



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 21, 2015

Maple Leafs-Sabres Preview

By Jeff Bartl

AP

October 21, 2015

Mike Babcock knew he was taking on a challenging project when he agreed to coach the Toronto Maple Leafs. The club's worst start in six years has certainly confirmed that.

Goaltending has been part of the problem, and Babcock will give Jonathan Bernier another chance to prove himself as Toronto looks to end a five-game road losing streak to the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday night.

The Maple Leafs (1-3-1) haven't seen signs of a turnaround in their first season under Babcock, one in which the coach doesn't have the services of Phil Kessel after his offseason trade to Pittsburgh.

The absence of their leading scorer from each of the last six seasons has been evident for the Leafs, who have scored once or been shut out three times. They've lost four of their first five for the first time since dropping eight straight to open 2009-10.

Toronto held Kessel off the scoresheet Saturday, but Leo Komarov's goal wasn't enough in a 2-1 loss to the Penguins after Babcock picked up his first win with the Leafs on Friday, 6-3 at Columbus.

"Guys seem to be enjoying working and competing and getting more tempo in us, so we're going to get better as a team," Babcock said. "We just want to get better quicker than the process is letting us thus far, that's all."

Bernier allowed both goals within the first 6 1/2 minutes against the Penguins and also gave up two in the first period of a 4-0 loss to Detroit in his previous start Oct. 9 - in which he was pulled early in the second after allowing three goals on nine shots. Babcock will give Bernier the nod again, though, as he's slightly better than James Reimer in save percentage, .900-.890.

"(Bernier) will be the first to tell you he'd like it to go better than that," Babcock said. "We need him to be better at the start of games. You can't spot the other team two and then get started."

Bernier was in net for the last meeting with the Sabres on April 1 and gave up two goals in the first four minutes of the third in a 4-3 defeat. It was the Maple Leafs' fifth consecutive defeat in Buffalo, where they'll make the third stop on a four-game trip.

The Sabres (1-4-0) have had their own issues, scoring two or fewer goals four times. Sam Reinhart got his first NHL goal less than three minutes into the game Saturday but Tampa Bay rallied for a 2-1 win.

Buffalo outshot its opponent for the third time, a sign of aggressiveness that coach Dan Bylsma appreciates. That hasn't translated into many goals, though.

"We've been there for three out of the (five games) for sure," Bylsma said. "That's a good thing. I still think we can do a much better job in that regard, getting pucks and having more of a mentality of getting pucks to the net and having more people at the net to cash in on those opportunities."

Chad Johnson has started the last four with Robin Lehner injured and has posted a 2.80 goals-against average in that stretch. He'll likely be in net again Wednesday, and former Leafs defenseman Cody Franson could play despite dealing with an undisclosed injury.

Babcock said forward Tyler Bozak should be available after he was scratched Saturday because of a lower-body injury.

Bylsma confident Eichel, Kane will click

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
October 21, 2015

Dan Bylsma has given some thought to breaking up Jack Eichel and Evander Kane. Through five games, they've combined for two goals, both by Eichel. On a team in need of scoring, that won't cut it.

But then Bylsma thinks back to the duo's shifts. The Sabres' coach remembers three shots by Kane that had no business staying out of the net. Add those to Eichel's totals, and five goals in five games sounds pretty good.

With that in mind, the speedsters will remain together Wednesday night when Buffalo hosts Toronto in First Niagara Center.

"The opportunities have been there," Bylsma said Tuesday. "I think they'd like to create more. I think Evander would like to create more, but they have had some golden opportunities that had they gone in, we'd be in a different spot with how they've done together."

The Sabres swung the blockbuster trade for Kane in February hoping he'd help transform the NHL's worst offense. The left winger has 15 shots, tied for third on the team. He has attempted 31, which ranks second behind Tyler Ennis' 37, according to Stats.HockeyAnalysis.com.

Kane is obviously getting the puck. He just needs it to go in.

"Obviously, we both want to be better," Kane said of he and Eichel. "At the same time, I don't think we've been that bad, either.

"As a team, we're struggling scoring goals right now. We're scoring one goal a game, and that's not going to win you too many hockey games. We just need to find a way to score. We've been getting some chances, some clean looks that have kind of taken some bad bounces there, but eventually those go in.

"Once we get a couple going here, I think the floodgates will open. With the guys that we have in this room, it's not going to last forever."

