



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

December 10, 2015

Sabres-Flames Preview

By Jeff Mezydlo

AP

December 10, 2015

Continued success at home has propelled the Calgary Flames to a modest winning streak that also happens to be their longest of the season.

The Flames can record a fourth straight victory by extending their run at home to eight Thursday night against the Buffalo Sabres, whom they've dominated at the Saddledome in recent years.

Though still among the NHL's bottom dwellers, Calgary (11-14-2) has gone 8-5-1 since a slow start, defeating San Jose 4-2 at home Tuesday to continue its improved play.

While its win streak is short in length, it's huge for the psyche of a club that had high expectations after snapping a five-year playoff drought last season.

"It's like a boxer that takes a real good one on the jaw in the first second of a fight," coach Bob Hartley told the Flames' official website. "Right now, we're pulling out of the hole that we created for ourselves ... I like the way we're progressing as a team."

That progression has yielded the seven-game run at home - the club's longest since winning eight straight Feb. 23-March 27, 2013. Mikael Backlund had a goal and an assist Tuesday while Mark Giordano and Dennis Wideman each added two assists in the Flames' first regulation victory in seven games.

"Winning seven in a row at home gives you a nice confidence boost," said Backlund, who has half of his four goals in the last three games. "We've been playing some good hockey."

Calgary has 12 non-shootout goals in the first three games of this five-game homestand. It scored 19 in dropping six of the previous nine overall.

"We knew we had a good team," Backlund said. "What we did last year was really good and we wanted to build on that. Having this streak at home is huge for us. We always hoped we'd have a good season and always believed in ourselves."

The Flames' league-worst power play, however, has gone 2 for 35 in the last 10 games after scoring once on seven chances against the Sharks.

Buffalo (11-14-3) has allowed one power-play goal in four of the last five contests.

The Sabres fell to Edmonton and Vancouver in the first two of their three-game trip, and they've been outscored 21-7 during a five-game skid at Calgary. Buffalo has lost seven of eight there, scoring two or fewer goals in each game.

The Sabres opened the scoring in the last two games but failed to take further advantage.

"We want better within this room," said veteran forward Brian Gionta, who scored Buffalo's first goal in Monday's 5-2 loss to the Canucks. "We know we're capable of that, so that's why it's so disappointing."

The Sabres also need to improve defensively, having allowed 15 non-shootout goals in the past four games.

Rookie Linus Ullmark made 26 saves Monday and has a 3.23 goals-against average while losing his last six starts. Teammate Chad Johnson posted a 1.33 GAA during a three-game winning streak that ended with Sunday's 4-2 loss to the Oilers, and he's expected to start this game.

Gionta has two goals and two assists in the last six contests.

Sabres' Eichel, Kane back together on same line

By Mike Harrington
Buffalo News
December 10, 2015

CALGARY, Alberta – Evander Kane's speed and physical play. Jack Eichel's speed and puck movement. Dan Bylsma liked the look early in the season. With the Buffalo Sabres in a funk on their Western road trip, the coach is going back to the combination of two of his team's marquee talents.

Kane and Eichel played together in the third period Monday in Vancouver as part of Bylsma's spur-of-the-moment moves in a game that was already lost. But they were back on a line in practice Wednesday in the Saddledome and will hook up with captain Brian Gionta during Thursday night's game against the Calgary Flames.

"They had some success earlier in the season playing together," Bylsma said. "There wasn't a lot of finish in that success but they had opportunities and I think it's two guys that have a ton of speed and can really play off each other. There are times Jack has been the speed factor on his line. To have another element of speed next to him is good and I think Evander can feed off that as well."

Jamie McGinn, on a career-high scoring streak of six games, will be taking Kane's spot with Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart. Kane was working well with O'Reilly with three straight multi-point games. But in the first two games on the trip, he went pointless with a minus-3 rating.

In Monday's game, however, Kane had 11 shots attempts, nine hits and was extremely active. Eichel is a little more of a puck carrier than O'Reilly, however, so Kane is ready to adjust.

"You have to find ways to get open when he has the puck and put yourself in a spot to receive it," Kane said. "Rather than support him, he likes to play a little more one-on-one and hold on to the puck. So when he has it, it's all about me getting open and vice versa."

Eichel has just two points in his last five games overall and also has just two in his last seven road games.

