



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

October 23, 2015

Deserved outcome: Sabres set tone for shootout win with chances aplenty

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

October 23, 2015

As shot after shot bounced off Toronto's goaltender and goal posts, a few dark thoughts entered the Sabres' minds. They've had trouble scoring, and it appeared Wednesday's game might end with nothing in the goal column.

"I think we were feeling it all game," Jack Eichel said. "When you have a little trouble finding the back of the net, you start to get a little frustrated."

Evander Kane had every reason to feel the frustration. Kept without a goal in the first five games, he was on his way to a sixth despite being the most aggressive offensive player on the First Niagara Center ice.

But Kane had no doubts in his mind. Buffalo was going to score, tie the game and win it. He was right, which could result in a similar positive mindset for his teammates going forward.

Kane scored his first goal for the Sabres with 4:29 left in regulation, then watched Tyler Ennis and Matt Moulson score in the shootout to give Buffalo a hard-earned 2-1 victory over the Maple Leafs.

"We definitely deserved to win that one," Kane said. "We worked hard for it from the start, got down early but kept battling and played our game, and we were able to get the victory."

The Sabres, who scored just nine goals in the opening five games, waited more than 55 minutes for their 10th despite firing away at goalie Jonathan Bernier. The Sabres finished with a season-high 35 shots, including 12 during each of the first two periods.

"We knew if we got the shot totals up, one had to go in for sure," said Kane, who had a game-high seven shots. "We just kind of felt we weren't going to be shut out, and we made that happen and we were able to get the win."

As shot after shot bounced off Toronto's goaltender and goal posts, a few dark thoughts entered the Sabres' minds. They've had trouble scoring, and it appeared Wednesday's game might end with nothing in the goal column.

"I think we were feeling it all game," Jack Eichel said. "When you have a little trouble finding the back of the net, you start to get a little frustrated."

Evander Kane had every reason to feel the frustration. Kept without a goal in the first five games, he was on his way to a sixth despite being the most aggressive offensive player on the First Niagara Center ice.

But Kane had no doubts in his mind. Buffalo was going to score, tie the game and win it. He was right, which could result in a similar positive mindset for his teammates going forward.

Kane scored his first goal for the Sabres with 4:29 left in regulation, then watched Tyler Ennis and Matt Moulson score in the shootout to give Buffalo a hard-earned 2-1 victory over the Maple Leafs.

"We definitely deserved to win that one," Kane said. "We worked hard for it from the start, got down early but kept battling and played our game, and we were able to get the victory."

The Sabres, who scored just nine goals in the opening five games, waited more than 55 minutes for their 10th despite firing away at goalie Jonathan Bernier. The Sabres finished with a season-high 35 shots, including 12 during each of the first two periods.

"We knew if we got the shot totals up, one had to go in for sure," said Kane, who had a game-high seven shots. "We just kind of felt we weren't going to be shut out, and we made that happen and we were able to get the win."

The Sabres came home from Tampa Bay on Saturday bummed out from a 2-1 loss that featured fine play. There's no telling how badly they would have felt if Toronto had trucked back up the QEW with a stolen victory.

Instead, the Sabres got to revel in a second win that improved their record to 2-4.

"We needed that," Eichel said. "We're trying to get over this hump. We're having trouble scoring goals right now. I think it's good for us to get a win like that."

"Maybe now we'll get on a roll. I think this is a team that can do so."

While linemates Eichel (six shots) and Kane led the way, the Sabres generated chances up and down the lineup. Moulson had four shots. Captain Brian Gionta and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen had three. Nicolas Deslauriers hit the post. Zemgus Girgensons missed the net from point-blank range. Sam Reinhart nearly scored for the second straight game.

"Those are the opportunities you want to have," coach Dan Bylsma said. "Eventually they're going to go in for us, and eventually they did."

If the team can continue to come in waves, the gap between goals and scoring chances should diminish.

"For the past two games I thought we worked hard," Girgensons said. "We really played pretty well, and we deserved to score maybe a little bit more goals. They haven't come easy for us."

"We keep working that's going to come. We just need to stick with it and get our opportunities."

Goaltender Chad Johnson (23 saves) wasn't busy, but he kept the Sabres within one. It helped fuel Kane's belief that Buffalo was going to tie it up. He believed it in the opener, too, but his late tying goal against Ottawa was waved off by replay. There was no chance of that with this one, a far-side shot from the left faceoff dot.

