



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

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## **Sabres-Penguins Preview**

By Nicolino Dibenedetto

AP

October 29, 2015

Sidney Crosby's only Stanley Cup came with Dan Bylsma behind the bench for the Pittsburgh Penguins.

Bylsma is back in Pittsburgh for the first time since being fired, and he's bringing another budding young superstar.

Jack Eichel and the Buffalo Sabres will try to give their coach a happy homecoming and end a six-game slide against the Penguins on Thursday night.

Crosby is considered the best player of his generation, but his lone title came as a 21-year-old in 2009. That came after Bylsma took over for the fired Michel Therrien midway through the season.

Bylsma went on to win a franchise-record 252 games, but he and Crosby never got back to the finals over the next five seasons. He was fired after losing to the New York Rangers in seven games in the 2014 Eastern Conference semifinals.

After taking a season off since he was still under contract with the Penguins (5-4-0), Bylsma was hired by the Sabres (3-6-0) and tasked with turning around the moribund franchise and nurturing Eichel - the second overall pick in last summer's draft.

"They'll be emotions," he said. "I don't know exactly if emotional means I'm not going to be moved to tears but it's going to be emotional. I look at the empty seats, I'm going to know 50 faces in the stands; where they sit. I know where my family sat. There's certainly going to be some emotions."

He'll also try to lead Buffalo to back-to-back victories for the first time this season. Zemgus Girgensons scored midway through overtime in Tuesday's 4-3 win at Philadelphia.

"We're learning how to win as a group," Bylsma said. "We're developing a team and how we want to play."

Eichel is vital to that. The center, who turned 19 on Wednesday, is tied with Tyler Ennis and Ryan O'Reilly with a team-high three goals. However, he's yet to score in three road games.

Crosby, meanwhile, is off to his worst start to a season with three points in nine games. He got them all in a 3-2 overtime victory over Florida on Oct. 20 and has failed to register a point in three games.

The star center has 45 points in 28 career matchups with the Sabres, collecting 18 in 12 at home. That's a big reason why the Penguins (5-4-0) have outscored the Sabres 25-3 while winning six straight meetings.

Pittsburgh is withstanding Crosby's season-opening slump, winning five of six games after beating Washington 3-1 on Wednesday behind Marc-Andre Fleury's 33 saves - 14 in the second period.

"The more shots he sees, the better he plays," right wing Beau Bennett said. "We can't do that every night, but he was definitely our best player and kept us in it, even when they had those flurries in the second period."

Fleury has started every game for Pittsburgh this season and has a 1.50 goals-against average in the last six.

He's compiled a 1.79 GAA while winning 16 of his last 19 starts against Buffalo, but it's unclear if he'll start in the Penguins' first set of games on consecutive days this season.

That could mean backup Jeff Zatkoff will make his season debut. He's 12-7-2 with a 2.58 GAA in 21 games - 18 starts - over the last two seasons.

## Memories await Bylsma in Pittsburgh

By Mike Harrington  
Buffalo News  
October 29, 2015

PITTSBURGH – The late-night flight from Philadelphia landed and the Buffalo Sabres' bus rolled toward downtown and the famous three rivers here early Wednesday morning. Dan Bylsma knows the trip well, from the far-off airport down the Parkway to Green Tree Hill until you enter the Fort Pitt Tunnel.

When you emerge, the city where Bylsma built his career explodes into view with a picturesque flood of light shining upon the city's skyscrapers and network of bridges. But on this night, no such luck.

"I was disappointed the tunnel was blocked last night," a smiling Bylsma said here Wednesday afternoon. "Because they were doing construction, we had to go around."

Bylsma is hoping that's not any sort of omen for this trip. For the first time since he was fired as Pittsburgh Penguins coach in 2014, Bylsma is back in town with a team to call his own. The Sabres got a big overtime win Tuesday in Philly and go for a 2-0 road trip Thursday night in Consol Energy Center, but the game is almost a sidelight to the focus on Bylsma's return.

The buildup began at practice Wednesday. Bylsma gave extra greetings to some Pittsburgh reporters and had a welcome-back chat with Jennifer Bullano, the Penguins' senior director of communications. Bullano was one of Bylsma's closest front-office confidantes when he was here and he even appeared with her in March, 2014 on the TLC reality show "Say Yes to the Dress," to do shopping in New York during a road trip for her impending wedding.

"I was a part of this organization for eight years and here for 5½ of them and there's a lot of familiarity walking into this building," Bylsma said. "I certainly felt that today."

