



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*October 9, 2015*

## **Johnson to anchor Sabres' defense against Tampa Bay**

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 10, 2015

Heading into the season opener, Robin Lehner acknowledged he was the biggest question mark for the Sabres. If goaltending was a question mark with Lehner, it's now a question mark with an exclamation point.

As in, Chad Johnson?!

The journeyman backup is suddenly Buffalo's No. 1 goaltender after Lehner suffered a lower-body sprain Thursday. It's a position Johnson hasn't held since playing for the minor-league Connecticut Whale in 2011-12.

The 29-year-old will make his first start for the Sabres on Saturday afternoon against Tampa Bay.

"I've for the most part been sort of a second guy," Johnson said Friday in First Niagara Center. "At this level, a lot of times what makes a difference is just an opportunity or the right person believing in you."

For now, General Manager Tim Murray is willing to put his faith in Johnson. The Sabres want to see what the goalie can do before pushing the panic button. He may get a long look. The Sabres don't know how long Lehner will be out – the goalie was set to have an MRI on Saturday – but it's not a short-term injury.

Lehner attended the Sabres' practice with crutches and a walking boot on his right foot.

"He just said he was sorry," coach Dan Bylsma said. "He can't be sorry for getting injured. It happened, but he's sorry for getting injured and not having the opportunity to get in the net."

Johnson stopped eight of nine shots in relief of Lehner against Ottawa. He had no chance on the goal, which bounced off teammate David Legwand and directly to wide-open Kyle Turris, but Johnson did get help from a couple of posts and poor marksmanship by the Senators.

He's happy to head to the crease with advanced warning this time. It will be his first appearance in back-to-back games since last October.

"The whole preseason I felt good," Johnson said. "In preparing for the season, I worked hard on all aspects of my game. I'm a better goalie this year."

The Sabres acquired Johnson at last season's trade deadline but never got a look at him. He suffered a sprained ankle on the morning of his scheduled debut.

Johnson went 8-8-1 with a .889 save percentage for the New York Islanders last season. He appeared in three straight games early in the year before occasionally giving breaks to Jaroslav Halak.

Johnson's most extensive work came in 2013-14 with the Boston Bruins. He went 17-4-3 with a .925 save percentage while backing up Tuukka Rask. He appeared in consecutive games four times.

"It's preparing the same way I have my whole life," Johnson said. "It is exciting. Obviously, I play hockey to play, so the more games I can play in, the happier I am."

Because the Rochester Americans opened their season Friday, Buffalo practiced without a backup. Linus Ullmark, who is recovering from double hip surgery, guarded the net across from Johnson. The rookie is not expected to be cleared to return until next week.

Nathan Lieuwen started for the Amerks, who play again Saturday night, and either he or Andrey Markov is expected to report to Buffalo for the 1 p.m. start. The goalie could conceivably make it back to Rochester by the 7:30 p.m. puck drop.

There are other options for the Sabres. Calgary, for example, is carrying three goaltenders and would likely be interested in moving one. Karri Ramo started the Flames' opener, while Jonas Hiller is scheduled to start Saturday. Rookie Joni Ortio is also on the roster.

The most recognizable free agent is Ray Emery, who spent time with Murray in Ottawa. Emery attended the Lightning's training camp on a tryout but was released.

Johnson certainly won't get a chance to ease into the starting job. Tampa Bay reached the Stanley Cup final last season, in part by leading the NHL with 262 goals. The top line of Steven Stamkos, Ryan Callahan and Jonathan Drouin will provide a huge test for Johnson and the Sabres.

"For us now, our focus is on ourselves here," said center Ryan O'Reilly, who is likely to be matched up against Stamkos. "He is a guy that we'll talk about a bit. You can't give him much room offensively. He gets in the right spot, we have to make sure he's covered because if he gets a chance he's going to bury it."

## ***Sabres notebook: O'Reilly wants to put disappointing debut behind him***

By John Vogl  
Buffalo News  
October 10, 2015

Ryan O'Reilly had a forgettable debut. His assessment was unforgettable.

"I felt I was pretty useless out there," O'Reilly said Friday.

The scathing critique was a bit harsh, but it wasn't too far from the truth. Aside from winning half of his 24 faceoffs, the Sabres' top center had no stats of note during Thursday's season-opening loss. He failed to record a shot or a hit in 20:17 of ice time and was minus-2.

He'll clearly need to do more when Buffalo hosts Tampa Bay on Saturday afternoon.

