



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres to move Girgensons to center

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

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At one point in Saturday's game, Dan Bylsma thought about putting Zemgus Girgensons at center between Ryan O'Reilly and Tyler Ennis.

But Bylsma was too busy juggling other line combinations to send out that particular trio.

After the game, Bylsma talked with O'Reilly and Sunday morning that line emerged as the Sabres practiced with another round of lines, searching for some offensive chemistry to get out of their 0-2 start when they host the Columbus Blue Jackets at 3 p.m. Monday.

"I talked about it a little with Ryan postgame and he's played a fair amount on the wing the past couple of years and he's open to it," Bylsma said.

Girgensons, a center by trade, has proved a versatile forward for the Sabres.

"I think Zemgus has been the most consistent worker in the first two games," Bylsma said. "I think Zemgus played his best game at center in the preseason. He's been good at wing as well but ... postgame I said we're going to put Zemgus" at center. "I know he's comfortable playing in that position. ... He can be counted on to take the draw. He can be counted on as a secondary guy in defensive situations so his versatility is extremely useful."

So expect to see Girgensons centering O'Reilly and Ennis on Monday. At least to start the game.

Bylsma isn't necessarily looking to create consistent lines. He's looking to put players in the best situations possible. The coach wants offensive pairings that will be the most consistent. O'Reilly and Ennis will play together.

So will Evander Kane and Jack Eichel. Who plays with them will depend on a variety of factors that change not only from game to game but from shift to shift.

"You're talking theoretically about what you'd like in a line, that's maybe a different conversation," Bylsma said. "Right now we've been playing lines on the ice in defensive situations and offensive situations, but not exclusively."

"Generally speaking, we're putting them in situations where they can be offensive and have those opportunities. ... You can talk about speed and net front presence and play-making ability in putting up a line, but that's really what we've tried to do and what we're looking for with those lines."

A team with many new roster parts and a new coaching staff means creating offense and chemistry can take time and for the Sabres it's been about trying to create consistency through the first week of the season.

"There's no time frame," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "It's not two weeks, one month, it's a process. We feel good about where we're at as a group but still need to build."

With just two goals in two games there are various ways to attack increasing offensive production. Some of it comes from chemistry – finding those magic line combinations. Some of it comes from learning the specifics of the new coaching staff's game plans.

"It's a little getting the system down, making sure you're not in-between, and at times maybe it's a little overthinking where you're thinking 'oh I should be here' instead of just reacting," Gionta said. "We have to get to the point where we're just going out there, reacting, knowing the system and just doing it like second nature."

Some of it, too, is getting back to the basics of individual skill and work ethic.

"That's probably part of it for sure," Kane said of chemistry, "but I think just playing better as individuals and working harder and staying on pucks. I think if we can get everybody doing that and everybody bringing that to their game it's going to create offense and turnovers for you regardless of the chemistry."

Sabres notebook: Lehner out 6-10 weeks with high ankle sprain

By Amy Moritz
Buffalo News
October 12, 2015

The news is pretty much what the Buffalo Sabres expected.

Goaltender Robin Lehner will be out for six to 10 weeks with a high ankle sprain.

Lehner suffered the injury about halfway through Thursday's season opener.

"We were waiting for the MRI and waiting for a prognosis but you know with the symptoms, you had an idea what the injury was," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "It's not a complete surprise to get the results and have that be the time frame."

Lehner was at practice Sunday morning, sitting on the bench with a boot on his lower right leg.

Back on the ice was captain Brian Gionta who practiced with the team for the first time since Tuesday after a lower body injury sidelined him for the first two games. He said he is hopeful to be in Monday's game when the Sabres host the Columbus Blue Jackets at 3 p.m. in First Niagara Center.

Brendan Guhle, who suffered an upper body injury in a preseason game, also practiced but Bylsma said there are no plans to get the defenseman in his first NHL game immediately.

Zach Bogosian, who has missed most of training camp with a lower body injury, skated on his own the last two games. Bylsma said there is no timetable for his return.

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With Lehner out for a while, the Sabres had to make goaltender moves.