But what's it going to be like to coach a game in front of a full house against the likes of Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin?

"There will be emotions. I'm not going to be moved to tears but it's going to be emotional," Bylsma said. "Even right now, I look at the empty seats and I'm gonna know 50 faces in the stands tomorrow where they sit. I know where my family sat when they were here. There's certainly going to be emotions."

Bylsma left town as the winningest coach in Penguins history at 252-117-32 and became the fastest to 250 wins of any coach in NHL history. All four of his full seasons resulted in 100-plus points and there were back-to-back division titles in 2013 and 2014.

But since coming to Buffalo in May, Bylsma has often spoken about the weight of expectations here after taking over with 25 games left in the 2008-09 season and going on to win the Stanley Cup that spring. There was nowhere to go but down and the Penguins did just that. After '09, the only other time they even reached the Eastern Conference final was when they were swept by Boston in 2013.

"It's a lot harder to do than just saying 'This team and these players should win three or four Stanley Cups,'" Bylsma said. "It's a lot harder to do than that. It didn't happen. I hate to say we came close. We put ourselves in position to win series and move on and we didn't. ... That's my only lament about the situation. We should have and we didn't."

Bylsma was fired on June 6, 2014, three weeks after GM Ray Shero was let go. The Penguins had blown a 3-1 lead to the New York Rangers in the second round and Bylsma knew he was toast. He tried to put on a happy

face at the time – and admitted Wednesday he was surprised he wasn't sacked the same day as Shero – but knew what the end result would be.

"I knew after we lost to the Rangers that I wasn't going to be back," he said. "Whether that was four weeks later or whatever, I knew. We needed to win, we needed to win a Stanley Cup. We didn't and regardless of what I answered in the press conference after the game against the Rangers, I knew and I'm all right with that."

Now Bylsma gets to see how the other half lives when faced with the task of defending Crosby and Malkin. Obviously, he wasn't going to give away any state secrets Wednesday but Bylsma certainly has some ideas on not letting Nos. 87 and 71 turn the game into a track meet like the ones he often directed here.

"It was part of our development and growth when I was here to say, 'How do you beat the Pittsburgh Penguins?' I have that book that we came up with then," he said.

"They've got talented players and skill players. We know that's the case. It's hard to say you're going to keep 87 and 71 off the board and how you're gonna do that. Their power play can be daunting with that skill and talent. They've added Phil Kessel and there's a little bit different look in some areas, but a lot of the same things apply."

And about the concept this might be a good time for the building Sabres to catch the Penguins, when they've been struggling and are coming home for a back-to-back after a game Wednesday in Washington? Bylsma isn't getting caught up in that.

"I don't think anybody every looks at Sidney Crosby or Evgeni Malkin and says, 'Oh, we're catching them while they're not scoring,'" Bylsma said. "You're always in fear of their ability to score and you always fear their ability on the power play whether they're at 25 percent or at 0 percent for however long. They still scare you for that ability. You don't sneak by this group without getting their best."

## **Sabres notebook: Eichel ready to meet up with Crosby**

By Mike Harrington  
Buffalo News  
October 29, 2015

PITTSBURGH – Jack Eichel turned 19 Wednesday and the first day of his final year as a teenager was spent getting ready for a big moment in his career: His first head-to-head chance against Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby when the Sabres and Pens meet Thursday night.

"I'm looking forward to playing against him, against a guy I watched growing up a lot and looked up to, so it should be good," Eichel said after practice in Consol Energy Center. "He's one of the best players in the world and I think you have to be excited to match up with him and play against him."

Eichel said he has not yet crossed paths with Crosby. The Penguins superstar has had a few meetings with Edmonton No. 1 pick Connor McDavid.

"I watch a lot of hockey and I'm well aware of young guys coming in." Crosby told Pittsburgh reporters here Tuesday before the Penguins left for Thursday's game in Washington. "I get excited to compete every night, regardless of whether it's against a younger guy or a guy who has played for 10 or 15 years. But, yeah, there are always those matchups. I definitely get excited for those."

Eichel had perhaps his worst period of the season in the middle frame Tuesday in Philadelphia, with a couple of giveaways and puck fumbles in his own end. But he recovered to play a much stronger third and didn't let the mistakes linger.

"Whatever I was doing, winning faceoffs, back-pressuring, whatever, if I didn't have it last night, didn't feel the best maybe, there are other ways to contribute," Eichel said. "You get frustrated like anybody else. There are nights you don't feel as great and you have to battle through it. It's a test of your mental toughness."