The Sabres certainly hope it's not an extended drought. The goal-scoring problem has dropped them to 1-4 and in last place in the Atlantic Division. The Maple Leafs are one point ahead at 1-3-1.

"There's a lot of hockey left to be played," Kane said. "I think everyone has that sense of urgency, in a way, that we can't wait forever. Even though it's just five games in, we've kind of got to start with this week. It's a big week for us. We play three games in four nights, so we're going to have to be mentally and physically prepared and get our rest when we can."

After welcoming Toronto to town, the Sabres host Montreal on Friday and New Jersey on Saturday. Those will actually be the third, fourth and fifth games for Kane this week. He was a spectator for the first two.

Kane watched the New York Mets host the Chicago Cubs on Sunday in Game Two of the National League Championship Series, then took in Game Three of the American League Championship Series on Monday. He sat in the front row in Toronto for the Blue Jays' 11-8 win over Kansas City.

He also sat in a helicopter. He flew round-trip to Toronto with teammates Jamie McGinn and Carlo Colaiacovo, which is a lot more stylish than sitting in late-night traffic on the QEW.

"I look at it as a safety thing," Kane said. "It prevents accidents. You're not driving. You're not tired. It's a safe way to get to a game.

"It was a big game for the Blue Jays, it's the playoffs, and I'm a sports fan. I like to go to all different sports. If I get an opportunity and it makes sense, why not?"

The timing worked out. The players were off Sunday, so Kane was in New York visiting his girlfriend. The Sabres held morning practices Monday and Tuesday, giving the players a free window in the evening.

"I knew some of the boys wanted to go, so I thought I would figure out some transportation and get there and enjoy the game," Kane said. "I think we have a pretty close group in here. With all the new faces, I think guys have got to know each other pretty well in a short amount of time."

Bylsma likes what he's gotten to know about Kane.

"He's coachable," Bylsma said. "He works at a high level. He's a battler. He's fit in with his teammates here. He's desperately trying to find and have ways to win hockey games."

Bylsma-Babcock backdrop adds spice to rivalry

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 21, 2015

The Sabres and Maple Leafs will play their 100th regular-season game in Buffalo on Wednesday night. It will be the first one of the rivalry for Dan Bylsma and Mike Babcock.

The coaches, hired eight days apart in May, will quickly learn that fans get up for this game. Bylsma says he's already aware.

"If you win four games, just win these four," the Sabres' coach said Tuesday. "That's what I've been told by fans going down the street."

The fans would have been even more riled up for the meeting had it been held in May. Babcock spurned an offer of more than \$50 million to coach the Sabres, instead opting to fill the vacancy in Toronto. The sting was lessened when Buffalo hired Bylsma, who like Babcock has won a Stanley Cup.

The coaches are still trying to mold their teams. Buffalo is 1-4, last in the Atlantic Division, while Toronto is just one point ahead at 1-3-1.

"We can get this team to win every night," Babcock told Toronto reporters. "I really believe that. When you put your work boots on and you trust each other and you play hard, you've got a chance."

Historically, the Leafs haven't had much of a chance in Buffalo. During the first 99 regular-season games, the Sabres went 66-25 with eight ties or overtime losses and have outscored Toronto, 391-259. The Sabres are on a 6-0-1 run.

Buffalo defenseman Cody Franson, who spent parts of the previous four seasons with Toronto, felt the pain. Now he hopes to inflict it.

"It's going to be a lot of fun," said Franson, who returned to practice after taking a maintenance day. "For us in Toronto, every time we came into Buffalo we knew it was going to be a tough game. It didn't matter where each team was in the standings, at the end of the day it was a hard-fought game and a game that was tough to come out of with two points.

"We came into Buffalo a number of times and didn't come away with two points. It's a tough place to win games when you're coming in here with a Toronto jersey on. Now being on the other side of it, I want that to continue."

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Sam Reinhart again practiced on the top line with center Ryan O'Reilly and right wing Tyler Ennis in First Niagara Center. The rookie had a goal Saturday in his first chance with the unit.

"Their line had eight offensive chances, and he was part of seven of them," Bylsma said.

"If he's on that line and they get seven scoring chances again, we'll see him continue to play on that line."

Defenseman Zach Bogosian (lower body) did not practice and will miss his sixth straight to open the season.

