



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Blue line is back for Buffalo with Bogosian's return

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

November 19, 2015

Chad Johnson has played in front of some impressive defense corps in Boston and New York. Now that Zach Bogosian is back on Buffalo's blue line, Johnson says the Sabres can hang with the Zdeno Chara-led Bruins and Johnny Boychuk-backed Islanders.

"This is definitely right up there," the goaltender said Wednesday. "They're just so balanced, I think, is the biggest thing. They're so good defensively and strong on the puck. The guys can play offense if they want to, but they're responsible defensively.

"Having everybody in the D corps like that is nice for a goalie."

The Sabres had to wait 18 games for their top six to play in the same game. If all goes as planned, Buffalo's visit to St. Louis on Thursday will be the second game of a long, long defensive collaboration. Consider:

- Bogosian is 25 years old and signed through 2020.
- Rasmus Ristolainen is only 21. Jake McCabe is 22. Mark Pysyk is 23.
- Cody Franson is 28 and signed through next season.
- Josh Gorges, 31, is under contract until 2018.

"That young defense, if they're not there yet they're really close to being a defense that could be here for years," Dallas coach Lindy Ruff said.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma will wait for Bogosian to get back in the swing of things before forecasting the unit's potential, but he likes what he sees.

"Zach really can be the anchor of our group back there," Bylsma said before praising the No. 1 pair of Gorges and Ristolainen. "A lot of the responsibility of checking and playing against top units has fallen on them, and they've done a real good job of doing that.

"Jake McCabe, I don't want to say he's light years ahead of where he was last year, but with his skating and his ability, he looks to be a solid pair and possibly a real good, solid pair with Zach, one where they also could be a shutdown-responsible pair.

"It looks good, a lot better with Zach back there, but I'd like to get him in and playing and being the anchor that we need him to be."

The ability to skate and pass are essential for defensemen in today's NHL. That's why Buffalo's unit has so much potential. Bogosian, Ristolainen, McCabe and Pysyk are fluid skaters who can handle the puck.

"It does all start from the back end, just moving that puck up, try to get it going north as quick and as much as possible," Bogosian said. "Our defense have done a good job of that."

Franson, meanwhile, is 6-foot-5 and fourth on the team in scoring. Gorges is a physical shot-blocker who focuses on the defensive zone.

"The potential is high," Gorges said, "but I think the biggest thing is to keep improving. From the start of the year to now, we've gotten better, but I think there's still a long way to go with how we play together as a group, finding our options on our breakouts and communication. Little details of our game now are things we have to incorporate into our overall game."

For now, it appears Gorges and Ristolainen will remain together. McCabe played with Bogosian in the latter's season debut. The right-handed Pysyk moved to the left side, allowing the right-handed Franson to stay at his natural position. Carlo Colaiacovo and injured Mike Weber have rotated as the seventh defenseman, and they will continue to provide depth and relief.

"Things are looking up," Pysyk said. "That's cool for everybody. Everybody wants to grow and make something good happen here together. All the guys get along, so it's fun to be a part of right now."

It may not be much fun Thursday, though. The big-bodied Blues are one of the tougher teams to handle around the net and along the boards.

"I watched their game against Winnipeg a couple nights ago, and it's the heaviest team that I've watched this year," Bylsma said. "This will be the biggest, heaviest, strongest, forechecking, offensive-zone team of any we've seen to this point."

Sabres notebook: Kane ready to go, will return Thursday

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

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The Sabres' two-week run through the Central Division might be their most difficult stretch of the season. They can use all the help they can get, so Evander Kane's return is coming at an ideal time.

Buffalo's top left winger, who has missed 10 games with a knee sprain, is expected to be in the lineup Thursday when the Sabres visit St. Louis.

"I'm looking forward to that," Kane said Wednesday in First Niagara Center. "I thought I would have a chance to play on the trip, and it looks like that's going to be the case."

Kane was flying during practice, and he ended the session by skating up to coach Dan Bylsma and providing an update on the injury.

"He's been telling me about his progress for four, five days now," Bylsma said. "He hasn't had a ton of contact in the two practices we've had, but I feel good about the way he's skating."

Kane practiced with center Jack Eichel and right wing Sam Reinhart, giving offensive potential to a team that has scored two goals in two games.

"I'm looking forward to playing with those two guys," Kane said. "They're both younger guys, such as myself. I think we've got some good chemistry off the ice, too, and I think that can kind of help translate on the ice."

The Sabres are in a seven-game run in which they face St. Louis, Dallas and Nashville six times. The Western Conference powerhouses have combined for a 38-13-4 record.

"I'm looking forward to coming in, especially against the teams we're playing the next couple games here," Kane said. "It's going to be a good test for myself, obviously, coming off injury, and a good test for our team. I'm looking forward to helping contribute hopefully in some wins."

