



Buffalo Sabres

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Ducks-Sabres Preview

By Nicolino DiBenedetto

AP

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Idle for nine of the past 10 days, the Anaheim Ducks are about to get much busier on this four-game East Coast swing.

The underachieving Ducks are looking to capitalize on their time off to get this trip off to a strong start and beat the Buffalo Sabres for a fifth straight meeting Thursday night.

Anaheim (11-13-5) has won three straight Pacific Division titles and finished with the most points in the Western Conference last season. The Ducks currently own the fewest in the West, and that's partly due to having the last five days off after falling 5-1 to Carolina to conclude a 3-2-1 homestand.

"When you don't get any points in nine days, other teams pass you and go by you," coach Bruce Boudreau said. "There's a sense of urgency to get points. Everybody knows the importance of that this week.

"The thing is, we have to win. We have to win because players want to win. They're used to winning and don't like losing, and we want to be where we should be."

The Ducks, 3-8-1 on the road, have outscored the Sabres 21-7 while winning four straight matchups.

After facing the Sabres (13-16-3), Anaheim's next three games come in a four-day span in the New York metropolitan area.

"The time off had given us time to work on things," center Shawn Horcoff said. "We worked a lot on special teams and we had some really hard practices. I think we're trying to keep the tempo high. We know the importance, as an organization, of this situation we're in. It's never easy playing one game with nine days off. I've never had it before."

Anaheim's power play is 1 for 16 over the past six games and has come up empty on its last 10.

Corey Perry leads the Ducks with 10 goals after scoring three times in the last five games. The star right wing has found the net six times in his last four meetings with Buffalo, including a hat trick in the latest.

The Sabres have lost four of their last six games after falling 2-0 to New Jersey on Tuesday.

"The guys are playing pretty well," Tyler Ennis said. "It's been a tough schedule. The last game (Buffalo's third in four nights) we might have been a little tired, but we've been in every game. There's a lot of good things the guys are doing well."

Ryan O'Reilly is looking to bounce back after his eight-game point streak ended against the Devils. The left wing had 11 points during that run before finishing as a minus-2.

O'Reilly has six goals and six assists in his last 15 meetings with Anaheim, while Rasmus Ristolainen has no points in four games.

Jack Eichel is mired in a five-game point drought. The star rookie has seven of his nine goals and three of his five assists at home.

The Ducks will be without center Nate Thompson, who was suspended three games without pay for an illegal check to the head of Carolina's Justin Faulk. Thompson was assessed a major for elbowing and a game misconduct.

Most Sabres take needed recovery day

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

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It may have been the most optional practice of the year for the Buffalo Sabres. There were just six players on the ice. One was goaltender Chad Johnson. One was Tyler Ennis, a member of the team's injured reserve list. They joined Cal O'Reilly, Jake McCabe, Nicolas Deslauriers and Carlo Colaiacovo for about a 45-minute session with the assistant coaching staff.

Heck, even head coach Dan Bylsma took a day off from the skates.

It was a needed break for the Sabres, who are in the midst of a brutal schedule. However you slice the segments, December has been a lot of games in not many days with a western road swing thrown in for good measure. When they host the Anaheim Ducks on Thursday in First Niagara Center, it will be their third game in four nights. They finish the week hosting Chicago on Saturday afternoon for five games in eight days before a luxurious six-day holiday break that includes five days with no practice scheduled.

"I feel like we're in an Olympic year with the number of days in between games," Bylsma noted.

In an ideal world, the Sabres coaching staff would moderate players' minutes during these scheduling streaks. But when you're down 1-0 in Detroit and it's late in the game and you feel a goal is near, there's not much thought to the reality of getting on a plane back to Buffalo to face New Jersey the next night.

"You'd like to get in games where you can manage everybody's minutes and spread them out. You get a game in Detroit where you get down, you're really pressing and you lean on 10 or 12 guys an awful lot," Bylsma said. "Then having to come back and play against New Jersey and see that situation where we're playing back-to-backs and five-in-eight nights, and I think you saw it a little bit in the team."

There may have been a lag to the Sabres game in the 2-0 loss to the Devils on Tuesday but regardless of the outcome, it was likely the Sabres would have followed that game with an optional practice.

That doesn't mean, however, there's no work.