Eichel said he was quickly finding a comfort zone with new linemates Johan Larsson and Sam Reinhart. The Sabres are expected to keep all their lines from Tuesday's game intact to start the game Thursday, a rarity this season.

"Lars' wins a lot of battles in the corners and with him and Sam it's a good line and I like playing with them," Eichel said. "We all bring something to the table and when we were at our best, we were tough to contain."

As for his birthday, Eichel didn't know what would be planned to commemorate it. Rasmus Ristolainen turned 21 on Tuesday so Eichel had some thought about a group dinner. Eichel, however, said he expected to get some roasting from his teammates for a faux pas in Philly and was hoping landlord Matt Moulson might come through to help him.

"I forgot my credit card in my hotel room last night so Mr. Murray says I owe the team dinner," said a smiling Eichel, referring to General Manager Tim Murray. "Maybe 'Mouls' will take me out. He does things like that."

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How good was goaltender Chad Johnson's diving save in overtime Tuesday on Philadelphia's Scott Laughton? Good enough to get slated No. 2 on ESPN's SportsCenter Top 10 on a night that featured Game One of the World Series and the opening of the NBA season.

Seemingly out of position and about to be burned for the game-winning goal, Johnson dove to his right and took the shot off his blocker. It kept the Sabres alive and Zemgus Girgensons scored the game-winning goal on a breakaway 33 seconds later.

"I sort of followed it with my eyes," Johnson said Wednesday of the Laughton shot. "I knew I wasn't going to get over there with my pad or have a good push. I just reached out. I knew I was in a bad position. You're kind of in desperation mode and reaching back. At that stage, it's mayhem, kind of summer hockey back and forth. It's nice that we scored right after that."

Johnson stopped 30 of 33 shots in the game and really had no chance on the final two goals he allowed. He was happy with the performance after giving up seven goals on 26 shots Friday night against Montreal.

"One save doesn't make a whole career but it was big, we scored after that and got the win," Johnson said.

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- The Sabres have lost six straight against Pittsburgh since a win here on April 23, 2013. The teams' last 20 meetings have all been decided in regulation, with Pittsburgh taking 15 of them. The last matchup to go past 65 minutes was the Pens' 2-1 shootout win in Buffalo on Dec. 19, 2009.
- Pittsburgh won all three meetings last year and outscored the Sabres, 13-1. The Pens posted similar domination in 2013-14, taking the three games by a combined 12-2.
- Reinhart and Tyler Ennis both sat out practice Wednesday for what coach Dan Bylsma termed maintenance days. He said he expected them to play in the game.

## Sabres' Bylsma looks forward to return to Pittsburgh

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

October 29, 2015

**BUFFALO** -- It's been more than 16 months since Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma was fired by the Pittsburgh Penguins. He's set to make his return to Pittsburgh on Thursday when the Penguins host the Sabres at Consol Energy Center (7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, BELL TV, ROOT).

Bylsma established himself as a winning coach during his 5 ½ seasons in Pittsburgh. He led the Penguins to the Stanley Cup four months after he was hired in 2009. But despite six consecutive trips to the playoffs, he was fired on June 6, 2014.

Returning to Pittsburgh has been on Bylsma's mind since the Sabres hired him on May 28.

"Of course I've thought about it," Bylsma said Monday. "I haven't been gone from Pittsburgh that long. We just moved a few months ago. I know more street names in Pittsburgh than I do in Buffalo right now. I'm going to know my way around when I get there."

Just getting his bearings at the arena were among his first thoughts about going back to Pittsburgh.

"Walking down the hallway and going right and not left, and also stepping into the arena and being on the other bench. I thought about both those things," he said. "Those are emotional things for me and things I've thought about. But once the puck drops, it's not going to be a big deal."

Bylsma made his NHL coaching debut with the Penguins on Feb. 16, 2009, in a 3-2 shootout loss at the New York Islanders. The Penguins were five points out of a playoff berth when he replaced Michel Therrien; four months later, they were Stanley Cup winners.

"I think it was one of those things, taking a chance on a younger coach and a chance to grow with the team." former Penguins general manager and current New Jersey Devils GM Ray Shero said Wednesday. "But even though he only had 55 games of head coaching experience in the American Hockey League, the thing for me is that he had played in the NHL for eight years and played with great players, and he was coming in to coach players like [Sidney] Crosby, [Evgeni] Malkin-type of guys, [Sergei] Gonchar, even a guy like Petr Sykora where he played with and went to the Finals in Anaheim in '03 as a player.