"It should be good," Eichel said of having Kane on his wing. "Hopefully we can utilize our speed and attack the other team. I don't know how many of us were really happy with our game in Vancouver. It's not the way we want to play as a team and I'm sure individuals aren't happy either."

Kane had plenty of good scoring chances while playing on Eichel's wing in October before going down for 10 games with a knee injury, but didn't convert too often. Then came the knee injury. Kane has slowly worked his way back to full speed since and has pretty much been Buffalo's best forward in recent games.

And Kane has been practicing as hard as he plays, at one point Wednesday slamming his stick on the glass three times in succession after he didn't like how a drill was going.

"Keep your mindset and it can help your consistency," he said. "You're not trying to kill your teammates, run around out there, take a one-timer and hurt a guy. Today, we needed a little bit more than usual after a couple tough losses. I don't think we were as sharp as we would have liked at the start of practice but it definitely got better."

Kane may have also been blowing off some residual steam from the Vancouver loss.

"I'm playing in front of my hometown family and friends and so are a couple other guys and we want to come out and have a much better performance than we had," Kane said. "Again we scored first and let that lead slip away. It was a tough game mentally, just the same as it was physically. I was frustrated, and I took penalties I shouldn't have."

The Sabres have scored first in the last two games, but promptly gave up three goals in Edmonton and two in Vancouver before the first intermission. So the good feelings of an early lead didn't last.

"What we need to do is go get the next one. Score two," Kane said. "It's playing the same way, playing hard. Just our intensity level mentally and physically needs to be higher and more consistent throughout the game. That's what good teams do, what winning teams do. No matter what the score of the game.

"If they're up 5-0, they're trying to get six. That's an attitude you have to have. It's not about embarrassing a team, it's about stepping on their throat and finishing them off. You can win a game in the first period. You score three and you've got a real good shot of winning the game. Look at Edmonton. They scored three and won the game. We have to have that mindset."

Eichel said the team's puck management has been an issue. The Sabres were sloppy most of the night Sunday in Edmonton, and played 11 good minutes in Vancouver before having similar struggles with the puck and running into penalty trouble.

"We're turning the puck over too much," Eichel said. "We've played well in second and thirds in terms of puck management but we're already behind the 8-ball down by a few goals. We're starting well with the first goal but we have to stay at it. We're deviating from the way we want to play."

Sabres notebook: Flames pick up pace after slow start

By Mike Harrington
Buffalo News
December 10, 2015

CALGARY, Alberta – The last thing the Sabres need right now is to run into a hot opponent. But that's exactly what they're getting Thursday night when they meet the Calgary Flames in the Scotiabank Saddledome.

The Flames were a surprise playoff team last year and have been a surprise doormat much of this season after a 1-5 start. But they've caught fire of late, posting their first three-game winning streak of the season with home wins over Dallas, Boston and San Jose. In fact, they've won seven straight at home and haven't lost here since Oct. 30.

The Flames got full marks for Tuesday's 4-2 win over the Sharks, a game that avenged a 5-2 loss in San Jose last week.

"That was a pretty complete game," said standout defenseman Mark Giordano. "We had some shifts where we really controlled it in their zone. It's a good game by our team and we have to keep this confidence and momentum going. Things are going better in terms of us bearing down on our chances and having pucks go in the net."

A weird Calgary stat? Tuesday's win was just their fourth in regulation all season as they hold a 6-1 record in overtime. Despite that, they entered Wednesday's games just four points out of a playoff spot in the Pacific Division.

"The confidence with our team keeps going up," said Sam Bennett, who was taken fourth overall two spots after Buffalo's Sam Reinhart at the 2014 draft. "It's nice we've been piling up wins at home lately and we're feeling very good about ourselves. Hopefully we can keep it going."

Second-year standout Johnny Gaudreau leads the Flames with 26 points in 27 games and three of his nine goals have been OT winners. His center, Sean Monahan, has eight goals and 11 assists. Karri Ramo has started 15 of the last 16 games in goal for Calgary.

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Sabres coach Dan Bylsma would not reveal his goaltender for the game against the Flames, although it almost certainly has to be Chad Johnson in the wake of Linus Ullmark's struggles that continued Monday in Vancouver. Jake McCabe's one-game exile to the press box is probably over as well. Bylsma wouldn't commit to using the young defenseman but pretty much let his cat out of the bag.

