the scrimmages. He's enjoyed the first two days, "It's been awesome, especially getting back and being able to throw the jersey on again and be back with a new group of guys."

"I have worked the whole summer for the opportunity to come here and make a team and that's my goal. I've been focused and pretty determined and so far I think it's a good step in the right direction for me."

Kaleta thinks he's going to get an honest chance to make this team. The winger does see opportunity, "Yes, or I wouldn't have signed what I did. All you can ask for is an opportunity, especially where I was at a week or so ago, so my love for the Sabres and the city outweighed any other decision."

Injuries have derailed Kaleta throughout his career. Since 2008 he's played 51 games, 55, 51, 63, 34 out of 48, 5 and 42 games. This off season he's been able to train without having to rehab an injury. He said because of that, he's in great condition, "Going into camp is probably the best shape I've been in in quite some time. It is a confidence booster feeling the way I do, especially with my knee doing some of the stuff that I did this summer I think expedited the process of me getting back to where I need to be."

Kaleta will always have his detractors out there because he's always been an agitator who has crossed the line. He knows he has to prove himself again, "I always have to prove to everybody. People doubt me all the time, it's nothing I'm not used to. I'm pretty sure I get people doubting me every single day, every hour, just look at my Twitter feed, so what it does is just fuel the fire."

The only real criticism I have of Kaleta is in today's game, you can't have guys on your fourth line who don't chip in offensive. Kaleta is an above average penalty killer, but since scoring 10 goals in 2009-10, he's had a total of 10 goals and has just one goal since February 8, 2012. He did score two goals in his first scrimmage, but he downplayed that somewhat, "It's not a real game out there, but in a sense it is and a goal's a goal and I'm happy to show I'm able to contribute in that manner."

As of right now the fourth line is David Legwand, Nic Deslauriers and Marcus Foligno. Last year Foligno had 20 points, Deslauriers had 15 and Legwand had 27 with Ottawa. Legwand had 51 points the year before playing in both Nashville and Detroit. Legwand thinks he can do that again, "Two years ago I had 50-something points and you want to contribute in your position and help with the young guys as much as possible and do whatever the coaches ask of me."

Both Deslauriers and Foligno provide a physical game too, but with Cody McCormick not passing his physical and out indefinitely, that could open the door for Kaleta if he stays healthy and continues to build on an all-around game.

Saturday's scrimmage saw much more hitting. Kaleta had many of those hits as did Deslauriers, Foligno, Brycen Martin, Zach Bogosian, Carlo Colaiacovo and Zemgus Girgensons.

Josh Chapman clobbered Sam Reinhart twice with no response from teammates on the ice.

Jack Eichel got crunched by Jerome Leduc and Devante Stephens. He slowly went to the bench and took his helmet off for a minute or two to gather himself and then got back out to finish the scrimmage.

The only goal of the scrimmage went to White as Jason Akeson scored on a penalty shot.

Andrey Makarov, Chad Johnson and C.J. Motte all had shutouts. Nathan Lieuwen gave up the game's only goal. The Gold will scrimmage the Blue on Sunday at 10. The first session begins at 9:00 and will be open to the public.

Kaleta once again out to prove himself

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 20, 2015

For the second day in a row, Patrick Kaleta caught everyone's attention during the Sabres' Training Camp scrimmage. In the first game Friday, Kaleta scored on a penalty shot and set up another. The penalty shot opportunity came after he drew a call near the offensive blue line.

On Saturday, it was Kaleta getting called for the penalty after laying out young defenseman Brycen Martin with the type of big hit he's known for. So far, so good for a player with a lot to prove in a short amount of time.

After missing the majority of last season with a knee injury, Kaleta was signed by the Sabres to a minor league deal on Sept. 11. That was step one for the Buffalo native, who worked all summer to earn a chance to return to the team with which he's spent his entire nine-year NHL career.

"It's been awesome, especially getting back and being able to throw the jersey on again and being back with a new group of guy," Kaleta said after practice Saturday. "I've worked my whole summer for the opportunity to come here and make a team and that's my goal. I'm focused and pretty determined and so far I think it's a good step in the right direction for me."

There were other offers, yes, but as he says, having a plan B and C would only distract him from plan A.

"And Buffalo, as everyone knows, has been my plan A since the day I was born," Kaleta said.

Kaleta knows there will be doubters; he's dealt with them his whole life. He has someone doubt him every 10 minutes on his Twitter feed alone, he jokes. But Kaleta also knows that he has a legitimate opportunity to earn a spot at the bottom of the roster, which Sabres coach Dan Bylsma affirmed on Saturday.