"As a younger coach, he had eight years of NHL playing experience with guys like [Paul] Kariya, [Teemu] Selanne, [Wayne] Gretzky, between L.A. and Anaheim, and knew what that was like in terms of being in the room with superstar players and the role player he was."

Working with superstars helped Bylsma land the job with the Penguins; the experience he gained doing that helped him land in Buffalo. The additions of Evander Kane via trade in February and Jack Eichel with the second pick at the 2015 NHL Draft meant the Sabres needed a coach who could handle gifted players.

"I've answered the question quite a bit about star players and good players and Crosby and Jack Eichel and Malkin and Jack Eichel and having dealt with young players that were stars," Bylsma said. "So without a question I've learned that. But working under Ray Shero and how he put together a team and how he wanted the team to play, what it meant to play as a team, that's what I've learned and that's what I'm bringing to this scenario with the Sabres."

Bylsma is a known quantity now, but he wasn't when he was brought up from Wilkes-Barre/Scranton of the AHL in 2009. Shero said it became clear quickly the Penguins had made the right choice.

"I think with anything it's only going to work if the players buy in or believe that you know what you're doing," Shero said. "That was a concern ... but I think it was after a week, I still remember as clear as day, I was walking out to watch practice one day and [Crosby] was trying to come back into the locker room and I was just walking through and I said, 'Hey, how are you doing.' And he says, 'Fine.' And I ask, 'Is everything OK?' And he says, 'I'm just getting gloves.' And walking out, he goes, 'Hey Ray, by the way, Dan; he's really good.' And I say, 'Oh, that's good to hear.' So I walk out of the room and say to myself, 'Thank God!'... If he right away just saw Dan and didn't believe or didn't buy what he was selling or didn't think he had an idea what he was talking about, that would've been a very difficult process."

The Sabres aren't coming off a loss in the Stanley Cup Final the way the 2008-09 Penguins were. Buffalo was the worst team in the NHL in 2013-14 and 2014-15 under Ron Rolston and Ted Nolan. Bylsma is trying to bring a lot of what worked on the ice for the Penguins to the Sabres.

"I think he has the same philosophy," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "It's a quick-paced, move-the-puck, get-up-in-the-play kind of mentality. I think that's where you saw the Penguins when he was there too. ... [It's fun to play] because you're not sitting back. You're forcing the play, you're going and you're pressing."

Despite the Sabres' 3-6-0 start, the changes Bylsma has made to Buffalo's style of play are already apparent.

The Sabres had the worst shot attempt percentage in the NHL in each of the past two seasons; according to War-On-Ice.com, the 2014-15 Sabres had the lowest SAT% (37.5) since the statistic was first kept in 2005-06. Through nine games this season, the Sabres are ninth in SAT% at 52.0.

"What you learn from some of the experiences you go through, I believe Dan is a better coach than he was five years ago," Shero said. "Through the experience he has and the ups and downs, I think that makes him a better coach."

## **Penguins downplay Bylsma's return as Sabres coach**

By Wes Crosby  
NHL.com  
October 29, 2015

**PITTSBURGH** -- The Pittsburgh Penguins admit it will be strange to face former coach Dan Bylsma for the first time when they host the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday (7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, BELL TV, ROOT). But for the most part it will be business as usual.

"I think the first time is always a little bit different," Penguins captain Sidney Crosby said. "But I think at this point we've all kind of dealt with those kind of things before. And once you get in the game, really get into it, everything kind of becomes normal. But I think the initial start is always kind of [strange]."

Bylsma coached the Penguins for parts of six seasons, starting when he replaced Michel Therrien 57 games into the 2008-09 season. That season ended with Bylsma coaching the Penguins to the Stanley Cup.

He was fired following the 2013-14 season. The Sabres hired him May 28.

"It'll be weird, that's for sure," goalie Marc-Andre Fleury said. "We got a Cup with him. So it'll be weird to have him on the other bench, on the other side."

Despite much regular-season success, Bylsma's final five seasons in Pittsburgh are remembered for disappointing Stanley Cup Playoff performances, including losing in four games to the Boston Bruins in the 2013 Eastern Conference Final and a seven-game loss to the New York Rangers in the 2014 Eastern Conference Second Round after holding a 3-1 series lead.

That doesn't take away from how the Penguins remember Bylsma.