"Jake was fighting the puck and the situations he was in in Edmonton and needed to take a step back," Bylsma said. "But I also said after the game in Vancouver, 'Don't let me sit him out again. We need him back playing the way he can and being in the lineup.'"

...

Bylsma said he was saddened to hear about the retirement of Pittsburgh winger Pascal Dupuis, who was having side effects while battling blood clots and announced Tuesday he was stepping away from the game.

Dupuis played on Bylsma's 2009 Stanley Cup team in Pittsburgh and had consecutive 20-goal seasons for the Penguins in 2011-12 and 2012-13.

"I've got a lot of respect for Pascal, his career and what he did as a player," Bylsma said. "I know he's been going through a fight the last couple years. I want to congratulate him. It's disappointing to see he's retiring but I congratulate him on a great career and having fought through it and been a really good teammate.

"That was my first thought. I know he's disappointed stepping away from the game and it's over for him but congratulations on a great career. He did a lot of great things as a player."

Flames go for eighth straight home win, face Sabres

By Tim Wharnsby

NHL.com

December 10, 2015

SABRES (11-14-3) at FLAMES (11-14-2)

TV: MSG-B, SN360

Season series: The Buffalo Sabres and Calgary Flames each won at home to split the 2014-15 series. The Sabres defeated Calgary 4-3 on Dec. 11 and the Flames won 4-1 on Jan. 27. Forward Tyler Ennis led the Sabres with four assists. Joe Colborne had two goals and an assist for the Flames.

Sabres team scope: Coach Dan Bylsma reunited rookie Jack Eichel with Evander Kane in practice on Wednesday, according to WGR 550 Radio. The two started the season on the same line, but were recently split up. They had a few shifts in together in the third period of the Sabres' 5-2 loss against the Vancouver Canucks on Monday and took line rushes alongside Brian Gionta in practice. Jamie McGinn was playing with Eichel, but instead has replaced Kane on a line with Cal O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart. The Sabres continue to be without injured goalie Robin Lehner (ankle), defenseman Mark Pysyk (lower body) and forward Tyler Ennis (upper body). Buffalo has lost the first two of a three-game trip through Western Canada. Veteran forward Matt Moulson has not scored in 16 games.

Flames team scope: Defenseman Kris Russell, who has missed the past two games with a hand injury, did not practice on Wednesday. Defenseman TJ Brodie also was absent for a maintenance day and goalie Jonas Hiller left early because of sickness. The Flames have won the first three games of a five-game homestand for their longest winning streak of the season; they have won their last seven at games at home for their longest streak since winning eight in a row from Feb. 23 to March 27, 2013. Captain Mark Giordano has been one of the catalysts for the Flames, with two goals and five points in his past five games. "His game has definitely come back," coach Bob Hartley told the Flames website. "He missed a lot of hockey [last season]. There's no timeline to regain your game shape or your form or your confidence."

Sabres phenom Eichel growing into huge potential

By George Johnson
Calgary Herald
December 10, 2015

For six winters, Dan Bylsma had a front-row seat, toured 'round the continent, as ringmaster to the greatest show on hockey earth.

Under a big top of his own creation, Sidney Crosby was Emmett Kelly, the Flying Wallendas and the guy who allowed himself to be shot of a cannon six times per week for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, wrapped into one.

All that was missing? Maybe a calliope and limitless supply of cotton candy.

"Sidney Crosby was under that microscope from a much earlier age and a much grander scale," reasoned Bylsma on Wednesday, in his first season in charge of the Buffalo Sabres after half a dozen overseeing Sid the Kid in Pittsburgh. "Even coming to Western Canada it was a circus show. There would be ... hundreds of people.

"Certainly there've been expectations and eyes are on Jack. There is a big microscope but I don't think he feels it in the same way Sidney Crosby did, and does."

On this day, Jack Eichel is peeling off his gear following a 1:15 p.m. Sabres' ice availability. Upcoming, another first appearance in another among 29 cities curious about the No. 2 overall pick, right behind Connor McDavid, the latest in a lengthy line of projected prodigies.

There aren't hundreds of people at the Scotiabank Saddledome clamouring for a minute or two of Eichel's time. A few, only. Regardless, the 19-year-old hailing from the rather regally-named North Chelmsford, Mass., is used to the drill.