"It was nice that it wasn't disallowed this time and it stood as a valid goal, which was a good feeling," Kane said. "It shows if we continue to play our game and wear them down and play at the pace we need to play at and compete on pucks, we can come back."

Shootout continues to thrill Sabres' Moulson

By Amy Moritz
Buffalo News
October 23, 2015

It's one of Matt Moulson's favorite parts of the game – the shootout.

Three-on-three overtimes may be exciting for the fans and likely will decide more NHL games that end up tied after 60 minutes, but Moulson loves the shootout.

Wednesday night, his number was called and the forward put in what proved to be the winning shot as the Buffalo Sabres took a 2-1 decision against the Toronto Maple Leafs at First Niagara Center.

"I just try to score," Moulson said with a laugh about his track record of shootout success. Moulson is 15 of 37 in shootout attempts for his career. "I don't know I think it's something I've always enjoyed. I don't think there's really any way to prepare for them. Just go in and try to score a goal."

Scoring goals in regulation continues to be difficult for the Sabres, who begin a weekend of back-to-back games hosting Montreal on Friday and New Jersey on Saturday. The Sabres have scored one goal in regulation in four of their six games. Coach Dan Bylsma continues to play with line combinations, often mixing up the forwards several times during the course of a game.

It's another difference the Sabres need to adjust to, but one that Moulson sees as a potential positive.

"We've got a lot of skilled guys on the team," said Moulson, who started the game on a line with Zemgus Girgensons and Brian Gionta. "Guys want to try and get a little chemistry and we've been mixing it up to try and find some things but you've got to get used to playing with everyone."

While the offense has failed to cash in on opportunities, team defense improved. The Sabres held Toronto to 21 shots in regulation – one of the signs for Bylsma that the Sabres are developing a fuller repertoire of "hard to play against" skills.

"There are lots of ways you can be hard to play against and it's not just being physical, not just seeing a big hit," Bylsma said. "In some ways a lot of the last number of games we're playing good teams and not giving up a lot of opportunities to score. That's hard to play against. I think for a lot of that game last night we were that."

"Were we hard in the physical sense? I think we can get harder and I think we can be better there. But when you give up 20 shots or 21 shots in regulation, anything close to 20 and under is real good from your team and we did last night against Toronto and we did that for the most part against Tampa Bay. That's something we have to continue."

...

Thursday's practice took place off the ice for a number of Sabres. With the overtime game on Wednesday and back-to-back games against Montreal (Friday) and New Jersey (Saturday), Bylsma told a number of players – including Evander Kane, Jack Eichel, Tyler Ennis and Gionta – not to skate.

"We had, I'm not going to be able to count the number, six guys have a maintenance day off the ice," Bylsma said after a 45-minute practice at HarborCenter. "The minutes that we played and playing three games in four days, it was a coach's decision to keep them off the ice."

He also noted there were "no new injuries."

...

The most popular question asked by visiting media this season will be about Jack Eichel. And Bylsma patiently answers each of them, again on Thursday to Montreal writers in Buffalo to advance the game with the Canadiens on Friday.

His latest thoughts:

"I think the stats could be much better," Bylsma said of Eichel. "At this point in time he only has two goals but if you take the play from the center ice dot last night where he pushed through, went around the defense, went underneath them and shot it over the net, it was pretty electric. He was that way a number of times last night.

"I've been more amazed at his play away from the puck and his defensive play than I have his offensive play. He's been elite away from the puck and working hard away from the puck and you see that just as much as the offensive flair."

...

There was one roster move Thursday as the Sabres assigned defenseman Bobby Sanguinetti to Rochester.

Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk forming strong defense pair for Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 23, 2015

BUFFALO – Their competitions are a bit one-sided. Any game Sabres defense partners Jake McCabe and Mark Pysyk play against each other, Pysyk inevitably loses.

"Yeah, I always beat him," McCabe said proudly Thursday. "Any game."

There's the Rory McIlroy golf video game for Xbox.

"He's unbelievable at it," Pysyk said. "He must not have any friends in the summer."

Then there was the little one-timer contest they had following practice Thursday.

"That's why he's got to carry the bag back," McCabe said.

That's right, as the loser, Pysyk grabbed McCabe's equipment as he departed HarborCenter and lugged it across the street to the First Niagara Center, where the Sabres host the NHL's best team, the 7-0 Montreal Canadiens, tonight.

McCabe, 22, and Pysyk, 23, share a special chemistry off and on the ice.

"We're really good buddies," McCabe said.