"I just felt I skated around," O'Reilly said in First Niagara Center. "I wasn't where I should have been a lot of the time. Whether it was just overthinking or just out of position, I have to be much better for my linemates and for the team."

O'Reilly, acquired in a blockbuster trade to serve as a much-needed two-way center, had trouble at both ends. He and linemate Tyler Ennis collided on the first shift as Ottawa turned up ice and scored with just 30 seconds gone. He was also on the ice when the Senators sealed their 3-1 victory with an empty-net goal.

O'Reilly's line couldn't get near the Senators' net during the opening two periods. Ennis had only one shot while Matt Moulson had none. The line finished with five shots thanks to a busier third period.

"It is my responsibility to create out there, and I have to be good," O'Reilly said. "When I have guys like Moulson and Ennis on my line and I'm in the middle, I've got to get those guys the puck and I have to be good in our defensive zone to help get that puck out quick."

"It's just one of those nights that it was a bad night, and I have to get back to working hard and get involved right away."

O'Reilly's self-assessment earned points with Dan Bylsma.

"I like accountability and I like honesty," the coach said. "He's not the only guy I had that conversation with and said the same thing about the way we played. Yes, I love the ownership and I love the accountability. We need to turn that accountability into action on the ice."

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Brian Gionta missed practice again with a lower-body injury, but he skated on his own. Bylsma hoped the captain would be available to face the Lightning. If so, it would bring continuity to the second line.

Three right wingers skated alongside center Jack Eichel and left wing Evander Kane against Ottawa. Sam Reinhart started in the spot before giving way to Marcus Foligno. Zemgus Girgensons replaced Foligno during the third period, and the line finally got going. Girgensons remained in the coveted spot during practice.

"I like what Evander and Jack and Brian did when they were playing together previously," Bylsma said. "Evander is clearly a certain type of player. He's straightforward and speed and is straight ahead. He's chipped pucks in and gotten to pucks first, and he drives wide and shoots the puck. Jack's got speed that can support and accent that."

"They need a worker. I think they need a guy who is a straight-line guy, goes to the net, does some of the work for them in terms of getting pucks and being a presence in the offensive zone. I think Brian Gionta did a lot of that the two games he played with them. I thought Zemgus did that during the third period."

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Because of the uncertain injury status of Josh Gorges, the Sabres opened the season with eight defensemen. Gorges got through the first game fine, blocking three shots in 20:33, so the number of blue-liners could dwindle as soon as Saturday.

Jake McCabe or Matt Donovan, the Sabres' extras, could be sent to Rochester. McCabe would not need waivers, while Donovan would.

"As we get closer to healthy, we probably won't have eight for too long," Bylsma said.

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Nicolas Deslauriers was too caught up in the excitement of Eichel's first goal to hear the new goal song. But the forward listened to it on the replay and was impressed by "Let Me Clear My Throat," a 1996 rap anthem that got the call after an online vote.

"I liked it. Seriously, I did," Deslauriers said. "The fans voted for that, and I think we're all about the fans here.

"Let's hope we hear it a few more times."

## Sabres confident in goalie Chad Johnson

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 10, 2015

BUFFALO – Considering Chad Johnson is the only healthy goalie on the roster, it can be assumed the backup will start this afternoon against the Tampa Bay Lightning, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

"Let's go with that," Bylsma said sarcastically Friday.

Goaltending was arguably the Sabres' biggest question mark *before* new starter Robin Lehner suffered a lower-body injury about halfway through the season opener Thursday.

Now, the Sabres might be forced to lean heavily on Johnson, 29, a career backup with only 57 NHL appearances (48 starts).

"It is exciting," Johnson said. "Obviously ... sort of a goal of mine is to be a starting goaltender."

Bylsma said Lehner was evaluated Friday and the Sabres will learn more about his status after he is examined today. Bylsma said following the game the Swede's injury wasn't short-term.

As the Sabres practiced Friday inside the First Niagara Center, Lehner, who was wearing a walking boot on his right foot after the game, watched from the bench.

An injury in his first game as the No. 1 goalie hit the emotional Lehner hard.

"He was apologetic," Bylsma said. "He was upset because he's injured right now. Last night he just said he was sorry. He can't be sorry for getting injured."

Bylsma said the Sabres would recall a goalie from the Rochester Americans following their season opener Friday. Nathan Lieuwen, whose concussion history forced him to sit out most of last season, played his first regular-season game since Dec. 19. The AHL club also has Andrey Makarov.

The two youngsters only have eight combined games of NHL experience.

So what will the Sabres do if Lehner's out for weeks or even longer? They could look outside the organization.