Nathan Lieuwen was still in Buffalo on Sunday to serve as a backup to newly minted starting goalie Chad Johnson.

"He's got a smile on his face all the time," Bylsma said of Lieuwen. "You can see it through his mask. He's a guy, too, who is not unlike several other of our goalies dealing with an injury situation and getting back to healthy. ... In training camp, he was good and solid and he earned the call-up to be the guy back there and to be smiling in the net."

Linus Ullmark made his North American debut for the Rochester Americans on Saturday, making 38 saves in a 2-1 win against Utica. It was his first action since having hip surgery in the offseason.

"He played really well from what I understand, from what I've been told, and I got the game report after the game, it sounded like he was the best player on the ice," Bylsma said.

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Columbus comes to Buffalo also off to an 0-2 start. The Blue Jackets opened the season with back-to-back games against the New York Rangers, losing the opener, 4-2, then dropping a 5-2 decision in New York on Saturday.

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Monday's 3 p.m. start is the second of 10 afternoon games for the Sabres this year.

"It definitely alters the preparation that you normally have versus a standard 7 o'clock game but it's something that I'm used to over time," forward Evander Kane said. "You play your dozen afternoon games a year so it's something you're used to and have to get ready for and both teams are playing at that time. That's just the way it is."

It doesn't change the game for Bylsma but with a new team with new faces, he does miss some of that morning skate time early in the season.

"If you asked me that question and this was Game 40 or 50 I would say no," Bylsma said when asked if the afternoon games change preparation. "Where we're at as a team, we're missing out on positive development time by not having a morning skate. From that aspect, 1 o'clock and 3 o'clock game, I would have preferred to have been further down the road. But having said that, it's not an adjustment. We should be able to deal with that no differently. Sometimes you play back-to-back and you play at 7 o'clock but you don't have a morning skate and you've traveled and you get up late. One o'clock games are similar. Not an issue for us with how we play."

Sabres hope to have Gionta against Blue Jackets

By Kristen Nelson

NHL.com

October 12, 2015

BLUE JACKETS (0-2-0) at SABRES (0-2-0)

TV: FS-O, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: The Columbus Blue Jackets won two of the three games against the Buffalo Sabres last season, including a 3-1 win in the season opener and a 4-2 victory in April.

Blue Jackets team scope: Columbus had Sunday off after two straight losses in a home-and-home series against the New York Rangers on Friday and Saturday. Center Ryan Johansen had a point in each game. Forward Brandon Saad had six assists in three games against the Sabres last season while playing for the Chicago Blackhawks. Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky won each of his starts against Buffalo last season, but is off to a rough beginning; Bobrovsky gave up four goals in each game and was replaced by Curtis McElhinney on Saturday.

Sabres team scope: Coach Dan Bylsma is hopeful that Sabres captain Brian Gionta will return Monday after missing the first two games of the season because of a lower-body injury. "I felt great, [Sunday] was a good day, I progressed well so it felt good to get out there with the guys and we'll see how things respond [Monday]," Gionta said, according to the Sabres website. Gionta will likely move into the right wing spot on the second line with Jake Eichel and Evander Kane. Chad Johnson is expected to be the starting goaltender after the Sabres announced on Sunday that Robin Lehner will be out 6-10 weeks with a high ankle sprain. Nathan Lieuwen was recalled from Rochester of the American Hockey League on Saturday.

Sabres have goaltending options with Robin Lehner out 6-10 weeks

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 12, 2015

BUFFALO – The news on Robin Lehner, as expected, was bad. A high ankle sprain will sideline the starting goalie six to 10 weeks, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Sunday.

“It’s not a complete surprise to get the results and have that be the timeframe,” Bylsma said inside the First Niagara Center.

So Lehner, who has been wheeling around the rink on a cart with his No. 40 and a Sabres logo, could possibly be shelved until mid-December. The Swede has a walking boot on his right foot after leaving his Sabres debut, a 3-1 loss to Ottawa in the season opener Thursday.