In fact, you need look no further than Bylsma to see what kind of impact Kaleta has on opposing teams. He coached against Kaleta with the Penguins and, like all of the others who coached against Buffalo for nearly a decade, developed contempt towards him that he's still trying to shed today.

Bylsma stood in silence when asked about the penalty drawn by Kaleta on Friday. A literal no comment.

"You look at him, and he smiles, I have a hard time not wanting to kill him," he deadpanned. "He still does inspire that in me when I see him."

All joking aside, the coach has been impressed with Kaleta through the first two days of camp.

"I think as a veteran guy and as a guy in Pat's shoes, you have to come out and do exactly what he's doing in camp, which is play his style, play his game," Bylsma said. "He's done that in our practices, he did that in the scrimmage yesterday ... if you weren't watching then you weren't watching because he stood out in how he practiced and what he did on the ice."

Kaleta expects to benefit from the fast-paced style of play that Bylsma's implemented in practice thus far, and he's healthier than he's been coming into camp in years. Now, he's just got to keep doing what he's doing.

"I just do what I got to do. Passionate, work ethic, anything and everything that needs to be done, I'm more than willing to do," Kaleta said. "Just be myself, I go out there and play the body, play the puck. It's not always about fighting and hitting but using my wheels that I have now and just getting back in the swing of things and doing what I do best."

LEGWAND BACK WHERE IT ALL STARTED

David Legwand's professional career began in Buffalo in 1998. That year, the city hosted the NHL Draft and an 18-year-old Legwand was taken No. 2 overall by a brand new expansion team, the Nashville Predators.

Now, Legwand is 35 and has returned to Buffalo, this time to play for the Sabres and help mentor other rookie No. 2 overall picks, Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel. He's already seeing the similarities.

"I think this is a very similar situation," he said Saturday. "When I was in Nashville, there was no other team, it was an expansion team and so much wasn't expected. But we expected in our four walls, in the dressing room, we were expecting to compete and work hard and make it as hard as it was to get two points night in and night out.

"That's what we're supposed to do; we're supposed to come in here and make this place hard to play in and have a home-ice advantage and those types of things."

Legwand was traded to the Sabres from Ottawa in June, an added piece in the move to acquire goaltender Robin Lehner. But the veteran comes only a year removed from a 51-point campaign in 2013-14, when he split time between Nashville and Detroit. Last year, he tallied 27 points in 80 games for the Senators.

Going into the season, he still feels like he has a lot to contribute.

"Obviously you want to go out and do well," he said. "You want to contribute in your position and help with the young guys as much as possible. I still think I can contribute and play key roles and do whatever the coaches ask of me."

Of equal importance to his role on the ice will be the mentorship he can provide to Eichel and Reinhart, Buffalo's top picks in the last two drafts. He's communicated with them both already and thinks he has a lot of help to offer.

"Hopefully a lot," Legwand said. "Obviously Jack and Sam are two huge, key pieces to this franchise and when kids are coming up nowadays it's different, they're learning so fast and the game's faster and sometimes it's going to take a little while. They're going to make mistakes, but the faster you put the mistakes in the back of your mind you forget about them."

SCRIMMAGE RECAP

Kaleta hits aside, only one goal was scored in the scrimmage between Eichel and Reinhart's respective practice groups on Saturday. After missed penalty shot attempts by Martin and Phil Varone earlier in the game, Jason Akeson scored following a penalty to secure a win 1-0 win for Reinhart's gold team late in the second half of the scrimmage.

Bylsma said afterward that he was also impressed with the performances of Zach Bogosian, Marcus Foligno and Cal O'Reilly in the scrimmage.

Eichel to play 1st preseason game Monday night in Minnesota

By Jourdon LaBarber
Sabres.com
September 21, 2015

Sunday marked the Buffalo Sabres' final tune-up in advance of their preseason opener Monday night in Minnesota. Following practice, coach Dan Bylsma said that Buffalo will carry 10 veterans to play the Wild, one of which will be Jack Eichel, the second-overall pick in the 2015 NHL Draft.

Team's top selections from this year's draft qualify as veterans in the preseason and a minimum of eight veterans per team are required for each preseason game.

Eichel will be joined in Minnesota by Matt Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons, who have served as the rookie's linemates throughout the first weekend of Training Camp.

Bylsma also announced that Chad Johnson will start in net for the Sabres, although he plans to split time between Johnson and Nathan Lieuwen. Robin Lehner and Johnson, expected to be the team's top two goalies this season, will likely each get at least one full game in net during the preseason.