"I think I've dealt with it for a little bit now," he says, diplomatically, "so I don't think it's anything too new."

When asked if perhaps — if only from time to time, mind — he might secretly wish the assembled media mongrels on a particular day would slink away and crawl under a nearby rock, Eichel shrugs.

"It's part of your job and part of mine. That's the way I look at it."

Bless him.

In advance of career NHL game No. 29, he's willing but seems a trifle worn down.

"It's been good," says Eichel, who finds himself back on a line with another jackrabbit, Evander Kane, for Thursday's date against the Calgary Flames. "I need to get a lot better. There are a lot of things I need to learn. I think in terms of the pace of play and speed and things like that, I've adapted pretty well."

Those with far more experience in the matter marvel at the poise.

"I think he's handled it all extremely well," offers veteran blueliner Josh Gorges. "It's a tough situation for anyone to find themselves in but to be as young as he is ... he's a kid, never forget. A teenager. Luckily, his personality is calm, laid-back, easygoing and that really helps him not to focus on the circus outside of the rink, but on what he has to do to play the game."

To help Eichel's acclimation to the NHL, he's billeting with Sabres' left winger Matt Moulson, and has immediately been quickly accepted by the family — Matt, wife Alicia, three year-old daughter Mila and two-year-old son George.

"I talked to him a bunch of times, but I think the first time I met him was the first time he showed up in the driveway with all his clothes, ready to move in," says the 32-year-old Moulson, filling the role of older brother.

"He plays with the kids a lot at the house. He needs to stay active. He stays pretty busy for a young guy. When I was 19, I was in college (Cornell) so I was doing homework and not happy about that.

"He's part of the family. We love him like a family member.

"I've got Jack teaching my son how to stickhandle and skate."

And the outside demands on his time?

"When people have that type of skill," Moulson reckons, "I think they embrace being in the spotlight."

Eichel's undeniable skill level certainly hasn't disappointed anyone. With Johnny Gaudreau, for instance, that elusiveness, the Avatar-eyes vision, the ability to feel and avoid contact, are the obvious attributes that transform him into an elite young talent.

With Jack Eichel?

"Well, I could list 10 different things that make you go 'Wow!'" replies Gorges. "But the way he skates ... he barely takes two strides and he's all the way down the ice. That really sets him apart.

"It's fun to watch. He's the type of guy, watching him skate, makes you say to yourself: 'Man, I wish I could do that. If I could, this game would be a whole lot easier.'"

The early going of his pro career, unsurprisingly, has been a mixed bag. As it is, Eichel finds himself tied for the team lead in goals, with nine, and has collected 14 points. Not shabby learning the ropes but hardly the sort of production he was used to a year ago, on his way to a Hobey Baker Award as a freshman, and 71 points in 40 games for Boston University.

This, however, ain't Hockey East.

"You can't score every time you touch the puck and can't treat it like you can score every time you touch the puck," reminds Bylsma. "There's gotta be more respect for the game than that.

"I think Jack's also a guy who wants to take more on himself and sometimes he does that in the way he plays, trying to do it all. And, yes, I sense the frustration. He wants to do more and when it's not there, he has faced that.

"The Edmonton game and the Vancouver game they played him hard. They leaned on him and I sensed a bit of frustration with the treatment he's getting.

"I like that. I like that in a player. He knows he can be better. He wants to be better. He wants to be contributing more. And I think that's a strong suit for Jack."

The daily interrogation over, Jack Eichel, prodigy, busies himself with the mundane of being just a hockey player.

The circus, though, says Josh Gorges, isn't apt to be pulling down the big top anytime soon.

"As he gets better and better — and he will, believe me — that microscope is only going to get more intense, the attention will only grow," he cautions. "So this is good opportunity for him to learn about those outside expectations.

"Cause I have a sneaking suspicion that the attention's not going away."

The rundown about Calgary Flames' Brandon Hickey from Buffalo Sabres' Jack Eichel

By Wes Gilbertson
Calgary Sun
December 10, 2015

Jack Eichel was asked for a scouting report.

On somebody else.

For the Buffalo Sabres rookie saviour, Wednesday's query about a former NCAA Boston University Terriers teammate — Calgary Flames blueline prospect Brandon Hickey — seemed to be a refreshing curveball after the usual daily diet of questions about ... himself.