Goalie Chad Johnson will likely start again for the 0-2 Sabres this afternoon against the Columbus Blue Jackets, the final contest of a season-opening three-game home stand. He looked sharp Saturday, stopping 27 shots in the Sabres’ 4-1 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning.

“He made some huge saves to keep us in it,” Sabres defenseman Mike Weber said.

But Johnson, 29, is a career backup. While his play could force the Sabres to keep starting him, they also want to examine some of their goalie prospects as Lehner recovers.

So expect Linus Ullmark, 22, to receive some action soon. The Swede, who underwent surgery on both hips during the offseason, dazzled in his North American debut Saturday, stopping 38 shots in the Rochester Americans’ 2-1 win against the Utica Comets.

“It sounded like he was the best star on the ice,” Bylsma said.

The Sabres also have Nathan Lieuwen, one of hockey’s best comeback stories. They recalled the 2011 sixth-round pick Saturday to back up Johnson.

The likable Lieuwen, 24, experienced vision problems last season a neurologist linked to a concussion (he’s had a few) he suffered late in 2013-14. He left the Amerks in January to recover.

“He’s got a smile on his face all the time,” Bylsma said. “You can see it through his mask. He’s a guy, too, who is not unlike some of our other goalies, is dealing with injury situations and getting back to (being a) healthy guy.”

Lieuwen impressed the Sabres in his short preseason appearances before a 35-save performance Friday in Rochester.

“I don’t think there’s much more I could’ve done in my situation,” Lieuwen said about training camp. “I thought I was sharp. I think I even surprised myself with how ready I was right off the bat. I was quite happy with it.”

Lieuwen said he started facing shots again in August. He prefers, however, not to talk about his recovery.

“There was a lot of hard work that went into making sure I was ready,” he said.

Still, Bylsma believes Lieuwen, who played seven NHL games two years ago, hasn’t fully recovered yet.

“He’s still on that road,” he said. “I don’t think he’s a finished product in terms of that recovery and comeback. He did well in training camp with his opportunity, not really great.”

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Sabres captain Brian Gionta could play today after a lower-body injury kept him out of the first two games. The winger practiced Sunday beside center Jack Eichel and Evander Kane.

"Cautiously optimistic," Gionta said.

Naturally, missing the first two games was tough. Gionta had a strong camp.

"It's been extremely disappointing," he said. "You want to be out there. You work all summer, all camp to get to that point of opening."

In other injury news, defenseman Zach Bogosian (lower body) has been skating on his own and progressing, Bylsma said.

Rookie defenseman Brendan Guhle (upper body) practiced Sunday for the first time since Toronto's Dion Phaneuf leveled him Sept. 29.

"A guy like Dion, he's a pretty good player, and he has been known to rock bodies, so that was a good lesson for me," said Guhle, 18.

Bylsma said he has no immediate plans to play him in a game.

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Zemgus Girgensons, who switched back to the wing this season, skated at center Sunday between Tyler Ennis and Ryan O'Reilly, a move Bylsma said O'Reilly is fine with. Girgensons could pivot that trio today.

Sabres' Lehner out long term

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 12, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The news isn't good on Robin Lehner. Head coach Dan Bylsma said, "The MRI showed he has a high ankle sprain and roughly the timeframe is six to 10 weeks based on his response, so we'll see about that."

Brian Gionta was back on Sunday practicing with his teammates and both he and Bylsma are optimistic that he'll play on Monday. Gionta was on one of the power play units and that usually means the player is playing.

Gionta appeared to be fast in practice and he said, "I felt great, today was a good day, I progressed well, so it felt good to get out there with the guys and we'll see how it responds."

The injury happened at the tail end of Tuesday's practice. He said, "It's just something that progressed throughout practice and it didn't get much better."

Brendan Guhle took part in his first practice since taking a huge hit from Leafs captain Dion Phaneuf in the preseason. Bylsma said he is not looking to get him into games right now, "No, not right now, but he's still not off IR and we're not looking to get him in right now."

The young defenseman got caught coming through the neutral zone without having his head on a swivel. Guhle said, "He's a pretty good player and he's been known to rock bodies, so I think that was a good lesson for me."

