



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*November 5, 2015*

## Lightning-Sabres Preview

By Jon Palmieri

AP

November 5, 2015

Scoring goals and winning games remain issues for the Tampa Bay Lightning, but those haven't been problems in recent matchups with the Buffalo Sabres.

Coming off yet another disappointing offensive showing, the Lightning seek a seventh consecutive win against the improving Sabres on Thursday night.

After scoring a league-best 259 goals last season, Tampa Bay figured to have plenty of offense again in its attempt to remain among the league's elite following an appearance in the Stanley Cup Finals.

Since scoring 27 goals during a 5-2-2 start, the Lightning have managed a mere seven in the past six games, resulting in a 1-4-1 stretch.

They appeared to make progress with a 4-3 victory at Carolina on Sunday to end a four-game losing streak, but were shut down again two nights later in a 2-1 loss at Detroit.

Tampa Bay is 3-3-1 when allowing two goals or fewer after it was 35-3-3 in such contests in 2014-15.

"You give up two or less goals a game and it should be a layup," coach Jon Cooper said. "But we're losing an alarming amount of those games."

Defenseman Anton Stralman hit the crossbar in the final minute with the goaltender pulled for an extra attacker Tuesday, at least the third time in the game the Lightning hit a post or crossbar.

"With goal posts, there's nothing you can do," Alex Killorn said. "Sometimes they go in, sometimes they don't."

A meeting with the Sabres (5-7-0) appears to be coming at an opportune time for Tampa Bay (6-6-2), which has won the first two matchups this season and six straight in the series by a combined 21-4.

Ben Bishop stopped 24 shots in a 4-1 road victory Oct. 10 and turned away 31 in a 2-1 win at home a week later. He's won eight straight starts against Buffalo, posting a 1.48 goals-against average.

The Sabres, however, are enjoying their best stretch of the season with three wins in four games, with the only blemish coming in a 4-3 loss last Thursday at Pittsburgh in which they outshot the Penguins 53-29.

Matt Moulson and Sam Reinhart scored third-period goals and rookie Linus Ullmark had another strong performance with 29 saves in Sunday's 2-1 win over the New York Islanders.

"You go out and win a game in the third period," coach Dan Bylsma said. "You don't see that often on the road in the National Hockey League."

Ullmark has a .930 save percentage in his first three NHL starts and could be in net again in place of Chad Johnson, who has allowed 14 goals in his last three.

"It's amazing what a couple of big saves can do," Reinhart said of Ullmark. "It can turn two losses into two wins just like that. He's been great."

The Sabres and Lightning will conclude their four-game season series Tuesday at Tampa Bay.

"You don't see it that often," Buffalo defenseman Josh Gorges told the team's official website of facing the Lightning again. "We've got to make sure we're at our best; this is a team that was in the Stanley Cup Finals last year. They're where we want to be so it's a good test and a good matchup for us."

Tampa Bay is still awaiting the return of injured forwards Cedric Paquette (ankle) and Jonathan Drouin (lower body). Paquette has missed five games and Drouin four.

## ***Sabres continue to build confidence***

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

November 5, 2015

The best period of the Buffalo Sabres' season to date didn't come in a win. But it could have plenty of impact on the team's mindset heading into Thursday night's game against the Tampa Bay Lightning in First Niagara Center.

On Oct. 17 in Amalie Arena, the Sabres dominated the opening 20 minutes against the Lightning. Sam Reinhart got his first NHL goal and Buffalo outshot a team four months removed from the Stanley Cup final by an astounding 16-3 count.

The 1-0 lead didn't last, however, as the Lightning eventually pulled out a 2-1 won on Alex Killorn's power-play goal with 3:57 left. But the game, and especially the start of it, remains a reference point.

"We've talked about that game quite a bit, especially the first period," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Wednesday. "About how we want to play, how we need to play. That's how the Buffalo Sabres are trying to play every game. We feel like we deserved a little bit better fate the last game but they're a championship team for a reason. They know how to find ways to win games and they did against us."

"We felt we played a really solid game," added Reinhart. "It came down to both teams having a late power play and they capitalized and we didn't. It was tight right to the end and that first period was probably the best one we've played all year. There's a lot we can take out of that."

The Sabres have lost both meetings with Tampa Bay this year – but are 5-5 against the rest of the NHL. They have lost six straight to the Bolts for the first time since Tampa joined the NHL in 1992.