"It'll definitely be special to see him come back," forward Pascal Dupuis said. "He started his whole coaching career here. He had an impact right away on this team as far as winning, and we had some good seasons. There were a couple lows there in the playoffs but there are definitely some good memories."

The Penguins finished first or second in their division in each of Bylsma's six seasons. On April 22, 2013, he became the fastest coach in NHL history to reach 200 wins in a 3-1 victory against the Ottawa Senators. In his final two seasons the Penguins won 66.9 percent of their games despite numerous injuries to key players, including defenseman Kris Letang's stroke in late January 2014.

The Penguins went 51-24-7 in 2013-14, and the 109 points were their most under Bylsma. Letang, who missed 45 games during Bylsma's final season, said he won't have much difficulty adjusting to seeing his former coach behind the opposite bench.

"It's always strange," Letang said. "But everybody knows that's the business. You're playing with 10 guys and the next year you're playing against them. So it's the same thing for a coach. ... It's still fresh in our mind. It's only been a year and when you're in the NHL every year is special. You kind of remember all of them. So it's going to be something special."

The Penguins have moved on. They are 5-4-0 in their second season under coach Mike Johnston after a 3-1 win at the Washington Capitals on Wednesday, and the players remain focused on hoisting the Cup, just as they were at the start of each season under Bylsma.

Late in Johnston's debut season, the Penguins seemed to regress and their once-potent offense became dormant, leading to a must-win situation against the Sabres on the final day of last season, something they never faced with Bylsma. The Penguins won to earn the second wild card into the playoffs from the Eastern Conference but they lost to the Rangers in five games in an Eastern Conference First Round series.

It hasn't been the smooth transition Pittsburgh had hoped for, but that could have been expected. The two coaches are noticeably different in philosophy and personality.

Once a month, a Penguins practice under Bylsma would end in a shootout competition, with the stipulation that the last player to score would be made to grow a mustache for the following month and be nicknamed "Mustache Boy." Johnston's practices periodically conclude with sprints that almost seem to pay homage to Kurt Russell's portrayal of Herb Brooks from the film "Miracle."

"They're obviously different personalities, different individuals," Dupuis said. "[Bylsma's] personality, he's an upbeat guy, a guy who loves to get a good laugh. He obviously was not too far removed from playing. I did play against him and he coached me right after, which was a little special. But that just shows how old I'm getting."

## **Ex-Penguins coach Bylsma returns to Pittsburgh with Buffalo Sabres**

By Seth Rorabaugh  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
October 29, 2015

Things were different for Dan Bylsma when he flew into Pittsburgh Tuesday night.

Having traveled in and out of Pittsburgh International Airport countless times, he is very familiar with the Fort Pitt Tunnel and the view it provides of Downtown when driving into the city.

"I was disappointed," Bylsma said. "The tunnel was blocked last night or they were doing construction so we had to go around so I was a little bit disappointed we couldn't go through the tunnels."

Things also will be different for Bylsma from a professional standpoint tonight when he coaches the Buffalo Sabres from the visiting bench inside Consol Energy Center. It will be Bylsma's first game against the Penguins since he was fired June 6, 2014.

"There will be emotions," Bylsma said after his team practiced Wednesday at Consol Energy Center. "I don't know exactly if emotional means I'll be moved to tears. It's going to be emotional. Looking at the empty seats. I'm going to know 50 faces in the stands tomorrow, where they sit. I know where my family sat when they were here. There's certainly going to be some emotions."

A midseason replacement for Michel Therrien in 2008-09, Bylsma coached the Penguins to the 2009 Stanley Cup championship but never matched that success in his subsequent five seasons.

"I think it's a lot harder to do than just saying, 'Hey, this team, these players should win three or four Stanley Cup [titles],' " said Bylsma. "It's a lot harder to do than that. It didn't happen. I hate to say we came close. We put ourselves in position to win and win series and move on and we didn't.

"You can look each [season] individually and say we were injured in [2011] and the year we lost the [Eastern Conference final] to Boston ... there's a lot of things to look at. I think we should have and we didn't."

The Penguins fired former general manager Ray Shero May 16, 2014, but retained Bylsma for three weeks before he was officially fired. While Bylsma admitted he was surprised the team didn't announce his dismissal in tandem with Shero's, he said he holds no animosity over the delay.

"I don't look back on it and begrudge anybody," he said. "I knew after we lost to the Rangers [in the second round of the 2014 postseason] that I wasn't going to be back.