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Toronto will start goaltender Jonathan Bernier, who is 0-3-0 with a .900 save percentage and 3.09 goals-against average. Of the seven goals he's allowed, five have come during the first period.

Center Tyler Bozak, who sat out practice Tuesday with a lower-body injury, could miss his second straight game. He's day-to-day.

"What day did day-to-day start?" Babcock said. "Day-to-day in this league usually means 10 days is the way I've come to know it over time. They tell you day-to-day just so you're not upset. Then the days keep going by.

"I don't know. The guy's going to play when he's ready to play."

Helicopter ride to Toronto allows Evander Kane, teammates to watch Jays

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
October 21, 2015

Evander Kane is a fan of any big sporting event, so when he heard a couple of teammates were interested in watching the Blue Jays on Monday night, he looked into the best way to get from Buffalo to Toronto.

He settled on a helicopter.

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Kane was also at an MLB playoff game Sunday night, taking in the Cubs at Mets in New York.

"Just had the day off and I was in New York City visiting my girlfriend," Kane said. "Obviously, there was a game so I thought we'd go check it out. It was cold. That was a little bit colder than the Blue Jays game, that's for sure. Didn't stay for the whole one.

"I am a Jays fan. I like sports, so whatever's on and obviously big games. It was a big game for the Blue Jays, it's the playoffs, and I'm a sports fan. I like to go to all different sports. If I get an opportunity and it makes sense, why not?"

It's back to hockey on Wednesday as the Sabres host Toronto.

"Obviously, our focus is getting better on the ice and getting better in a lot of areas in our game," said Kane, whose team is 1-4. "That being said, we're five games in. There's a lot of hockey left to be played.

"I think everyone has that sense of urgency, in a way, that we can't wait forever. Even though it's just five games in, we've kind of got to start with this week."

Bozak remains day-to-day, Maple Leafs visit Sabres

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

October 21, 2015

Season series: The Toronto Maple Leafs and Buffalo Sabres each won two games last season, with the home team victorious each time. Sabres forward Matt Moulson led all scorers with four goals and seven points. Sabres forward Tyler Ennis had two goals and six points. Maple Leafs forward Tyler Bozak had two goals and five points.

Maple Leafs team scope: Jonathan Bernier, who won two of his three starts against Buffalo last season, will be in goal. Bozak, who sustained a lower-body injury Friday against the Columbus Blue Jackets and wasn't in the lineup Saturday against the Pittsburgh Penguins, was not at practice Tuesday and remains day-to-day. "The guy's going to play when he's ready to play, and in the meantime someone else gets an opportunity," coach Mike Babcock told the Maple Leafs website. Peter Holland centered a line with Shawn Matthias and Brad Boyes, which moved Marc Arcobello down in the lineup. Arcobello could be a scratch if Bozak returns. "Whenever I'm in the lineup I just have to try to bring my best game and contribute as much as I can," said Arcobello, who is with his fifth NHL team since the start of the 2014-15 season.

Sabres team scope: Coach Dan Bylsma said he's liked the line of Ennis, Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart and is inclined to keep them together if they continue to generate chances. All three are natural centers. Bylsma switched captain Brian Gionta to right wing on a line with Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons. "More [about] the rounding out of another line," Bylsma told the Sabres website. "[They're] guys that have played together, had some success together last year." Jamie McGinn moved onto the line with Jack Eichel and Evander Kane. Defenseman Cody Franson returned to practice Tuesday after taking a maintenance day and said he felt fine. Franson, who played parts of four seasons in Toronto, has exceeded 20 minutes of ice time in four of five games. "I really enjoyed my time in Toronto," he said. "But this is the next chapter for me and I'm having a lot of fun here and I want to take two points from those guys."

Sabres' Sam Reinhart becoming offensive threat

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 21, 2015

BUFFALO – The plays have mostly been subtle, devoid of the flash one might expect from a former second overall pick.

While quietly morphing into one of the Sabres' top offensive threats, rookie winger Sam Reinhart, 19, has been showcasing the intelligence that makes him a coveted prospect.

Some of Reinhart's best work – goalie screens and passes that illustrate his supreme vision – almost goes unnoticed.

"No one would ever question his intelligence and his ability to make a play and have that good hockey sense," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Tuesday inside the First Niagara Center. "He's shown it."

That's why Reinhart should start tonight's home tilt against the Toronto Maple Leafs as the left winger on the Sabres' No. 1 line beside center Ryan O'Reilly and Tyler Ennis.