"He's a really good player — he's a real smart defenceman," Eichel said of Hickey, who'll arrive Thursday in Toronto for Team Canada's world juniors selection camp. "I think another great thing about him, something I noticed, is he's got a great one-timer ... It doesn't matter how hard you pass it, where it is, he can one-time anything. It's a skill not a lot of guys can do, and he's really good at it.

"He's a great player. He's smart. He understands the game. He skates well. He's really well-conditioned, so he can play a lot. I have a lot of great things to say about Brandon.

"Best of luck to him at the world junior camp. Hopefully, he makes it. That would be a great experience for him."

And hopefully, added the oh-so-talented teenager from North Chelmsford, Mass., Hickey is on the losing side of a much-anticipated Boxing Day matchup between Canada and Team USA in the world juniors opener for both sides.

"Well yeah, I'm not going to cheer for him," Eichel said. "I'll cheer for him personally. Hopefully, he scores and plays a great game and they lose to the United States."

No hard feelings, of course, because Hickey — now in his sophomore season for the NCAA's Terriers but definitely in the long-range plans for the Flames — is probably hoping Eichel scores, plays a great game and ... loses in Thursday's clash at the Saddledome (7 p.m., Sportsnet 360/Sportsnet 960 The Fan).

The second-overall pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, otherwise known as the shiny consolation prize in the Connor McDavid sweepstakes, Eichel has been as advertised for the Sabres.

The speedy centre is tied for tops on his team with nine tallies — most of which are worth watching (and re-watching) on YouTube — in 28 outings so far as an NHL freshman.

"I've got Jack teaching my son how to stickhandle and skate," quipped Eichel's landlord, left-winger Matt Moulson, after Wednesday's practice. "That's not something I'll be teaching him."

Moulson is selling himself a bit short, but there's no doubt Eichel — still a kid himself after turning 19 in late October — is a guy that aspiring puck prospects can certainly learn from.

"I think there's probably only a handful, if that, of people who can skate like him in the league," Moulson said.

"I think the biggest thing is his skating ability — how advanced it is already at an early age. It's pretty special how he can move out there," agreed Sabres captain Brian Gionta. "You'll see his explosiveness. Whether he has

the puck or not, his first two or three strides, he really pulls away from guys. He has a ton of talent. He's great with the puck. There's a lot of power in his game."

It's becoming obvious, too, that the 2015 Hobey Baker Award winner packs a lot of star-power.

In every city, there's a scraggly bunch of scribes waiting at Eichel's locker-stall. ("It's part of your job, and it's part of mine," Eichel said Wednesday with a shrug. "That's the way I look at it.")

In every city, fans are anxious to find out what all the fuss is about.

"I think people with that type of skill like him, they embrace being in the spotlight," Moulson said. "They embrace having everyone watch them."

On Thursday, it's Calgary's turn.

Sabres' Kane is leading with his new team

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 10, 2015

Calgary, AB (WGR 550) -- Evander Kane mentioned to me in training camp that he's at the point in his career where he wants to start being a good leader for his teammates.

Kane puts forth maximum effort on the ice and leads by example not only in games, but in practice.

In Wednesday's practice Kane made a bad play and got so upset he attacked the glass giving it three good whacks before heading to the other end muttering to himself. Kane said, "I think a great way to lead is by your play on the ice. I think it's hard to lead vocally, but I think both are important, but for me it's hard to lead if your play on the ice, your work ethic, your intensity and your compete level I think that's a great way to lead. It shows your teammates that you care, it show that you want to win and you're here to do whatever you can to make a difference in the game."

The last two games did not sit well with him and to follow that up with mistakes in practice is just unacceptable to him. Kane said, "Guys are pissed off, I'm pissed off, I'm playing in front of my hometown family and friends and we want to come out as a team and have a much better performance."

"It was a tough game mentally just as it was physically just because there were some questionable decisions that happened throughout the game. I was frustrated, I took a penalty that I shouldn't have."

The Sabres have improved their puck possession this season and did a great job of dominating the puck for the first 11 minutes of that game, but Kane said it went downhill fast, "A team like Vancouver they thrive on puck possession and playing in the offensive zone and we let them do too much of that."