"Whether that was four weeks later or whatever that was, I knew. We needed to win and we needed to win a Stanley Cup and we didn't. Regardless of what I answered in the press conference after [Game 7] against the Rangers, I knew at that time. And I'm all right with that."

The Penguins' all-time leader in most coaching categories, Bylsma's resume brings instant credibility to a Sabres team which has missed four consecutive postseasons.

"He took a team to Stanley Cup," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "It's not much more that you need to know more than that."

## **Penguins notebook: Players attach little significance to Dan Bylsma's return**

By Dave Molinari  
Pittsburgh Post-Gazette  
October 29, 2015

WASHINGTON — **Dan Bylsma** coached a few members of the 2015-16 Penguins to a Stanley Cup in 2009.

He also presided over losses to lower-seeded opponents in each of the five springs that followed.

Bylsma, now in his first season as Buffalo's coach, became something of a polarizing figure by the time he was fired in 2014 and figures to get a mixed reception when the Sabres meet the Penguins at 7:08 tonight at Consol Energy Center.

Before facing Washington Wednesday night, however, his former players didn't attach any special significance to facing a Bylsma-coached opponent for the first time.

"It's going to be a game like [any other] one," defenseman **Kris Letang** said. "It's the business that everybody is kind of facing each other at certain points."

Left winger **Chris Kunitz** volunteered that "the longer you're in the league, you play against other people [you know], ex-teammates or coaches or assistant coaches," and spoke warmly of playing for Bylsma. "I enjoyed my time [under him]. I kind of [accelerated] my career playing under his system, and the situations he put me in.

"I had a great time with him on a personal level and a business level."

## **Sabres' Dan Bylsma knows return to Pittsburgh will be emotional**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 29, 2015

PITTSBURGH – There are no hard feelings, Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. For five and a half seasons, he enjoyed a heck of a ride leading the Penguins, winning a Stanley Cup just months after taking over the job in 2009.

That they let him twist in the wind at the end of another disappointing season, refusing to fire him for three weeks after letting general manager Ray Shero go, doesn't matter.

"I don't think there needs to be any reconciliation," Bylsma said Wednesday inside the Consol Energy Center. "I got the opportunity to coach a great team, great group of players and a great organization."

Of course, tonight's contest, Bylsma's first here since the Penguins fired him in June 2014, will be emotional. Lots of old friends greeted Bylsma with handshakes Wednesday.

"There's a lot of familiarity walking into this building," Bylsma said. "I certainly felt that today."

From a hallway outside the dressing room, Bylsma looked out into the empty seats as he spoke to the media.

"I know 50 faces in the stands tomorrow, where they sit, and I know where my family sat when they were here," he said. "There's certainly going to be some emotions."

Still, Bylsma became emotionally detached from the Penguins living in Pittsburgh last season, he said.

"Coming in last night, it felt different than probably the previous 400 days I've been in Pittsburgh," he said.

Bylsma went an incredible 252-117-32 as Pittsburgh's coach, winning at least 47 games in every full season. Did the Penguins make a mistake letting Bylsma go?

Sure, they suffered a string of playoff disappointments after winning the Cup, only reaching one Eastern Conference final and losing twice in the first round. But some of those losses can be chalked up to injuries – superstars Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin both missed the 2011 postseason – and wonky goaltending from Marc-Andre Fleury.

"I hate to say, we came close," Bylsma said. "We put ourselves in position to ... win series and move on and we didn't."

He added: "We didn't do it, and that's my only lament about the situation. I think we should have."

After the New York Rangers' seven-game win over the Penguins in the 2014 Eastern Conference semifinal, Bylsma knew he was finished in Pittsburgh.

"We needed to win a Stanley Cup," he said.

The Penguins fired Shero May 16 but waited until June 6 to dismiss Bylsma.

Naturally, that created some odd situations.

“I think the most uncomfortable thing is the group of texts I got on the day I didn’t get let go, a number of people giving me condolences,” Bylsma said. “That was the hardest thing for me and them. They had to call me back and say, ‘Sorry, I didn’t mean that.’”

“I don’t look back on it and begrudge anybody. I knew after we lost to the Rangers that I wasn’t going to be back.”

Firing him hasn’t radically transformed the Penguins. If anything, they’ve regressed under new coach Mike Johnston.

The talent-laden club, once the NHL’s most feared, eked into the playoffs last year by beating a hapless Sabres squad in the season finale before quickly getting bounced. Their offensive firepower has vanished.

The Penguins’ days as a juggernaut might be over.