Still, there's a different feeling in the Buffalo dressing room now than there was even two weeks ago. The Sabres are suddenly just four points behind Tampa Bay in the Atlantic Division, closer than you would have expected them to be to the defending Eastern Conference champions even at this early stage of the season.

"We definitely owe them one and if you look at the standings, it's close," said winger Tyler Ennis. "You get on a roll here, you can really tighten it up."

The Sabres have won two in a row and three of their last four games in their best stretch of hockey in the last couple of years. Now they're gunning for the next step up in consistency.

It has been nearly 11 months since the Sabres won three straight games, dating to four consecutive one-goal victories when red-hot Jhonas Enroth was in goal from Dec. 9-15, 2014. The Sabres, in fact, won back-to-back decisions just twice over the season's final 51 games.

They again have a red-hot goaltender in rookie Linus Ullmark, but now have a much more polished offensive attack.

"We need to learn to develop a team that learns how to win every night, that knows how to win, that expects to win every night," Bylsma said. "That's not just coming to the rink with the right suit on. That's in how we play, how we act and what we do on the ice. That's something we are trying to develop."

Bylsma said a 1-4 start may have strained the players' belief level some but things have quickly pushed forward. The Sabres piled up 93 shots on goal in two games last week in splitting their Pennsylvania road trip, and came from behind in the third period Sunday to post a 2-1 win over the New York Islanders.

"It's a significant thing for this group," Bylsma said. "It will be nice. At some point in time this year we're gonna say we've won three in a row. We've got a chance right now to do it."

"We're playing with a little more pace, sharper as a team," said center Jack Eichel. "We're scoring more goals, starting to find a groove. Our coaches have been harping on us to play fast, play more north-south hockey."

The Lightning, meanwhile, have hit an early crisis point to their season, falling to 6-6-2 after Tuesday's 2-1 loss in Detroit. Tampa Bay is 1-4-1 in its last six games, either getting shut out or scoring just one goal in five of them.

Coach Jon Cooper has broken up the "Triplets" line that was the talk of the league last spring, moving Ondrej Palat up to play with Steven Stamkos and Ryan Callahan. Killorn took over on wing with Tyler Johnson and Nikita Kucherov.

The Lightning led the league last year in scoring at 3.16 goals per game. They're down to 2.43 this year and entered Wednesday's play just 19th.

"We had the same thing going and I'm sure every team has it," Eichel said. "You can't look at them as a team going through a drought. Because at any point, they can explode."

## **Sabres notebook: McDavid injury pushes back meeting with Eichel**

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

November 5, 2015

Scratch off that showdown between Jack Eichel and Connor McDavid next month in Edmonton. And forget about McDavid's meetings with Sidney Crosby until next season.

The NHL's No. 1 draft pick suffered a broken left clavicle during a tumble into the boards Tuesday night against Philadelphia. Oilers General Manager Peter Chiarelli announced Wednesday that McDavid needs surgery and will be out for a timetable the team would only list as "months."

The Sabres will play Dec. 6 in Edmonton in what will be their final visit to Rexall Place before the Oilers move to a downtown arena next season. Assuming all goes well in McDavid's recovery, the top two picks in the June draft will thus have their first head-to-head meeting March 1 in First Niagara Center.

"Hockey is a physical game and things happen," Eichel said after practice Tuesday. "It's unfortunate. It doesn't really affect me at all. I'm still playing and I'm sure he'll be OK."

While meeting reporters Wednesday, Eichel was focused on the Sabres' game here Thursday against Tampa Bay and the quest for their first three-game winning streak of the season. He pretty much brushed off McDavid talk.

"Hockey is a fast game," Eichel said. "There's injuries. Guys get hurt all the time. It's going to happen. I guess good luck to him in his recovery."

November was a pretty important month on the calendar of McDavid's rookie season. He was to have his first meeting with Crosby on Friday night in Edmonton, and a rematch later in the month in Pittsburgh. His first trip to Stanley Cup champion Chicago was Sunday night, and his highly anticipated return home to Toronto was slated for Nov. 30.

He will now miss all those games. McDavid could play against Crosby in next September's World Cup of Hockey, with Crosby expected to play for Team Canada and McDavid for Team North America.

But the teams are not scheduled to meet in the round-robin portion of that event, so it may not be until next season for Nos. 87 and 97 to be on the ice together.

Sabres forward Sam Reinhart has much more of a personal history with McDavid, being a key teammate with him on last year's gold medal squad for Team Canada at the World Junior Championships.

"That's tough. I feel bad for him," Reinhart said. "He was playing well but I'm sure he'll come back ready."