Defenseman Bobby Sanguinetti was held out of practice and is day-to-day with an upper-body injury.

Monday night's contest from Xcel Energy Center can be heard live on WGR 550 at 8 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Andrew Peters will have the call. Sabres.com will be on-site and have full coverage of the game.

FOLIGNO STRONG IN PRACTICE

After a "long summer" of working out with his brother Nick, an All Star last season for Columbus, Marcus Foligno says that he's come into this year's camp in the best shape of his life. So far, it's paying off on the ice – Bylsma said that Foligno delivered one of the most impressive performances in Saturday's scrimmage, a performance he followed up with a go-ahead goal on Sunday.

Like all of the players on the Sabres' revamped roster, Foligno is trying to carve out his role. At the outset of camp, he's playing alongside veteran center David Legwand and physical forward Nicolas Deslauriers on what figures to be the team's fourth line.

"It's a clean slate for everyone. I have to prove myself, I'm going to earn everything I get this year, I know that," Foligno said. "I feel rejuvenated, feel positive, and feel that I can get back to where I was and my game can get back to where it was when we were rolling and I was playing well offensively."

Now entering his fourth NHL season, Foligno has confidence in his skill. He's a physical playmaker who can disrupt other teams, but he's also showed his offensive ability. Despite being limited to only 57 games due to injury last season, he still managed to tally a career-high 20 points.

His mission now is to continue climbing the depth chart.

"You always want to be up in the lines, and I feel I can get there," he said. "But I know that I have to earn that and to show it to the brass and to my teammates as well. For me, Deslauriers, other guys who are young, every day is kind of a training camp and you want to produce every day."

Then again, having Foligno on the fourth line wouldn't be a bad scenario for the Sabres either. If the team performs like they're expecting to, then their depth will allow Bylsma to roll out all four lines at any given point of a game.

Foligno's already noticed the depth in practice. The scrimmages at have been high-paced, and he said that none of the top four lines have proved to be slower than the next. If the Sabres have a strong fourth line, he says, they'll not only be able to outplay other fourth lines but compete with opposing teams' second and third lines, too.

"It wasn't like that in the past, it was tough, right?" Foligno said. "You keep the puck in their zone when you have all four lines cycling and wearing down their D and their top players. That's huge."

McGINN FEELING THE GAME OUT

While many of the Sabres found time to play hockey over the summer, Saturday's scrimmage was Jamie McGinn's first real game experience in nearly nine months. McGinn underwent back surgery last December while playing for Colorado and, since then, has been rehabbing and getting into shape for the season.

"I'm getting back into it, feeling the game out," he said. "Felt good, no issues so just continue to strive and get better and continue to work on my game every day."

McGinn did get better the next day, scoring a goal for the winning team in Sunday's scrimmage. Entering his first year with the Sabres following a June trade that sent him to Buffalo along with Ryan O'Reilly, McGinn has been placed on a line with young center Sam Reinhart and team captain Brian Gionta to begin camp.

While Bylsma said on Friday that placing McGinn and Gionta on a line with Reinhart was a means towards giving the young center time in the offensive zone, McGinn believes that playing with those players will help him also. His personal goals are simple: He wants to play hard, all the time.

"I'm going to be a hard worker, help out in any way I can," he said. "I feel like I can chip in with some goals but I want to change momentum if the boys are down, keep them loose and work hard. My goal is to never take a shift off and continue to work and get on the winning ways here. I know it's been a couple of tough years, but we're here to change that."

Changing the team's fortunes, he says, should begin to happen sooner rather than later.

"Absolutely, 100 percent. Right away. I don't think there should be any hesitation there with a new coach, there's a new look in the dressing room obviously; a lot of new personnel so I don't think there should be any hesitation or a slow start," he said. "We're ready to go, we're excited, and that's what we need out of a group is the excitement to want to go play and want to win."

SCRIMMAGE RECAP

Sunday's scrimmage saw Foligno's group beat the later practice group by a score of 4-2. Deslauriers scored twice and Foligno and McGinn each contributed a goal for the winning team, while Vaclav Karabacek and Jerry D'Amigo scored for the opposing team. Robin Lehner did not allow a goal in net in 20 minutes of play, including a strong stop on Brian Gionta in front of the net.

"The scrimmage is an opportunity for the individual players to play and show what they can do," Bylsma said. "You're just starting to put together things of how we're going to play and so maybe this scrimmage more than any, we saw some of our players doing that and executing that, defending the way we need to defend, so this one was the best in that regard."