I thought the team panicked once the Oilers and Canucks came at them with speed, but Kane and Josh Gorges don't agree, "I wouldn't say we panicked," Kane said. "I'd say we got off our game plan and off what we're good at. We got off our game and there was some frustration that led to those mistakes."

Gorges said there were other things than panic in play, "No, I don't think it's been a panic, I think it's a mindset, its situations where we're trying to make plays happen when plays aren't there and force things. Some teams come at you hard, they play in your face and we have to learn that sometimes the ugly plays are the right play to make, but lately we've been forcing it and it's been causing us turnovers, it's causing us to play in our own end and then we get scrambling and loose and that's more of what's been going on."

"It's a great opportunity for us to respond and finish the road trip off on a positive note, especially with a team like Calgary which has won seven straight home games."

It's been said many times that the Sabres are different, they've improved, but they're not there yet. Kane said, "I just think it's playing hard and our intensity level mentally and physically needs to be higher and more consistent throughout the game because that's what good teams do, that's what winning teams do, they have a high intensity level no matter what the score of the game is. If they're up 5-0, they're trying to get six and that's the type of attitude that you have to have." Kane added, "It's not about embarrassing a team it's about stepping on their throat and finishing them off."

Dan Bylsma said he had not yet told the goaltenders who is going to play Thursday and he said the same went for Jake McCabe so he wouldn't tell us if he was going to play or not. McCabe's play had started to slip and then got real bad in Edmonton.

Don't take the one game benching as Bylsma has lost confidence in the young defenseman because he hasn't. He did give a pretty good indication though that McCabe will be back against the Flames, "I'm not worried about him, Jake was fighting the puck and fighting the situations he was in, but I also said after the game in

Vancouver, 'don't let me sit him out again'."

Bylsma added, "Jake needed a break, take a step back. I think it was important for him to watch last game from the Press Box and I think it's going to be important for him to get back in and get back to the game that he can play for us."

Bylsma did shuffle the lines a bit for practice:

McGinn R.O'Reilly Reinhart
Kane Eichel Gionta
Larsson Girgensons Moulson
Deslauriers Legwand (C.O'Reilly) Foligno

Sabre stats: Pysyk's absence felt on both ends of the ice

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

December 10, 2015

It is easy to roll our eyes sometimes when you hear a hockey analyst say, "points aren't everything," because, well, the old score board doesn't keep tabs on hard work or simple plays. However we can give credit to that cliché if it is in reference to a player like Mark Pysyk, who is proving to be one of the Buffalo Sabres' most valuable players despite only scoring one point this season.

After spending most of last season in Rochester, the former first-round pick arrived in Buffalo this year as a finished product – a phenomenon Sabres fans have rarely seen from their young players over the past few seasons. Game after game, Pysyk quietly made perfect passes to start transition out of the Sabres' zone. He used top-end skating skill to close gaps on wingers trying to carry the puck into the offensive zone. He covered up for teammates' errors by winning wall battles with his stick.

Because the 23-year-old has rarely seen power play time and does not often attempt to carry the puck through the neutral zone on his own, he only has only posted one point (though the one assist was a brilliant pass to Jamie McGinn for a goal at the door step). But Pysyk is still contributing significantly to Buffalo's offense.

When the young defenseman has been on the ice at even strength, the Sabres are averaging 55.5 shot attempts (shots on goal, missed, blocked) per 60 minutes of ice time. The only Sabre creating more offense than Pysyk is winger Evander Kane. When he is not on the ice, the team only manages 47.6 attempts per 60.

Here is a look at some examples of how he has made offensive contributions.

Against the Penguins, Pysyk pinches in to keep a puck in the offensive zone. He wins a battle along the wall, keeping the play alive and it eventually results in a goal

Entering the offensive zone cleanly is a key to creating scoring chances. In this play, Pysyk is patient with the puck and rather than dumping it in and forcing his team to go on the forecheck, he freezes the defenders and makes a quick pass to Jake McCabe, who carries the puck into the zone and gets a shot on goal.

What doesn't often show up in highlight videos is Pysyk's simple breakout passes or ability to deny offensive zone entries by opponents. All those things show up in the numbers.

In terms of shot attempt differential (Corsi), almost every Sabre scores better in terms of puck possession while playing with Pysyk on the ice. Notice first how much easier the goalies' lives have been.