The Calgary Flames are carrying three goalies – Jonas Hiller, Joni Ortio and Karri Ramo – to start the season.

Johnson, an acquisition from the New York Islanders last season, hasn't started consistently since 2012-13 with the AHL Portland Pirates. He played a career-high 27 games with the Boston Bruins in 2013-14. He was scheduled to play regularly for the Sabres in March before an ankle injury ended his season.

When Johnson saw Lehner was injured, he thought, "Oh boy, here we go, right?"

"It's unfortunate," he said. "It's a weird situation, especially first game of the year."

Johnson stopped eight of the nine shots he faced in relief in the Sabres' 3-1 loss to the Ottawa Senators.

"I think we saw in last night's game is what we saw in the exhibition games as well," Bylsma said. "He's got a calm, quiet demeanor in net. The saves he made for us are the saves he made in preseason. ... The picture of

him pushing to the weak side and being read solid and square in net and making a glove save is what we've seen to this point."

Sabres defenseman Mike Weber added: "(Johnson is) extremely positive, and in the same sense he's pretty focused in and knows what he has to do to compete and win games. He's pretty steady in there."

With no backup recalled, goalie prospect Linus Ullmark practiced Friday. The Swede, an injured, non-roster player, underwent surgery on both hips during the offseason.

Ullmark will be reevaluated in three to five days and could be cleared to return, Bylsma said. Still, it's highly unlikely Ullmark, a North American newcomer, would start playing in the NHL.

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Bylsma on the feeling on the bench late Thursday after rookie Jack Eichel scored and an offside called nullified an Evander Kane goal: "We felt ... whether it counted or not we were going to win the game, and that's what I think is a positive. ... I wish you could have been on the bench for that mindset and attitude of the team in the third period, because we believed we were going to win."

**Notes:** Captain Brian Gionta (lower body) skated on his own Friday and is still day-to-day, Bylsma said. ... The Sabres are still carrying two extra defensemen. "As we get closer to healthy, we probably won't have eight for too long," Bylsma said. Matt Donovan and Jake McCabe were scratched Thursday. ... Johnson said goalie coach Andrew Allen, 39, was getting dressed to back him up after Lehner was hurt. Allen, a former professional goalie, never played in the NHL.

## **Sabres' O'Reilly, "I was useless out there"**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 10, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Ryan O'Reilly was not at all happy with his play during his Sabre debut Thursday against Ottawa. O'Reilly was late getting back to Kyle Turris who scored down the slot just 30 seconds into the game. O'Reilly said, "That wasn't the start we were looking for and personally I felt pretty useless out there."

"I just felt I was skating around out there, I wasn't where I should've been a lot of the time and whether it was just overthinking or just out of position, I have to be much better for my line mates and for the team."

Dan Bylsma spoke with O'Reilly, Josh Gorges, Evander Kane and many of the players both on and off the ice. On O'Reilly's comment Bylsma said, "I like accountability and I like honesty and he's not the only guy that I had that conversation with and said the same thing, so I love the ownership, I love the accountability and we need to turn that accountability into action on the ice."

In Friday's practice O'Reilly still was centering Matt Moulson and Tyler Ennis.

## **Sabres will address goaltending late Friday**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 9, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- With Nathan Lieuwen scheduled to start Friday in Rochester, rehabbing goaltender Linus Ullmark practiced in Buffalo. Robin Lehner had crutches and a walking boot as he watched Friday's practice from the bench.

Dan Bylsma said they won't make a move until after the Amerks game.

The coach really didn't have much of an update on Lehner. He said, "He will have more evaluation done today and tomorrow and maybe have a further prognosis on what his injury is and the extent of it."

Lehner ended his Ottawa career missing the final few months with a concussion. Bylsma said, "He was apologetic. He just said he was sorry, but he can't be sorry for getting injured, it happened."

Ullmark has been practicing with the Amerks and Bylsma said he's close to being cleared for game action, "He's on a schedule right now that roughly is in the three to five day range to return to play and actually today, he will be reevaluated as to where he's at and if he can return to play sooner or later."

Brian Gionta skated on his own and Bylsma is still hoping he can play Saturday against Tampa Bay.

Many felt both Jake McCabe and Matt Donovan would be playing in Rochester this season. Neither dressed for game one and it's not a situation Bylsma likes, "We had this discussion a few days ago on eight defensemen and it's not something that I think is a very good thing to have eight defensemen around. With Josh Gorges and his health situation, we certainly had some protection if he wasn't able to come back,, but as we get closer to healthy, we probably won't have eight for too long."