Coach Dan Bylsma recalled seeing Crosby meet McDavid in Pittsburgh when McDavid was just 14.

"I was anticipating him playing against Sid just as much as any fan," Bylsma said. "I'm disappointed to see that. Flying to the net there, I've just seen one replay and it looks like he catches an edge or his skate pops up off the ground. It's just disappointing from a fan's perspective to see him get injured."

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Thursday's game will be another reunion for the McGinn family. At 27, Sabres winger Jamie McGinn is the oldest of three NHL-playing brothers. Brother Tye, 25, was called up to Tampa Bay last week and figures to be in the Lightning lineup Thursday. Brock McGinn, 21, is in his rookie year with Carolina.

Tye's debut with the Lightning after being recalled from the minors was Sunday against the Hurricanes.

"That was very special. My parents couldn't be more proud and I'm definitely a proud big brother," Jamie McGinn said Wednesday. "It's pretty surreal."

McGinn said his parents will be at home in Florida watching the week's second head-to-head matchup of their sons.

"Normally they have a couple TVs and a computer going to catch all the games on the same night," he said. "They'll be watching. I'm not going to ask who they're rooting for. Hopefully we're not on the ice at the same time and they can choose pretty easy."

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The Sabres will hold their annual Military Appreciation Game during Saturday afternoon's visit by Ryan Miller-led Vancouver. There will be several tributes to former and current armed forces members during the game.

Sabres players will wear special camouflage jerseys during warm-ups. The jerseys will be auctioned on [auctions.nhl.com](http://auctions.nhl.com) beginning Saturday and running until Nov. 15 at 9 p.m. Military members will receive a 25 percent discount at the Sabres Store.

Members of the Sabres Sled Vets, a sled hockey team composed exclusively of veterans, will be on the ice for anthems and to take part in a ceremonial puck drop. Following the game, the Sabres Sled Vets will play a game against the Ohio Warriors, a veterans team based in Columbus, Ohio.

As part of the lead-up to the day, Eichel, Zach Bogosian, Zemgus Girgensons, Matt Moulson and Mike Weber visited troops at the Niagara Falls Air Force Base on Wednesday.

## Sabres face Lightning looking to build winning streak

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

November 5, 2015

**Season series:** The Tampa Bay Lightning have won the first two games against the Buffalo Sabres this season. Goalie Ben Bishop made 24 saves in a 4-1 victory Oct. 10 at First Niagara Center. Bishop made 31 saves and forward Alex Killorn scored a power-play goal with 3:57 left in the third period in a 2-1 win Oct. 17 at Amalie Arena.

**Lightning team scope:** Tampa Bay didn't practice Wednesday after losing for the fifth time in six games, 2-1 to the Detroit Red Wings on Tuesday. Forwards Jonathan Drouin (lower body) and Cedric Paquette (ankle) remain questionable. Drouin has missed the past four games and Paquette the past five. Forward Nikita Kucherov, who scored the only goal against the Red Wings, has two goals and two assists during a three-game point streak. The Lightning were 19th in the NHL entering games Wednesday with 2.43 goals per game after averaging a League-leading 3.16 goals last season. "We keep saying it's going to come, it's going to come, it's going to come, but it doesn't seem to be coming," Killorn told the Tampa Bay Times after the loss to Detroit. "We can't be doing the same thing over and over. That's insane. We've got to change things up."

**Sabres team scope:** Forwards Tyler Ennis and Jamie McGinn returned to practice Wednesday following maintenance days Tuesday. McGinn is looking forward to facing his brother, Tampa Bay forward Tye McGinn, and trying to get Buffalo on the board against the defending Eastern Conference champions. "I think we owe them one for sure," McGinn told the Sabres website. "We've been playing well of late so we're going to continue to focus on us and do the right things." Buffalo is attempting to put together its first winning streak of as many as three games since it won four straight from Dec. 9-15, 2014. Goalie Linus Ullmark earned his first NHL wins by defeating the Philadelphia Flyers last Friday and the New York Islanders on Sunday, but veteran Chad Johnson is expected to get this start.

## **Sabres' Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons starting to showcase offensive skills**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
November 5, 2015

BUFFALO – Just over six minutes into the third period Sunday, Sabres captain Brian Gionta deftly backhanded the puck along the left boards through the neutral zone into Islanders territory. Center Zemgus Girgensons then barreled in, retrieving the pass in the circle before slickly feeding Matt Moulson for the tying goal.