Coach Dan Bylsma put the youngsters together when the Sabres recalled McCabe 11 days ago, and the duo has been showcasing their strong skating ability as the club's third defense pair ever since.

"That's really what I like about them, their skating ability," Bylsma said. "They're able to defend with that ability, and they're also able to step out of (the) D-zone with that skating ability, and I think they've showed it every night. That's a big part of how we want to play."

McCabe and Pysyk played together with the Rochester Americans briefly last season, when their final game as a pair quickly turned into a disaster.

"I don't think we made a good play until about 10 minutes left in the third period," McCabe said. "We were kind of getting beat pretty bad, we kind of looked at each other and laughed it off."

Still, Bylsma put them together in training camp, and McCabe, thanks to an injury to defenseman Zach Bogosian and some impressive play, started the season as the seventh defender before a one-game AHL stint.

With veteran Carlo Colaiacovo struggling a bit, McCabe, a 2012 second-round pick, basically forced the Sabres to play him. Tonight will be the Wisconsin native's 14th NHL game.

McCabe scored his first NHL goal last Thursday in the Sabres' 3-2 loss in Florida and skated a career-high 17 minutes, 27 seconds Wednesday in a 2-1 shootout win against Toronto.

"I finally feel like I've shown that I can play at this level," McCabe said. "When I come up, it's a little different when you get a call-up (without an injury), you get a little bit more confidence off the bat. The coaching staff does have trust in you. You're not just filling someone's position when you're called up."

Having Pysyk on the ice with him can be helpful.

"It's easy to talk situations out and what happened that last play," McCabe said. "We're not going to scream at each other, get (ticked) off at each other. It's just a good relationship we have and good chemistry we're growing."

Psyk added: "I think we both do pretty similar things, we jump up in the rush, but first and foremost we need to be solid defensively and earn the trust of the coaches."

Psyk's ability to make little plays that might go unnoticed helps their chemistry, McCabe said.

"When you really get down to ice level and the speed the game's played, he makes those easy quick plays and is a great skater, so if one of us gets caught, usually one of us can bail (the other) out," he said. "He's just super steady."

To McCabe, Psyk plays more like a poised veteran than a kid with only 76 games of big league experience.

"He's very steady and that helps me," he said. "He's always in the right spot. I always know I have an out, whether it be behind me, he's always supporting me in some way. So I think they see that we're a steady pair."

Notes: With three games in four nights and some players piling up big minutes, Bylsma held about six players out of practice Thursday, including rookie center Jack Eichel, who played 19 minutes, 42 seconds in his sixth NHL game Wednesday. ... Canadiens rookie goalie Mike Condon, not reigning Vezina Trophy winner Carey Price, is expected to start in goal. ... Defenseman Bobby Sanguinetti cleared waivers Thursday and was assigned to Rochester.

Girgensons' effort is just what Sabres need

By Nick Wojton
Batavia Daily News
October 23, 2015

BUFFALO — The Buffalo Sabres topped the Toronto Maple Leafs 2-1 in a shootout on Wednesday, but one player who didn't even get a point credited to him on the night deserved big praise.

In fact, he's almost been lost in the shuffle of the "Next Chapter" despite being a staple and fan favorite on the team in some of their darkest hours.

Evander Kane got the lone point, the reporters after the game, and the spotlight (literally) on him after his game-tying goal with under five minutes to go. But that play wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for Zemgus Girgensons.

Even Kane knows it.

"(Girgensons) sure did force it," Kane said. "He chased him down and put a lot of pressure on them. He was a huge part of the goal."

On the play, Girgensons said the Sabres tried to run a play right off the faceoff which was outside the Toronto (1-3-2) zone. Buffalo (2-4-0) lost the draw.

Kane eventually forced the puck to dribble into the corner to the right of Toronto goaltender Jonathan Bernier. Racing down the wing, Girgensons forced Nazem Kadri with a bump, a push, then a fall.

Girgensons didn't get the puck, but in hockey, a strong forecheck can be just as good as an interception or steal.

Kadri panicked and under pressure from the Latvian, he made a tape-to-tape pass. But to Kane.

Kane made no mistake, firing the shot from inside the circle past Bernier's glove. Five minutes of overtime and shootout goals from Tyler Ennis and Matt Moulson later, the Sabres had their second win on the young season.

But don't look to the hard-working Girgensons to gloat about his effort on the play. Instead, he put it simply.