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While the Sabres got good news about the health of Kane, things weren't as rosy for Zemgus Girgensons. The center will miss at least the next two games with an upper-body injury after not joining his teammates for the road trip to St. Louis and Dallas. Bylsma said it's possible Girgensons will be ready when the Sabres host the Blues on Monday.

Though Girgensons has struggled offensively with just one goal and one assist in 17 games, he's been important on the defensive end. That could be an issue against the high-scoring Blues and Stars, who will have the last line change as the home team.

"He's a big factor to our team in how we use him and where we use him and the quality of competition he plays against," Bylsma said. "Right now we've seen a pretty straight matchup with Ryan O'Reilly's line, especially at home, against the top line of the opposition. But on the road it really was Zemgus and Ryan sharing those duties with not getting the last change, so his quality of competition has been high."

"We've used him against other team's top lines, and he's come out on the positive side of the possession with his line. That says a lot about what he has been bringing to our team and maybe a little bit past the goals and assist that he does have."

Bylsma would love to give O'Reilly a break from the opponents' top lines.

"This guy's also trying to score goals for us as well," the coach said. "It's taken away from getting offense at the other end, and that has to be distributed throughout the team. As a group, we have to be better there and look for goals and chances throughout our lineup.

"We need more offense five-on-five from everybody."

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Tyler Ennis has no goals in the last seven games and only three this season. Bylsma can tell the forward is feeling the strain.

"He's trying to make a lot happen with every time he touches the puck," the coach said. "He has that mentality and is probably trying to shoulder the load a little bit, so yes, I think he's pressing."

Bylsma is moving Ennis down the lineup. The right winger practiced on the third line with center Johan Larsson and left wing Marcus Foligno. Larsson and Ennis combined for eight goals and 24 points in the final 16 games of last season.

"I went back and looked at the success he had last year, watched a lot of the goals and points and plays," Bylsma said. "That is one of the factors" for the line change.

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Reinhart's offensive instincts have never been questioned. The rookie center provided a vital screen on Buffalo's lone goal Tuesday in a 2-1 loss to Dallas and put a rocket into the top corner that was overturned by an offside call.

It is the 20-year-old's toughness and speed that have needed work. Bylsma has seen steady progression in both.

"He has made real, real large steps and huge improvements in his game since Sept. 1, since the start of the year," Bylsma said. "His skating and his puck battles and strength in certain areas - wall play, around the net - have been a huge improvement."

Sabres forwards struggling to generate offense

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Sabres coach Dan Bylsma believes Tyler Ennis' recent erratic play is a result of pressing. The shifty winger, meanwhile, thinks he's "just trying to play hard."

Whatever the case, Ennis, who has zero goals in the last seven games, keeps trying to do too much.

"I think he's trying to make a lot happen with every time he touches the puck," Bylsma said Wednesday. "He has that mentality and (is) probably trying to shoulder the load a little bit."

Ennis, whose freelancing has drawn comparisons to former Sabres enigma Maxim Afinogenov, might be trying to pick up the slack for some of the team's other struggling forwards.

Entering tonight's road tilt against the St. Louis Blues, the Sabres have scored 40 goals in 18 games, 2.22 a contest. That's a 182-goal pace. For some perspective, that would be the third-lowest full-season total in franchise history after an NHL record-low 150-goal 2013-14 season and a pathetic 154-goal campaign last year.

The NHL's No. 26 offense has been boosted by the league's No. 3 power play. The Sabres have scored 14 times on the man advantage. Their even-strength scoring ranks among the league's worst.

"We need more offense five-on-five for everybody," Bylsma said inside the First Niagara Center.

Forwards are struggling across the board.

Only two – centers Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly, with six each – have scored five goals. O'Reilly has the Sabres' only two goals in the last two games, both power-play scores.

Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, with four goals and 11 points, is the second-leading scorer behind O'Reilly, who has 14 points.

Consider some of these low outputs from Sabres forwards this season, especially the wingers:

– Captain Brian Gionta, who had six goals and 16 points in his final 14 games last season, has one goal and five points in 15 contests. The winger scored his first goal in his 13th appearance.

– Injured center Zemgus Girgensons, who had 15 goals and 30 points in 61 games last season, has one goal and two points in 17 appearances.

– Center Johan Larsson, who had five goals and 14 points in his final 20 games last season, has zero goals and three points in 17 appearances. Larsson has also spent time on the wing.

– Winger Marcus Foligno's only goal in 17 games was a pedestrian shot mishandled by Tampa Bay goalie Andrei Vasilevskiy.

– Center David Legwand, in the final season of a two-year, \$6 million contract, has zero goals in 17 games.