"Really smart," O'Reilly said about Reinhart. "You can just tell he reads the game well. Where you think he's going to be, he ends up there. He's just got a vision for the game that most guys don't have."

Reinhart enjoyed his best NHL outing Saturday in the Sabres' 2-1 loss in Tampa Bay, scoring his first goal in his 14th appearance and narrowly missing at least two other prime chances while skating a career-high 15 minutes, 43 seconds.

"He's got a lot of sneaky talent," Ennis said.

The Sabres have only nine goals through five games, and Bylsma said Reinhart, who has two points, is responsible for three of them because "he's been our best guy at the net front."

Reinhart created Nick Deslauriers' goal Oct. 10 by feeding him from down low and hustling to the crease. He screened Florida Panthers goalie Roberto Luongo on Ennis' power-play goal Thursday.

"They don't go in if he's not there," Bylsma said. "So ... pretty much in every game he's played he's made a play, given us an opportunity to score a goal."

Reinhart's effectiveness in front of the goalie, a spot he had rarely been positioned at as a playmaker, has been surprising. Why is a neophyte who's 6-foot-1 and 189 pounds so good in the ice's grittiest area?

"You don't need to be good to get in front of the goalie's eyes," Reinhart said. "A lot of it's about positioning. I haven't played there too much, but I've always liked the position. I think it's a lot more than screening the goalie. ... You can still make a lot of plays."

O'Reilly added: "He's a great skill set, his hands. I think anything that comes there, he knows where it is. Anything that drops he can get out of his feet well, he can make a play with it."

With a glut of centers, Bylsma moved Reinhart from center to the wing last month, and an impressive preseason – he had a three-assist outing – helped him earn a roster spot instead of going to the AHL, a league he's allowed to play regularly in this season because he turns 20 years old Nov. 6.

So far, Reinhart has skated on several lines with ice time mostly in the 10-12 minute range. Bylsma loves using forward pairs – one center and one winger – while frequently changing a piece. Still, he said Reinhart could keep skating beside O'Reilly and Ennis.

Against the Lightning, Reinhart created a scoring opportunity for Ennis by bouncing the puck off the end boards during a rush.

"If he's on that line, they get seven scoring chances again (like Saturday), we'll see him continue to play on that line," Bylsma said.

A year ago, in the midst of his forgettable nine-game NHL trial, Reinhart looked overmatched. He has used the last 11 months to build his game and his body.

"Part of the confidence that I've been able to gain, especially since the season started, has been knowing the work that I've put in not just this summer, but this whole past year," Reinhart said. "So I'm happy with the progress."

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Bylsma on what he's been told about the Sabres' rivalry with Toronto: "If you win four games, just win these four. That's what I've heard and that's what I've been told by fans going down the street."

Quick Toronto trip to watch Blue Jays special for Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 21, 2015

BUFFALO – The call came at 4:30 p.m. Monday. Sabres winger Evander Kane asked defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo, a Toronto native and a huge Blue Jays fans, if he wanted to go watch Game 3 of the American League Championship Series at Rogers Centre in a few hours.

"I know some of the boys wanted to go, so I figured out some transportation," Kane said this afternoon following practice inside the First Niagara Center.

That transportation turned out to be a helicopter. Yes, instead of driving up the QEW, Colaiacovo, Kane and winger Jamie McGinn flew to Toronto. Kane figured a helicopter would be safer than driving.

"It was too good of an opportunity to pass up," a smiling Colaiacovo said. "It happened on short notice. It was a great gesture by him. It something that's a once in a lifetime opportunity to do something like that. It was superstar status, that's for sure."

The three sat in box seats behind home plate for the Jays' exciting 11-8 win against the Kansas City Royals. The electric atmosphere in the park wowed Colaiacovo.

"Unbelievable," he said. "To get a chance to be a part of an event with that much on the line was outstanding. It was a great experience for me and something I'll never forget."

The Jays' first postseason appearance since 1993 brought back special memories for Colaiacovo, who remembers watching Joe Carter's World Series-clinching home run.

"For them to bring back those memories and put you in the moment in the year 2015 ... I feel real pleasure to be able to take part in an opportunity like that," he said. "It's just great. It's great for the city. It's amazing to see how the city's definitely rallied around the team."