Player	With Pysyk	Without	Diff %	TOI
JOHNSON, CHAD	59.8	49.3	10.5	168:32:00
ULLMARK, LINUS	47.4	43.4	4.0	134:47:00
MCCABE, JAKE	50.7	50.1	0.6	98:19:00
EICHEL, JACK	46.4	45.9	0.5	86:46:00
ENNIS, TYLER	47.3	46.3	1.0	76:24:00
GIRGENSONS, ZEMGUS	57.3	48.2	9.1	75:11:00
LARSSON, JOHAN	51.7	48	3.7	68:49:00
REINHART, SAM	54.9	54.2	0.7	67:46:00
O REILLY, RYAN	59.5	50.2	9.3	66:45:00

FOLIGNO, MARCUS	44.9	46	-1.1	64:01:00
MOULSON, MATT	68.6	46.8	21.8	62:53:00
COLAIACOVO, CARLO	55.6	42.5	13.1	60:22:00
MCGINN, JAMIE	58.3	45.4	12.9	56:22:00
GIONTA, BRIAN	62	42.6	19.4	56:02:00
DESLAURIERS, NICOLAS	53	36.6	16.4	48:56:00
LEGWAND, DAVID	56.2	39.5	16.7	43:30:00
KANE, EVANDER	55.7	56.1	-0.4	41:46:00
WEBER, MIKE	73.5	50.8	22.7	37:37:00

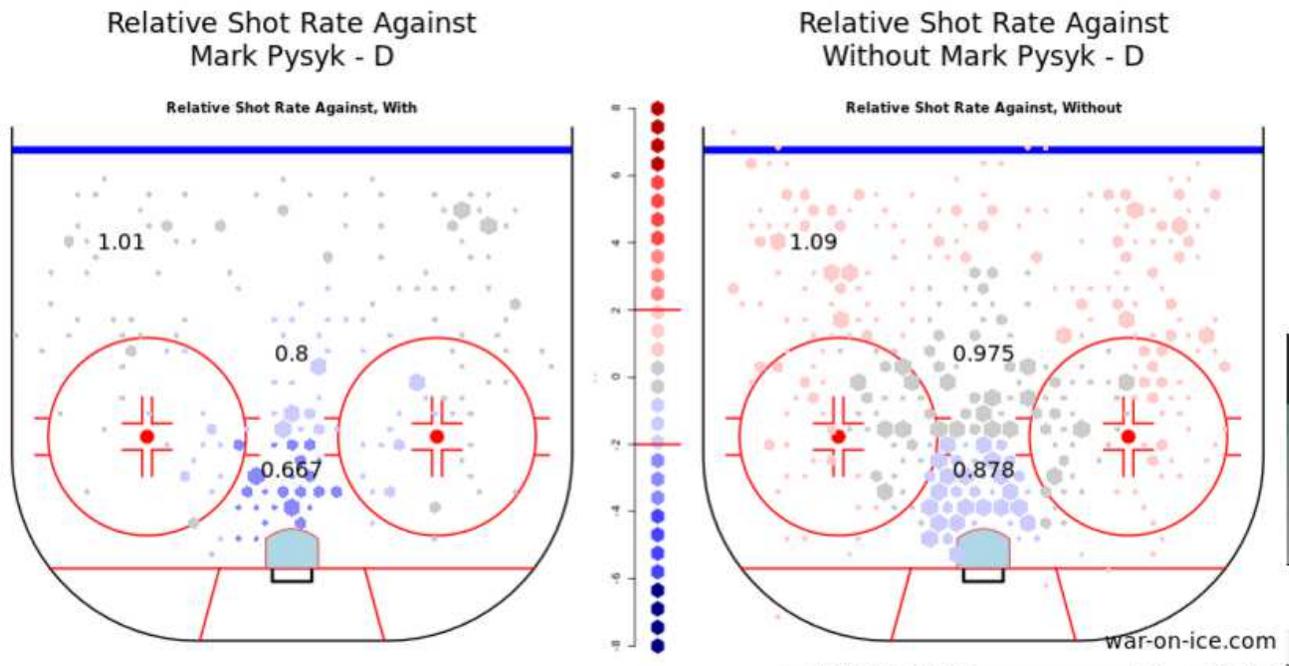
Pysyk is not skating yet, so it could be awhile before he gets back in the lineup. The Sabres, meanwhile, have dropped to 28th in the NHL in Corsi Percentage when the score is separated by one goal (Close) – meaning when score isn't affecting the shot attempt differential.