"I just tried to chase it down and they turned it over," Girgensons said. "He turned the puck over straight to Kaner and he put it in."

Goals have been tough to come by for the Sabres at times in 2015. Look no further than one game before the win over Toronto.

Last weekend against Tampa Bay, Buffalo only put away one despite numerous chances in a 2-1 loss.

With a work effort like the one Girgensons puts forward, the Sabres' fortunes could start changing.

The 21-year-old forward thinks his team has put forward that effort already and if they continue, he said goals like the one he played a big part in will start coming more frequently.

"For the last few games we worked pretty hard and played pretty well. We deserved to score maybe a little bit more, but it's nice to get the win," he said.

"If you keep going and stick with it, the opportunities will come. You know you have to get something like a lucky bounce. We knew we just had to get that one goal tonight," Girgensons added.

The Sabres have a quick turnaround and chances to rev up their offense following Wednesday's win over Toronto. Tonight Buffalo hosts the Montreal Canadiens and then Saturday, the New Jersey Devils will be in town. Both opening faceoffs are scheduled for 7 p.m.

Sabres' Deslauriers trying to get the physical play going

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 23, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Dan Bylsma has been asking his team to be more physical, especially in the offensive zone.

In the game against Toronto I thought Nic Deslauriers was back to his old self as he and Marcus Foligno were always taking the hit. Evander Kane, Zemgus Girgensons and others joined in and by the third period, you could see the Toronto defense looking over its shoulder to see if a hit was coming.

Kane leads the Sabres with 18 hits, while Deslauriers only has 14. Foligno has 11. Dan Bylsma said, "Are we hard in the physical sense? I think we can get harder and I think we can do better there."

Matt Martin of the Islanders leads the NHL with 31 hits. Martin was far and away the leader last season too, but Deslauriers was ninth in the league with 261 hits. Against the Leafs he was back around his average with three hits which would put him at 246 for the season. Deslauriers saw improvement against the Leafs, "Yes definitely, I think every time, especially our line were frustrated so me and Marcus finished all the hits there and felt pretty good." The tough winger added, "The physical part is going to create more offense, so we have to be better at finishing our hits."

Players that like to hit have to be careful to know when not to take the hit because it takes them out of position. Deslauriers said, "The F1 (first forward) has the freedom to finish the hit, but the F3 (high forward) is more of a tracker guy. Our forecheck has not been great, but it's been good. I think there's always improvement, but our line was physical and created some chances."

To me, Deslauriers is a perfect fourth liner. He hits, he's feared and he can help chip in as he had 15 points last year. I thought maybe he could be more relaxed this season than last when he was establishing himself. He said, "No not at all, we have such a depth team, I think for me it's just be good day in and day out. There have been veterans that have had to sit in the stands, so at one point you don't want to be that guy, so for me it's just like last year, proving that I can be in this league."

The days of the guy like John Scott who can fight and protect players, but can't play hockey are gone. There are quite a few players who now turn away from Deslauriers because they know he can hurt them. He knows and likes his role as protector and hockey player, "I take pride in trying to protect our players, especially when you have Enzo who wants to get after players and under their skin, so for me I know my job, I have to protect a couple of guys and we have other guys that can do it as well."

In my opinion, Deslauriers is a guy that could maybe score 10 goals from a fourth line role. In 2013-14 the Kings asked him to move to forward. In Manchester he scored 18 goals in 60 games before being traded to Buffalo. He said he thinks it can be better, "Definitely, but I don't set specific goals for myself, I just want to play every game and be physical. Points are just going to come whenever they come, so for me I don't have a set point, I just take every chance I get and trying to prove myself."

If Deslauriers is going to hit double figures in goals, it's going to take more shots. He said, "I need to shoot the puck more. I don't have a lot of shots yet and as a fourth liner I need put the puck on net from everywhere and then bang and crash."

With three games in four nights, Dan Bylsma told certain players they couldn't skate on Thursday. Rasmus Ristolainen, Cody Franson, Ryan O'Reilly, Tyler Ennis, Evander Kane, Jack Eichel and Brian Gionta all worked off the ice. Bylsma said none are injured.

Montreal is in the arena Friday night.

Sabres keeping shots against to a minimum

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 23, 2015

Dan Bylsma has said numerous times that he wants his Buffalo Sabres team to be "hard to play against." That phrase encompasses several of the key ingredients you see in successful teams: physicality, speed and puck possession, to name a few.