They began their tilt Wednesday in Washington at 4-4 with only 13 goals, just 1.6 a game. Yes, a team with Crosby, Malkin and newcomer Phil Kessel has the NHL’s second-worst offense.

Right now, with just one goal and three points, Crosby is enduring the worst offensive stretch of his 11-year career.

Bylsma knows the numbers mean very little.

“I don’t think anybody ever looks at Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin and says, ‘Oh, we’re catching them while they’re not scoring,’” he said. “You always fear their ability to score.”

Bylsma, who was hired by Buffalo on May 28, will experience that fear for the first time tonight. Part of his growth as a coach was understanding how teams tried to eliminate Crosby and Malkin to beat the Penguins.

“I have that book,” he said.

## **Sabres goalie Chad Johnson rebounds nicely; Jack Eichel ready for Sidney Crosby**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 29, 2015

PITTSBURGH – Buffalo Sabres goalie Chad Johnson embraces a simple philosophy following poor outings: Don't panic, just stick with it.

"I think when you start sitting down and being like, 'OK, I got to change this, change that, get out here and do this,' now you're overthinking instead of saying it was one of those days," Johnson said Wednesday inside the Consol Energy Center.

Johnson, 29, experienced one of those days Friday, looking shaky in the Sabres' ugly 7-2 loss to Montreal. He made only 19 saves and looked awful on at least two Canadiens goals.

Following a game off, Johnson, who's subbing for injured starter Robin Lehner, rebounded nicely, stopping 30 shots in the Sabres' 4-3 overtime win Tuesday in Philadelphia.

"It was sort of a big rebound game for me," Johnson said.

Johnson saved the game 1:56 into the three-on-three overtime, stopping Sam Gagner on a two-on-one before sprawling – Johnson called it "desperation mode" – and getting the inside of his blocker on Scott Laughton's rebound shot.

Zemgus Girgensons scored the breakaway winner 33 seconds later.

"That's pretty impressive," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said about Johnson's save. "That had a little bit of Dominik Hasek flair to it. That save gets us an extra point, plain and simple. If he doesn't make that save, we don't get the overtime goal. He played well all night last night. He made a lot of big saves at key times."

Johnson, a fifth-round pick by Pittsburgh in 2006, will likely make his eighth start tonight against the Penguins.

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Sabres center Jack Eichel has never faced or even met Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby.

"He's one of the best players in the world," said Eichel, who turned 19 on Wednesday. "I think it'd be exciting to be matched up against him, playing against him."

Eichel gets his chance tonight. The second overall pick has often performed like a veteran in his first nine NHL appearances, scoring three goals and, at times, controlling the game with his superior skills and hockey sense.

But Eichel, like any rookie, struggles occasionally. Following some tough stretches Tuesday, he finished the contest strongly, skating 18 minutes, 40 seconds.

"I just tried to keep it simple," he said. "Sometimes people overlook that."

Eichel didn't have any firm birthday plans early Wednesday afternoon. Even on his special day, Eichel might've paid for some food.

Since he forgot his credit card in his hotel room Tuesday, Eichel said Sabres general manager Tim Murray, someone he calls "Mr. Murray," told him he owes the team a dinner.

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Sabres winger Tyler Ennis and Sam Reinhart both had maintenance days Wednesday. Coach Dan Bylsma expects both to play tonight.

## **Sabres' coach Bylsma returns to Pittsburgh**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 29, 2015

Pittsburgh, PA (WGR 550) -- Dan Bylsma had not been in Consol Energy Center since he was fired by the Pittsburgh Penguins. On Thursday, he walked in as the head coach of another team.

Bylsma won a Stanley Cup in Pittsburgh and spent five in a half seasons behind their bench. He said, "It's a little more different than I anticipated. I had been in Pittsburgh the last year without coming here as the coach and just coming in last night to the city was different than I anticipated, but I was part of this organization for eight years and here for five in a half and there's a lot of familiarity walking into this building and I certainly felt that today."

Bylsma had some thoughts coming into Philadelphia on Tuesday after many battles between the Penguins and the Flyers. He knows what tomorrow night will bring, "There'll be emotions, I don't know exactly if emotional means I'm not going to be moved to tears."

The interview with the head coach was being done in a hallway where the inner bowl of the arena could be seen. He said, "Even right now looking at the empty seats, I'm going to know 50 faces in the stands, where they sit, so there's certainly going to be some emotions."