Kane also watched the Mets and Chicago Cubs play Sunday in New York on the Sabres' day off.

In other news, defenseman Cody Franson practiced today after taking a maintenance day and said he plans to play Wednesday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, his old team.

"When you play in a place like that for a long time, you develop those relationships," Franson said. "I really enjoyed my time in Toronto, but this is the next chapter for me. I'm having a lot of fun here, and I want to take two points from those guys."

Bylsma 'Rounds out' lines in latest shuffle

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 21, 2015

In the final weeks of Training Camp heading into the season, Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma commended Brian Gionta's work as the right wing on a line opposite Evander Kane and with Jack Eichel at center.

That praise was reaffirmed when Gionta returned to the Sabres lineup on Thursday in Florida after missing the first three games of the season with a lower-body injury. Bylsma returned Gionta to the wing alongside Eichel and Kane for each of the Sabres' two road games over the weekend.

So when Gionta was moved to the right wing alongside Matt Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons at Monday's practice and again on Tuesday, it was not an indictment of the captain's play. Rather, it was in an attempt to use his services to provide a spark for his other teammates.

"More [about] the rounding out of another line," Bylsma said of the switch. "[They're] guys that have played together, had some success together last year."

Eichel and Kane, he said, require little assistance moving the puck up the ice. So on that line, the team is looking for a net-front presence. Gionta was able to serve in that role, but so can Jamie McGinn, as evidenced by the two tip-in goals he scored in Buffalo's preseason finale on Oct. 2.

"Jack, really, from the top of the circles doesn't need a lot of help," Bylsma said. "He's a guy who can carry the load and can carry the mail. We're looking at more guys [for] getting on the inside and being at the net front for that line.

"Jamie's hopefully going to be a guy who's going to get on the inside. The two goals he scored here in Buffalo were examples of what he can bring for that line."

Gionta, meanwhile, will be called upon to bring his intangibles to the line with Moulson and Girgensons. All three players were on last year's team and spent varying amounts of time as linemates.

Girgensons, who is still searching for his first point of the season, believes that the familiarity will help them on the ice.

"Always when you play with guys you know for a longer time, it's easier," Girgensons said. "You know what type of style they play, where they're going to be in most situations, so it's a little bit easier than getting adjusted to the newer guys."

As for the Eichel and Kane line, it may only be a matter of time before they start showing up on the score sheet more often. Kane has not yet scored a goal in the regular season, but Bylsma pointed to three specific instances where matters of circumstance prevented him from hitting an open net.

Kane also had a game-tying goal overturned by a coach's challenge in the team's home opener on Oct. 8 and Eichel was stoned on a scoring chance in front of the net on Saturday in Tampa Bay.

"We've thought about breaking it up, but when you look at some of the opportunities they have had to score ... you go back to Florida and Jack gave Evander an empty cage and, you know, by chance, luck, circumstance, it hits the defenseman's stick. That's the only thing that would prevent it from going in," Bylsma said, recounting one of Kane's missed opportunities.

"If you look at three goals in those games you'd be feeling a lot different about them as a pair. I think the opportunities have been there."

FRANSON OK TO PLAY AGAINST FORMER TEAM

Cody Franson returned to the ice for the Sabres on Tuesday after being absent from Monday's practice for a maintenance day. He'll be ready to play on Wednesday night at First Niagara Center against his former team.

The defenseman said that he's set to be on the opposite side of the Sabres-Maple Leafs rivalry.

"Obviously when you play in a place for a long time like that you develop those relationships and I really enjoyed my time in Toronto," Franson said. "But this is the next chapter for me and I'm having a lot of fun here and I want to take two points from those guys."

Franson spent three years playing for Toronto prior to being traded to Nashville in February. He amassed 119 points in 236 games for the Maple Leafs. On Sept. 10, he signed a two-year contract with the Sabres.

A lot has changed in Toronto since Franson's departure. The Leafs hired Mike Babcock to be their coach in May and team president Brendan Shanahan brought on Lou Lamoriello as general manager in July among other moves like trading Phil Kessel to Pittsburgh.

One thing that Franson doesn't expect to change, however, is the nature of the rivalry between Buffalo and Toronto.

"For us in Toronto, every time we came into Buffalo we knew it was going to be a tough game," he said. "It didn't matter where each team was in the standings, at the end of the day that was a hard-fought game and it was a game that was tough to come out of with two points."

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