Friday's Lines:

Moulson O'Reilly Ennis  
Kane Eichel Girgensons  
Foligno Larsson Reinhart  
Deslauriers Legwand McGinn

Defense:

Gorges Pysyk  
Colaiacovo Ristolainen  
Weber Franson  
McCabe Donovan

## **Johnson ready to start against Lightning**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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After leaving Thursday's season opener with a lower-body injury in the second period, Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner watched his team practice from the bench Friday morning.

How long Lehner's injury will keep him on the sidelines is still to be determined, according to Sabres coach Dan Bylsma.

"Robin Lehner will have more evaluation done today and tomorrow and maybe have a further prognosis on what his injury is and the extent of it maybe tomorrow," Bylsma said.

Chad Johnson will take over the starting goaltender duties in the meantime. While there were no call-ups on Friday morning with Rochester set to open their season at night, Linus Ullmark did participate in a full practice with the team.

Ullmark, 20, is currently listed on the non-roster injured list after undergoing hip surgery in the offseason.

"He's on a schedule right now that roughly is in the 3-5 day range from now to return to play," Bylsma said. "Actually today he will be re-evaluated again as to where he's at and if he can return to play sooner or later."

In other injury news, Sabres captain Brian Gionta was absent from practice again on Friday but did skate beforehand. He remains day-to-day with a lower-body injury.

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### **JOHNSON READY TO SEIZE OPPORTUNITY**

Last season, Chad Johnson was injured in practice prior to the game that was supposed to be his Sabres debut, an early-March contest with Ottawa.

The Senators were the opponent again on Thursday night when Johnson noticed Buffalo starter Robin Lehner beginning to limp in the net midway through the second period.

"I was going 'Oh boy, here we go,'" Johnson said. "It's unfortunate. It's a weird situation, especially [with it being the] first game of the year but it is what it is."

Johnson allowed one goal on eight shots after relieving Lehner in a one-goal game. The only goal scored on him came later in the second period when a puck deflected off of a Sabres player right onto the stick of Kyle Turris right at his doorstep.

For the foreseeable future, Johnson will be the Sabres starting goaltender.

"It is exciting," he said about the opportunity. "Obviously I play hockey to play, so the more games I can play, the happier I am. It's sort of a goal of mine to be a starting goaltender so the situation here is good for me. And again, for me I'm just looking forward to one game at a time and tomorrow it starts."

Johnson said that he hasn't had a stretch of multiple weeks as a starter since he was in the minors. He did play three games in six days for the Bruins towards the end of the 2013-14 season as the team looked to rest starter Tuukka Rask, all of which he won.

But after going 8-8-1 with a .889 save percentage with the Islanders prior to his trade to the Sabres last season, Johnson has felt like a better goalie after the work he put in this preseason.

His coach agrees.

"I think what we saw from him in last night's game is what we saw from him in his exhibition games as well," Bylsma said. "He's had a calm, quiet demeanor in net ... the picture of him pushing to the weak side and being real solid and square in net and making a glove save is what we've seen from him."

Behind Johnson, the Sabres have two goalies in Rochester – prospects Nathan Lieuwen and Andrey Makarov. Lieuwen is expected to start for the Amerks on Friday.

Johnson is confident with the potential backups in the organization.

"I think every organization that I've been on has good depth," he said. "At this level, a lot of times what makes that difference is an opportunity or the right person believing in you. I think every goalie, even at the minor league level, is a really good goalie and could possibly play in the NHL so we have good depth here."

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## **ZEMGUS SWITCHES BACK WITH JACK ... FOR NOW**

Zemgus Girgensons was back on the right wing alongside Jack Eichel at Friday's practice. Girgensons was Eichel's linemate at the outset of Training Camp this season, but his ability to play both center and wing has moved him around on various lines in the weeks since.

On Thursday with the team needing a boost in the third period, Bylsma played Girgensons on a line with Eichel and Evander Kane and liked what he saw. But Gionta had succeeded in that spot in the preseason, meaning that where Girgensons will play against Tampa Bay is dependent on the captain's health.

"I think it was just a spur of the moment," Girgensons said. "We switched around a lot last game so that was one thing that kind of got us going in the third period so maybe we'll stick with it."

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## **UP NEXT**

The Sabres will return to action Saturday afternoon at First Niagara Center when they host the reigning Eastern Conference Champion Tampa Bay Lightning. Top Sabres Gamenight begins at 12:30 p.m. on MSG-B and Bell TV. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550 with puckdrop set for 1 p.m.

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## **FRIDAY'S PRACTICE**

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