"That doesn't happen too often in the junior leagues, I mean put himself out of position to make that hit, so that's something I don't see very often and it's good I can be more aware of it now."

Zach Bogosian has missed most of the preseason and the first two games. Bylsma updated his condition, "Zach has skated two days in a row, so he's progressing quite well and hopefully he will be back on the road of getting into practice, but that's not on a timetable yet."

Gionta called a lengthy players only meeting after practice. Gionta hated last year more than any in his career and after two losses, he wanted to address some things.

Sunday's Lines:

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

Gionta could return Monday while Lehner out 6-10 weeks

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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On Sunday, the Sabres came one step closer to having their captain back. After missing the first two games of the season with a lower-body injury, Brian Gionta was back on the ice practicing with the team and said he is "cautiously optimistic" that he'll be able to play Monday afternoon against Columbus.

"I felt great, today was a good day, I progressed well so it felt good to get out there with the guys and we'll see how things respond tomorrow," he said.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma expressed hope that Gionta will be ready to play on Monday. If he is ready, he'll likely return to his spot on the right wing alongside Evander Kane and Jack Eichel. Bylsma has rotated several forwards in that spot through the first two games.

From his vantage point, the Sabres captain has noticed his team still trying to develop the chemistry and understanding of the system – it needs to be "second nature," he says – that it takes to win.

"We've had stretches where we're doing the right things, playing well, things are going our way but we've also had stretches where we're too spread out, not supporting, and teams are taking the play to us so we've got to find a way to get that consistency," Gionta said.

Gionta also reiterated that the continued development hasn't come as a surprise, a point he made before the season began.

"It is a process, we're going through it," he said. "We feel good about where we're at as a group. But you still need to build throughout that season."

Gionta's potential return comes on a day when the team received news on another important player's injury status. Bylsma announced after practice that an MRI on goaltender Robin Lehner revealed a high-ankle sprain that will keep the netminder out for 6-10 weeks. Lehner sustained the injury during the second period of Thursday's season opener.

Chad Johnson is expected to start in net Monday with Nathan Lieuwen serving as his backup.

The Tops Gamernight pregame show begins at 2:30 p.m. on MSG-B and Bell with puckdrop scheduled for 3 p.m. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

GUHLE BACK ON THE ICE

Gionta wasn't the only Sabre who returned to practice on Sunday morning. Defenseman Brendan Guhle, Buffalo's second-round pick in this year's draft, also practiced with the team for the first time since sustaining an upper-body injury on a hit by Maple Leafs defenseman Dion Phaneuf in Toronto on Sept. 25.

"I felt good," Guhle said. "My upper-body injury feels fine. I feel comfortable so we'll just see what happens here in the next couple of days."

Guhle has not yet been activated off injured reserve, but his physiotherapist informed him that the healing process has been right on schedule in the time since his injury.

An 18-year-old in his first pro camp, Guhle learned a valuable lesson the hard way in Toronto. Always keep your head up, especially when Phaneuf is on the ice.

"Especially a guy like Dion, he's a pretty good player," Guhle said. "I think that was a pretty good lesson for me."

Bylsma also announced on Sunday that defenseman Zach Bogosian was continuing his progression in rehabbing a lower-body injury that he sustained early in Training Camp.

"Zach has skated two days in a row now, so he's progressing quite well and hopefully he will get on the road of being back into practice although that's not on a timetable yet," Bylsma said.

ULLMARK IMPRESSIVE IN ROCHESTER DEBUT

When he was activated from injured reserve on Saturday morning, goaltender Linus Ullmark had never played a game in North America. By the time the night was over, he had made 38 saves for the Amerks in a 2-1 Rochester win over the Utica Comets.

Ullmark underwent surgery on both of his hips in the offseason, making his excellent debut even more impressive.

"He played really well from what I understand, from what I've been told," Bylsma said. "I got the game report after the game; it sounded like he was the best player on the ice."

SUNDAY'S PRACTICE

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4 Josh Gorges – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
6 Mike Weber – 46 Cody Franson
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