For Girgensons, the nifty assist in the Sabres' 2-1 victory against New York was his first this season and just his second point. For Gionta, the point marked the second straight game he created a pivotal goal.

The Sabres' offense has come to life recently, scoring 15 goals in the last five games entering tonight's tilt against the Tampa Bay Lightning inside the First Niagara Center. Not surprisingly, some contributions from Gionta and Girgensons have helped ignite it.

Still, nine games into his season, Gionta hasn't scored a goal. Girgensons netted his lone goal, a breakaway overtime winner in Philadelphia, nine days ago.

Let's deal with Gionta first. At 36, he's the Sabres' oldest player and most decorated goal scorer with 262. The winger endured his worst start ever a year ago, scoring his first goal 20 games into the season. He finished strongly, however, compiling six goals and 16 points in his final 14 appearances.

Gionta was arguably the Sabres' best forward during the preseason, earning duty beside rookie center Jack Eichel before a lower-body injury shelved him for the first three games.

"His last two games he's really in a much better spot ... playing how he needs to play," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Wednesday. "(He) hasn't gotten the result on the scoresheet yet ... but I think he's coming back from an injury, getting back and getting up to full speed.

"I don't think he was totally there the first couple games. I think his last couple games ... have been much better games from him, and if he keeps playing like that, he's going to get on the scoresheet for us."

Gionta usually gets on the scoresheet about 25 times a season, his full-season average since 2005-06. Clearly, the injury has slowed him.

"(I) felt good .... through the preseason games, and then you get an injury, it sets you back a couple weeks and you lose your timing and you got to find your game again," said Gionta, who has a point in three of the last four games. "It just took me a little longer to find it than I wanted to."

He added: "It took me a few games to find it, but I feel like the last four games I've been better and been on it."

Meanwhile, Girgensons, like several teammates, admittedly had some trouble adjusting to Bylsma's new system.

"There's a lot of new things to take in, a lot of new stuff that you have to know," Girgensons said. "At that time maybe ... we were thinking on the ice, not playing. So now it's all laying down all of the systems and everything. You just play, you don't think too much."

Bylsma believes Girgensons, 21, has recently "stepped up" and started "driving our team."

"Last game, in a time in the game where we needed it, he's the guy who steps up and (with) authority, he's carrying the puck up the ice, stepping out of the D-zone coverage," Bylsma said about the tying goal. "The way he's skating, the goal's a great example. ... The last handful of games that's what he's been doing for our team."

Having won three of the last four outings, the last handful have been the Sabres' best in almost a year. They're gunning for their first three-game winning streak since December.

"To be able to string a couple of wins together, to go on the road and come from behind and get a win ... to say we've won three of four, it's a significant thing for this group," Bylsma said. "At some point this year we're going to be able to say we won three in a row. We got a chance right now to do it."

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Besides being a coach, Bylsma counts himself as a hockey fan.

Oilers phenom Connor McDavid's first meeting with Pittsburgh Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby on Friday in Edmonton, one of the most anticipated matchups on the NHL schedule this season, was circled on Bylsma's calendar.

Now, with McDavid sidelined "months" with a broken left clavicle he suffered late Tuesday in the Oilers' 4-2 win against the Flyers, Bylsma, like most hockey fans, is wildly disappointed.

"I don't know if there could be any more disappointment that he's not going to continue playing," Bylsma said.

Eichel, the mega-prospect selected second overall in June after McDavid, said he had no reaction to McDavid's injury. Clearly, Eichel wants to distance himself from McDavid comparisons.

"Hockey's a physical game and things happen," Eichel said. "It doesn't really affect me at all. I'm still playing hockey, and I'm sure he'll be OK."

Of course, the Sabres' highly anticipated Dec. 6 tilt in Edmonton has lost most of its luster.

"He's just another player," Eichel said. "I'm not really focused on him."

McDavid, the greatest prospect since Crosby, had lived up to most of his hype, compiling 12 points in his first 12 games.

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Bylsma hasn't officially named his starting goalie for the Lightning, although it appears rookie Linus Ullmark will get his third straight nod.

## **Foligno finding his place under Bylsma**

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

November 5, 2015

Four coaches in four NHL seasons. Four different sets of expectations. Four years of fans asking, "Where does Marcus Foligno fit in?"

After a number of solid games in a row – quality play that earned him ice time in practice with Jack Eichel and Johan Larsson – it appears that question is finally being answered under coach Dan Bylsma. And it is being answered under better circumstances in which the team is stocked with quality forwards and a ready-to-win approach.