While the team remains a work in progress, one statistic certainly seems to be an indicator that Buffalo has indeed been a difficult team to play – or, at the very least, to find the net against.

Through six games, the Sabres have allowed 25.3 shot attempts per game, the second-fewest in the League. Buffalo has allowed less than 25 shot attempts four times in those six games.

"In some ways a lot of the last number of games we're playing good teams and not giving up a lot of opportunities to score. That's hard to play against," Bylsma said after practice Thursday at HARBORCENTER. "I think for a lot of that game last night we were that ... when you give up 20 shots or 21 shots in regulation, anything close to 20 and under is real good from your team."

The Sabres outshot the Maple Leafs 35-24 in their 2-1 shootout victory on Wednesday at First Niagara Center. In the previous game, a 2-1 loss to Tampa Bay on Saturday, they outshot the Lightning 32-22.

Bylsma credits the limited opportunities by the opposition to the defensive play of his forwards at the F3 position, which is the forward who enters the offensive zone last and is typically responsible for being the first forward to backcheck into the defensive zone.

"I think one thing we've done really, really well – it's a key to our game – is having a good F3, both offensively and defensively and tracking back and allowing our D to have a good gap and you saw that a number of times last night where they're forcing the puck out of their hands before the red lines," Bylsma said.

"The first two or three games we weren't good at it, gave up the odd-man rush against Ottawa ... I think we've been much better in that regard and you see that in the number of opportunities we're limiting to the opposition."

Cutting down on opponents' chances has gone a long way in creating more opportunities for the Sabres, too.

Buffalo only scored once in regulation in each of its last two games, but those results don't do justice to the amount of chances that the Sabres have generated.

Buffalo's forwards know that the less time they spend in the defensive end, the more chances they'll be able to create for themselves.

"I think keeping it out of your own end, getting it into their zone as quick as possible, I think that's a main philosophy we've been trying to preach," Matt Moulson said. "Get pucks up quickly, get them in the other end, and we've done a decent job at that. Hopefully we keep getting better."

LIEUWEN STAYING SHARP IN PRACTICE

Since being recalled from the Rochester Americans of the American Hockey League on Oct. 10, Nathan Lieuwen still hasn't seen the ice in an NHL game. It's a much different experience from the first time that the Sabres goaltender was promoted to the NHL, back in March of 2014.

Lieuwen was called up to serve as Jhonas Enroth's backup for a Sunday game against the Montreal Canadiens that year, or at least he thought. Enroth was injured in that game, and Lieuwen was thrust immediately into his NHL debut.

He stopped all 10 of the shots he faced that day and played in six more games before a concussion ended his season in April. The symptoms of that concussion lingered throughout last season and kept him out of the NHL until Robin Lehner's high-ankle sprain created an opportunity for him to serve as Chad Johnson's backup.

Now, he's waiting patiently and staying sharp in anticipation for his return to the ice.

"It's been great," he said, smiling. "Any time I'm here, I'm thrilled. This is the goal. This where you want to be and it's been really good to get acclimatized as far as practicing and being here – being in this situation and exercising a bit of patience, waiting for that opportunity and making sure you're always ready because you never know when it will come."

Whether that opportunity comes this weekend – when the Sabres play the Canadiens and the New Jersey Devils on back-to-back days at First Niagara Center – remains to be seen.

In the meantime, Lieuwen is happy to be in Buffalo. He's enjoyed the relationship he has established with Johnson, who has impressed him with his calm demeanor in net. Furthermore, he's continued to develop in practice situations set up by Sabres goalie coach Andrew Allen.

"It's been fantastic, they've got a great group of minds up here," he said. "I think they know what they're doing and the practice situations for me have been really good, a lot of game-like stuff. Andrew himself, he's been fantastic, he's been fun to work with. We can discuss different things and, for me, that's what I like in a goalie coach."

Lieuwen had to earn his place on the Sabres' depth chart in Training Camp. Both he and Andrey Makarov received time in net during the preseason, but Lieuwen took advantage by allowing only one goal in 40 minutes of play and impressed Bylsma enough to earn the call up once Lehner sustained his injury.

Even if he wasn't coming off of an injury-riddled season, the 24-year-old netminder would have been happy with his performance in camp.

"Even if I had been just coming along like I normally would be and not coming off of injury, I think it was good," he said. "So considering the situation, I thought it was fantastic. I was sharp. I was ready for every little opportunity in two periods in the exhibition games I thought I was sharp and ready and on my game. I think that's just carried over now to the practices here."