– Winger Matt Moulson, in the second season of a five-year, \$25 million contract, has four goals and seven points in 18 games.

– Ennis, who scored 20 goals in each of the last two seasons, has three goals and 10 points in 16 games, hardly the numbers he wants in what is supposed to be a breakout campaign.

To help ignite Ennis and Larsson, who played together late last season, Bylsma paired them together again Wednesday with Foligno.

“I know it’s going to come,” Ennis said about his offense. “I’m used to situations like this. If I stay onside, maybe life’s a little different. I know it’s going to come.”

A day after Ennis went offside late in the Sabres’ 3-1 loss to Dallas, negating Sam Reinhart’s game-tying goal after a coach’s challenge, he was still upset. Ennis also went offside in last Thursday’s 3-2 win in Florida, erasing his own goal.

“It was my goal that I screwed up on,” Ennis said. “Now we lose the game and we take a goal away from Reino. It bugs me a lot more.”

Part of the Sabres’ problem is O’Reilly, their top offensive threat, usually plays against the opponent’s top line. He shadowed the Stars’ Jamie Benn and Tyler Seguin, the NHL’s second- and third-leading scorers, all of Tuesday.

“That’s something we have to do a better job of, getting in situations where we can take advantage of a matchup and get people in the right spots to have success,” Bylsma said. “It’s tough. It’s not the ideal situation to play Ryan O’Reilly against a top line in the league and ask him to check the Benn-Seguin line.

“This guy’s also trying to score goals for us as well. ... It’s taking away from getting offense at the other end. That has to be distributed throughout the team.”

Getting a shooting mentality back would help the Sabres. After briefly leading the NHL in shots, they’ve dipped to ninth place with 30.5 a game and have been outshot five straight games.

“(We need to) just simplify and continue to do the simple things by shooting from everywhere,” Sabres winger Jamie McGinn said. “Dallas is a perfect example. They lead the league in shots because they do shoot the puck from everywhere, they put a lot of rubber to the net, eventually good things go in.”

Sabres' Evander Kane wants to play Thursday

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Why shouldn't he play, Sabres winger Evander Kane asked? He doesn't have any MCL pain and feels comfortable wearing a large brace on his left knee.

"I think you'll have a pretty good chance to see me tomorrow night in the lineup," Kane, out since Oct. 24, said today after practicing with his teammates inside the First Niagara Center.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma labeled Kane "a possibility" for the road contest against the St. Louis Blues.

The Sabres originally said the former 30-goal scorer would miss four to six weeks after New Jersey's David Schlemko hit him into the boards. He's at three and a half now.

"You know what they say, an MCL doesn't really heal up for 12 weeks, so it's just more of the fact I don't have any pain right now," Kane said.

Whether it's Thursday or in the coming days, Kane, who has one goal and three points in eight games, will return soon. He practiced today on the right wing beside center Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart.

"He's been telling me about his progress for four or five days now," Bylsma said. "So he's shown that in his skating. He's shown that getting on the ice."

In other news, Bylsma said center Zemgus Girgensons (upper body) won't accompany the Sabres on their two-game road trip. The Sabres also play Saturday in Dallas.

Bylsma expects Girgensons to play next week.

Meanwhile, center Ryan O'Reilly had a maintenance day today, Bylsma said.

Sabres' Kane likely to play Thursday

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 19, 2015

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Dan Bylsma confirmed that there's a possibility Evander Kane will play Thursday in St. Louis. Kane has missed 10 games with a MCL injury. The winger said, "I think you'll probably have a good chance to see me tomorrow night in the lineup, so I'm looking forward to that." Kane added, "Things went well today as I expected and I said I thought I'd have a chance to play on the trip and it looks like that's going to be the case."

Kane is doing well, but he isn't totally back to where he was before the injury, "You know what they say, a MCL really doesn't heal for at least 12 weeks, so I don't have any pain and I'm wearing a brace, so I felt comfortable out there and I'm in good shape, so why not play."

Kane did the same thing to the other knee last season in Winnipeg. He said he wore a brace then too, "I did yes, I think after wearing it last year I knew what to expect a little bit, so it only takes a couple of skates and I kind of get used to it and I forget about it being there."

Bylsma has been keeping close tabs on Kane. He said, "He's been telling me about his progress for about four or five days now, so he's showing that in his skating and showing that getting on the ice. The hardest practice he had was three practices ago in a workout on the ice, so he's skated well, he's looked really good and I feel good about the way he's skating."

Bylsma said Ryan O'Reilly missed practice due to a maintenance day and that Zemgus Girgensons will not go on the road trip to St. Louis and Dallas.