In the interim, the Sabres will need way more from some of their other defenders. Zach Bogosian has a 42.5% Corsi Percentage and his partner Carlo Colaiacovo is posting an underwhelming 45.5%.

Over the long term, more shots for and fewer against will most likely result in a better Goals For Percentage. In Pysyk's case, it already does. At +5.8% is only behind the Gorges-Ristolainen (+9.1%) pair in terms of Relative even strength Goals For Percentage – a statistic that compares a player's Goals For Percentage to the rest of the team.

One of the reasons is that teams have not had as many good chances to score when the former Edmonton Oil King has been on the ice. (Darker blue is better. Chart via war-on-ice.com)

Team Shot Rate Against (Relative)



While Pysyk's absence hasn't been the only reason the Sabres have been slipping in possession and struggling in the standings, it has been a big factor. He is also proof of how Corsi statistics can quantify some of what analysts are looking at when they suggest viewers look beyond the regular box score.

McGinn to see time on top line in midst of point streak

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 10, 2015

CALGARY – The last six games have been up and down for the Buffalo Sabres, who have lost two straight following a four-game point streak. But through this six-game stretch, there has been one constant: Jamie McGinn has found his way onto the score sheet.

McGinn's assist on Brian Gionta's goal in Vancouver on Monday extended his point streak to six games, a new career-high for the eight-year veteran. He could've had another, too. Although he wasn't credited, his work on the end boards led to Sam Reinhart's goal in the third period.

"I'm just trying to keep it simple out there," McGinn said. "Continue to work hard, I feel like I'm starting to get my game back. It was a long layoff last year, being hurt, so it takes a little bit to get back into it.

"It's nice to be back in the rhythm of things now and contributing, but at the end of the day I'm not really worried about that. I'm worried about winning hockey games."

McGinn has certainly been a factor in Buffalo's recent wins, going back to a two-assist performance in a 4-2 win against Carolina on Nov. 27. He scored the next night in Nashville, tallied a helper in Detroit, scored again against Arizona and now has an assist in each of Buffalo's last two games in Edmonton and Vancouver.

Prior to that game against the Hurricanes, he hadn't notched a point in his eight prior contests.

"It's just sticking with it," McGinn said. "There's going to be ups and downs through the year, the thing is how you come out of it and continue to work at it and don't get frustrated by it. We're all human and it does get frustrating. But you have to get past that, stick with it and work hard every day. The bounces are starting to go my way now."

McGinn has been rewarded for his play by the coaching staff when it comes to his spot on the depth chart. He began playing on a line with Jack Eichel in the win against Arizona on Friday, a decision that Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said he made after considering how McGinn had brought the best out of the young center earlier this season.

Bylsma pointed in particular to Buffalo's 4-1 win in Tampa Bay on Nov. 10. That game, the coach said, was Eichel's best of the year thanks in part to McGinn's presence on the ice.

In the third period against Vancouver, however, Bylsma switched McGinn to the Sabres' top line with Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart. The move resulted in Reinhart's goal 1:31 into the period. McGinn fought for the puck behind the net and fed O'Reilly, who wrapped around and found Reinhart in the slot.

"He's a smart player that puts himself in the right places," Reinhart said. "I think that we had success on that line and that's with him working down low. You saw right when he came on with us we created a lot of chances."

McGinn was beside O'Reilly and Reinhart again at practice on Wednesday, which is what Bylsma said we can expect to see when the Sabres play the Flames on Thursday night.

"When Jack was at his best, Jamie was playing next to him," Bylsma said. "He's a straight-line guy, he's a straight-forward guy, hard forechecking guy and that's what he's added and he'll be adding it next to Ryan tomorrow night."

Regardless of whom he plays with, McGinn's focus remains the same: keep it simple, play physical and open up ice for his linemates. If he does that, more points – and hopefully wins – could be on the way.

"I'm trying to be physical out there, bring energy, and trying to do the right thing," he said. Trying to get pucks behind, trying to create energy for the team – it's something we need right now and I think there are some guys who are doing a very good job of that ... that's what I want to do as well."

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