Many can't believe that Bylsma doesn't hold a grudge, but he said, "I don't begrudge anybody. I knew after we lost to the Rangers that I wasn't going to be back, whether that was four weeks later or whatever that was. We needed to win a Stanley Cup and we didn't and I'm alright with that."

Bylsma started in Pittsburgh winning the Cup and ended losing a playoff series to the Rangers that ended his stay. Bylsma is not bitter at all, "I don't think there needs to be any reconciliation. I got the opportunity to coach a great team and a great group of players and that was a great opportunity for me."

Both Tyler Ennis and Sam Reinhart were given maintenance days and didn't practice on Wednesday. Dan Bylsma anticipates both playing Thursday.

Tim Schaller took Ennis' spot while coach Dave Barr filled in for Reinhart.

## **Bylsma prepares for 'Emotional' return to Pittsburgh**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

October 29, 2015

**PITTSBURGH** – Dan Bylsma was one of the first people to skate onto the ice at Console Energy Center for practice on Wednesday morning. He was surrounded by 19,758 empty seats and nearly six years worth of memories.

“I look at the empty seats, I know 50 faces [that will be] in the stands tomorrow and where they sit,” the Sabres coach said. “I know where my family sat when they were here. There’s certainly going to be some emotions.”

On Thursday night, Bylsma will coach his first game in Pittsburgh since parting ways with the Penguins after the 2013-14 season. He led Pittsburgh to six-consecutive Stanley Cup Playoff berths during his time as coach of the Penguins and won the Cup in 2008-09, his first with the team.

Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. with Tops Sabres Gamenight on MSG-B and Bell TV. The can also be heard live on WGR 550. Puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m.

Bylsma said that he won’t be moved to tears when he returns to the bench, but he also did not downplay the fact that there will be emotions in the game. He’s already felt certain emotions, be it when he arrived downtown Tuesday night or when he first walked into the arena out of the pouring rain Wednesday morning.

Bylsma lived in Pittsburgh during his year away from the NHL, so he’s been around. But the feeling is different now.

“Being here for a year last year, I probably became a little bit emotionally detached from the team and the city,” he said. “Coming in last night it felt different than probably the previous 400 days that I’ve been in Pittsburgh.”

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### **MAINTENANCE DAYS**

Sabres forwards Tyler Ennis and Sam Reinhart were both absent from Wednesday’s practice for maintenance days, Bylsma said. The coach expressed confidence that both will be ready to play Thursday night.

Tim Schaller filled in for Ennis alongside Nicolas Deslauriers and Ryan O’Reilly in drills while assistant coach Dave Barr participated in Reinhart’s place alongside Johan Larsson and Jack Eichel.

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### **REFOCUSED JOHNSON SAVES THE DAY**

On a night that included a World Series game, opening night in the NBA and nine other NHL games, the No. 2 pick in SportsCenter’s Top 10 on Tuesday belonged to Sabres goaltender Chad Johnson.

In overtime against the Flyers, on a scoring attempt in the blue paint by Simon Gagner, the puck drifted away from the Flyers forward across the crease, just past Sabre defenseman Jake McCabe.

Philadelphia's Scott Laughton was there to clean it up on a seemingly open net. But not on Johnson's watch.

The goaltender dove to his right just in time to stop Laughton's attempt and save the game for the Sabres. Less than a minute later, Zengus Girgensons scored the game-winner on a breakaway.

"I was sort of following it with my eyes," Johnson said. "I knew I was in bad position so you're kind of in desperation mode, you're kind of reaching back for it. Again [the 3-on-3 overtime] is kind of mayhem, it's like summer hockey out there, it's just back and forth so it's nice that we scored right after that."

The victory was especially important for Johnson considering his performance in his last outing against Montreal, in which he gave up seven goals on 26 shot attempts. He rebounded with a 30-save effort against the Flyers.

"It was sort of a big rebound game for me after it was just one of those days the game before. For me again I just wanted to refocus and just play my game so it was nice to get the win," he said.

Refocusing, he said, isn't as complicated as it sounds.

"I think when you sit down and say 'OK, I've got to change this, change that, I've got to get out here and do this, do that,' I think now you're over thinking it," Johnson said. "You just got out there and do the same thing you do every day. You focus on the next shot, you compete, and that's about it."

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### **WEDNESDAY'S PRACTICE**

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Defensemen: 4 Josh Gorges, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 29 Jake McCabe, 46 Cody Franson, 25 Carlo Colaiacovo, 3 Mark Pysyk, 6 Mike Weber

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