"I think everyone here respects Dan and knows this is it for the long run," Foligno said. "We want to make sure that we're not going back to where we were a couple years ago. Dan's been awesome. The whole coaching staff, I feel like we are back to teaching but also back to being professional. I mean, it's always been professional, but it's more like, this is our team and it's time to start rolling."

When Foligno was first called up from Rochester in 2012, he was supposed to simply be a big body, bringing size and toughness to a team that had been lacking (Re: Lucic ). But he brought more than some edge and his 6-foot-3 frame. He also scored.

Playing alongside Tyler Ennis, his current locker mate, and Drew Stafford, Foligno caught fire at the end of the 2012 season, scoring 13 points in 14 games.

Expectations shot through the roof like pumpkin sales at Halloween. Suddenly he was the next Lucic – no, the next Cam Neely! In a matter of weeks, the former fourth-round pick went from hoping to stick in the NHL to having Kevin Weekes of NHL Network project him as the following year's Calder Trophy winner. And it didn't help that his dad Mike is one of the most revered Sabres in the team's history.

There was a lot to like in Foligno's game, but asking for a point-per-game was lofty, especially considering the Sabres' decision to go into rebuild mode. Slowly but surely, they began shipping key players out, with Paul Gaustad and Jason Pominville the first to go, then Thomas Vanek and Ryan Miller to follow.

Following his blazing hot stretch, the young winger has scored 61 points in 189 games. Along the way, Foligno was shuffled up and down the lineup, playing with quality NHL scorers and AHL'ers alike, sometimes at center, sometimes at wing, sometimes at full health, sometimes through injuries.

While everyone on the team has changed linemates like square dancers change partners, Foligno's role is more clearly defined. It's easier to do your job when you know what your job is supposed to be.

"He's a big-bodied, strong, powerful skater," Bylsma said. "He should be a guy who's hard to handle with the puck (when) holding onto it and driving the net. (He should be) big in the slot area. He should be and can be our best forechecking guy. You saw the last two games on the first shift of the game he delivered two big hits. That's how he needs to play and he has to do it consistently."

Ahh, there's that word. One common thread throughout Foligno's experience with all four coaches is that they have all asked him to be more consistent.

"I'm just growing with the game," he said. "You have more and more years in the league, you figure out how to play at this pace....I think it's just about getting comfortable and playing with confidence. It's been 200 games now in this league and it's still about growing as a player."

Statistically, he has been consistent, though. In his four full NHL seasons, he has averaged between 0.26 and 0.38 points per game, with his career average at 0.36 points per contest. He has averaged between 1.07 and

1.17 shots per game. In terms of even strength scoring, Foligno has been better than Steve Ott over the past three years, better than Jordan Nolan, better than Gregory Campbell, better than Dustin Brown, better than Brooks Laich and on par with many who play a similar role.

Like many players, his Corsi numbers have jumped up and down based on linemates and quality of team. Last season he managed a 37.8% Corsi at even strength, while this season he is over 50%. Foligno said the improved numbers also have a lot to do with Bylsma's system.

"I think the biggest thing this year with our coaching staff is that they're very strict," Foligno said. "If you stick with it, it's going to work...if you do well within the system, it's going to benefit the team."

In small samples, Jack Eichel has been better in terms of puck possession when playing with Foligno. Doing his job – things like winning puck battles, causing turnovers and providing the occasional hard drive to the net – will result in making his teammates better. So instead of being asked to be Cam Neely, he can be a compliment to an impressive young group that can grow together. And he can finally know where he fits in as an NHL player.

## **Eichel, Bylsma react to McDavid's injury**

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

November 5, 2015

When Connor McDavid lost his balance and fell hard into the boards at Rexall Place, the entire hockey world collectively put its hand over its eyes and hoped the phenom would get up unscathed. After he rose to his feet looking stunned, hand on his shoulder, it was clear that everything was not OK.

The Oilers announced Wednesday that McDavid, who has 12 points in 13 games thus far in his rookie campaign, broke his collar bone and will be out "long term."

Hype and draft status will forever tie Jack Eichel to McDavid, whether he likes it or not. And it's pretty clear he leans towards not.

Eichel was asked several questions about McDavid's injury following Wednesday's practice at First Niagara Center. Buffalo's No. 2 overall pick seemed a little bewildered as to why he was being asked about an injured player from the Pacific Division, but acknowledged he saw the news.