With Kane back and Girgensons out, Bylsma put Johan Larsson between Marcus Foligno and Tyler Ennis. Bylsma thinks Ennis has been pressing so he said he watched Larsson and Ennis from the end of last year, "Yes I went back and looked at the success he had last year and watched a lot of the goals and points plays and yes, that is one of the factors in it."

Wednesday's lines were:

Moulson Schaller Gionta

Kane Eichel Reinhart

Foligno Larsson Ennis

Deslauriers Legwand McGinn

Kane a possibility to play Thursday

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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A day after seeing one of their top defensemen return to the ice in the form of Zach Bogosian, the Buffalo Sabres are coming closer to being complete on offense as well. Evander Kane wasn't coy when speaking about his expectations for Thursday in St. Louis.

"I think you'll probably have a good chance of seeing me tomorrow night in the lineup," Kane said after practice Wednesday at First Niagara Center. "Things went well today as I expected and like I said, I thought I had a chance to play on the trip and it looks like that's going to be the case."

Kane has missed the past 10 games after sustaining an MCL injury on a hit into the boards on Oct. 24 against the New Jersey Devils. The timetable for his return was 4-6 weeks, but the progress he's made might allow him to return in just over three. Both Kane and the coaching staff thought he looked comfortable in practice on both Monday and Tuesday.

"Well he's been telling me about his progress for about four or five days now," Bylsma said after confirming that Kane was a possibility to play Thursday.

"He's shown that in his skating. He's shown that getting on the ice. The hardest practice he had was three practices ago off the ice and his workout on the ice. So that was his hardest day ... He's skated well. He's looked really good. I feel good about the way he's skating."

Though he's been told an MCL doesn't fully heal for 12 weeks, Kane's ability to play pain-free has been the deciding factor in his return. He'll wear a brace on his knee, something he gained experience doing while returning from a similar injury last season to his other leg.

"After wearing it last year, I kind of knew what to expect a little bit," he said. "It only takes a couple of skates to kind of get used to it and kind of forget about it being there."

On Tuesday, Kane skated on the right wing with linemates Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel. Prior to his injury, he tallied one goal and two assists in eight games despite having a number of chances to score more.

"I think my game was kind of a lot like the team's," he said. "I think we were still trying to figure some things out and I feel better. I think as a team we're in a better position than obviously we were when I got hurt. I'm looking forward to coming in especially against the teams we have coming up."

As Kane returns to the lineup, the Sabres lose another important forward for at least two more games. Zemgus Girgensons, who did not play Tuesday against the Stars, will not travel with the team on their road trip to St. Louis and then Dallas.

Bylsma is hoping that the forward will be prepared to play upon their return to First Niagara Center. The Sabres host the Blues on Monday night to begin a three-game homestand.

Ryan O'Reilly, meanwhile, was absent from practice on Wednesday for a maintenance day. The forward scored for the second-straight game and was assigned with defending Dallas' top line in 21:39 of ice time on Tuesday.

DEFENSE LOOKING UP

While Bogosian and Bylsma both admitted it may take a few games for the defenseman to fully return to game speed, his teammates already noticed the impact he can make after just one game.

"You look at everything he can do, like his whole body of work," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "Big, strong, physical defenseman that skates extremely well, sees the ice, removes pucks, he kind of does it all. I think he adds a lot of depth to our back end which is always important."

With Bogosian's return, a young Sabres defense is starting to show its true potential. Prior to the game Tuesday, Dallas coach Lindy Ruff praised Buffalo's unit as the type that may have staying power for years to come in the NHL.

The veteran Gorges and 21-year-old Rasmus Ristolainen have comprised Buffalo's top pair this season and are now joined by another promising duo in the 25-year-old Bogosian and 22-year-old Jake McCabe.

"I'd like to get Zach a few more games under his belt, Zach really can be the anchor of our group back there and [Gorges and Ristolainen] have been doing a real good job," Bylsma said. "A lot of the responsibility of checking and playing against top units has fallen on them and they've done a real good job of doing that."

"Jake McCabe, I think he's – I don't want to say he's light years ahead of where he was last year – but with his skating and with his ability, it looks to be a solid pair [with Bogosian]."

Bylsma has also paired a veteran with a young defenseman on the team's third duo. Cody Franson – a regular contributor on offense with nine points this season – played to the right of 23-year-old Mark Pysyk.

"Everybody wants to grow and make something good happen here together," Pysyk said. "All of the guys get along so it's fun to be a part of right now."

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BLUES UP NEXT

"It's the heaviest game that I've watched this year," Bylsma said of St. Louis' 3-2 win over Winnipeg on Monday. "Big, heavy offensive-zone, forwards forechecking – it's a big man's game and that's what they present. I don't think we've seen a team like that so far this year through the 18 games."