"Hockey is a physical game, things happen," Eichel said. "It's unfortunate, but it doesn't really effect me at all. I'm still playing hockey and I'm sure he'll be OK."

McDavid leads all rookies in points and is Edmonton's second leading scorer. His broken collar bone now delays the hockey world's first look at McDavid vs. Eichel, which was set for Dec. 6 in Edmonton. Now it will have to wait until the Sabres and Oilers' second matchup in March.

"I remember when he met Sidney Crosby at 14 years old in Pittsburgh," coach Dan Bylsma said. "I was anticipating playing against him just as much as any fan. Just disappointed to see that.

Obviously he has 12 points in 13 games, so he's doing pretty well," Bylsma said. "As a fan, I would have liked to have seen him play."

## **Improved Sabres look forward to yet another rematch with Tampa Bay**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 5, 2015

Tyler Ennis and Jamie McGinn, both absent at Tuesday's practice, returned to the ice for Sabres practice at First Niagara Center on Wednesday morning. Both players are expected to play at home against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Thursday night.

For McGinn in particular, it will be special to get on the ice against Tampa Bay. His brother, Tye, was called up by the Lightning on Nov. 1 and made his season debut that day against the Carolina Hurricanes and their youngest brother, Brock.

Jamie and Tye have played each other once in an NHL game, in October of last season when Tye was with the San Jose' Sharks and Jamie with the Colorado Avalanche. But this marks the first time that all three brothers are in the NHL at once.

"It was definitely a special game that we haven't forgotten," Jamie said of their first meeting on Wednesday. "To start myself in the NHL and to see the younger two come up and follow in my footsteps is amazing and I'm a proud big brother for sure."

If Tye plays, it will be new to see a McGinn on Tampa's side, but seeing the Lightning across from the Sabres in faceoff circle certainly won't be. Thursday will mark Buffalo's third game this season against Tampa Bay, with their fourth and final matchup scheduled for next Tuesday in Tampa.

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

"You don't see it that often," defenseman Josh Gorges said of the front-loaded schedule against the Lightning. "We've got to make sure we're at our best; this is a team was in the Stanley Cup Finals last year. They're where we want to be so it's a good test and a good matchup for us."

The Sabres came out on the wrong end in both of their first two meetings with the Lightning. Tied at 1 in the second period of their first game, on Oct. 10, Tampa pulled away in the third for a 4-1 win. But their second matchup – at Amalie Arena on Oct. 17 – is one the Sabres really want back.

In that game, they outshot the Lightning 32-22 but couldn't capitalize on scoring chances in front of the net. Tampa scored the deciding goal with 3:57 to play in the third and Buffalo lost 2-1.

"That was a game where I think we felt like we played the way we wanted to and needed to play. It really stung, giving up a power-play goal in the last five minutes of the game to make it a 2-1 game," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We've talked about that game quite a bit, especially that first period ... that's how the Buffalo Sabres are trying to play every game."

"I think we owe them one for sure," McGinn said. "We've been playing well of late so we're going to continue to focus on us and do the right things. It starts with the small things and our energy level and how we play the game, and where we've found success is playing a full 60 minutes – we start the game right; we do the small things and continue to move forward from there."

Less than three weeks later, the Sabres have continued to improve their play. With a third-period, come-from-behind victory against the New York Islanders in Brooklyn on Sunday night, Buffalo became winners of back-to-back games for the first time this season.

The Sabres have won three of their last four games, the only blemish a 4-3 loss to Pittsburgh in which they outshot the Penguins 53-29.

Come Thursday, Tampa Bay might see a Sabres team that's already improved from their last encounter.

"I think we keep developing and changing and getting better every day," Gorges said. "I think we're playing a more consistent game than we were 2-3 weeks ago. The type of team we are hasn't changed and the type of team we're gonna be won't change but we're going to continue to get better."

Obviously, it's imperative for a team to string wins together to be successful, especially for the 5-7-0 Sabres as they continue to climb back towards a .500 record.

But for a young team that's still taking form, winning consecutive games is also an important ingredient to the development of a winning culture.

"I feel like we need to learn how to develop a team that's going to be a team that wins every night, that knows how to win every night, expects to win every night," Bylsma said. "Early on when you don't get results – you play well and you do some good things but you don't get results – it's hard maybe to get that concept."

"To be able to string a couple of wins together, to go on the road and come from behind and win in [Brooklyn], to say we've won three of four, it's a significant thing for this group. At some point in time this year we're going to say we've won three in a row. We've got a chance right now to do it."

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