Bylsma called it a "get what you need" day. Players had off-ice recovery sessions or worked rehabilitation exercises on nagging injuries or stiff and sore body parts. While the visible skills and strategies are done during practice, perhaps the most underrated component for players' ability on the ice is what they do after the game.

In the hockey vernacular, it's "taking care of your body." In the sports science world, it's called "recovery" and involves replenishing the body – with food, fluid and sleep – to be at optimal performance the next game day.

"I like to take my time. I usually try to eat right away but then stretch," said Ryan O'Reilly who leads all NHL forwards averaging 21:52 of ice time per game. "Some guys like to stretch right away and then maybe go eat. So you have to find what works for you and I think it developed early in my career when I wasn't playing a lot of minutes. It was more, I'd be trying to stay in shape, try to keep weight on and strength and maintain it. Now, playing these minutes, it's about taking care of myself, making sure I can maintain the energy and the pace I need."

So what's most important to O'Reilly after a game?

"Just eating the right things right away and stretching," he said. "I've gotta make sure after a game to calm down and relax my entire body so I can sleep and put myself in a spot where I can recover."

Sleep doesn't come easily after games. That's something McCabe has learned. Two years removed from his collegiate days at Wisconsin, the defenseman is on another new learning curve on how to best take care of himself off the ice so he can be his best on it.

"I think last year was the learning curve and even this year is another learning curve between the AHL schedule and the NHL schedule," McCabe said. "It's a little bit different but you know it's just one of those things where you've got to be prepared every single game. You've got to stick to your same routine and really just be dialed in when that puck drops."

His postgame go-to is a chilly soak.

"I'm a big fan of cold tubs," McCabe said. "I'll go in there for five or 10 minutes. Stretching. Our training staff is great so if we have bumps or bruises we work with them with that. Kinda just sleep too. Try to get as much sleep as possible. It's not easy to fall asleep after games but you've got to try to calm yourself down and get to bed."

Sabres notebook: Ennis feeling better, is close to returning

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

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The week-to-week status of Tyler Ennis has shifted to day-to-day.

The forward again skated on his own, then joined the handful of Buffalo Sabres taking an optional practice Wednesday morning at First Niagara Center in anticipation of Thursday's home game against the Anaheim Ducks.

As has been usual in Ennis sightings the last three weeks, he was sporting the red "no contact" jersey on the ice as he continues to come back from an upper body injury which he said happened in his last game, Nov. 23 against St. Louis. Since then, he's been on injured reserve, missing 11 games.

"It was just my last game," Ennis said Wednesday when asked when he suffered the injury. "So, body's a strange thing. I just didn't feel great and starting to feel really good now, which is a good thing."

The absence of Ennis has caused a shifting of lines by coach Dan Bylsma, perhaps more than usual in his scheme. It also has caused some shifts in the power play to make up for the loss of the dynamic playmaking ability of Ennis.

"We've had to make some adjustments and put people in different spots on our power play and that's all happened with Tyler out of the lineup," Bylsma said. "I know we're coming into a break here after the next two games and hopefully we can get him back sooner rather than later."

For his part, Ennis feels good both skating and with his off-ice workouts. Looking to find ways to mitigate the frustrations of sitting out, Ennis sees a silver lining in his prolonged time out of the lineup.

"I'm just going to look at it as an opportunity to get in great shape," Ennis said. "I've had some good skates and some good bike rides and I felt good. My body feels good. Maybe I can come back with a little more energy than some of the teams who have been in the grind the whole time. Maybe I'll be in better shape than them."

While neither Ennis nor Bylsma ruled out a return for Saturday's game against Chicago, the more likely scenario has the forward back after the holiday break.

But whenever he returns, Ennis knows what he wants to improve on from his first half of the season:

"Well I'd like to score a little more," he said. "I haven't put the puck in as much as I've wanted to. That's one thing I want to improve on but it just comes down to simplicity – working as hard as you can and doing the little things and the goals will come."

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Bylsma said forward Marcus Foligno is day-to-day with an upper body injury he suffered in the Sabres' 2-1 win in Detroit on Monday.

"It happened in the game in Detroit, which he played with through that game," Bylsma said.

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While the Sabres are trying to catch their breath from a brutal stretch of schedule that has them playing five games in eight days on the heels of a three-game western road trip, Anaheim is pretty well rested.

The Ducks arrived in town on Tuesday and their time on Wednesday included a workout at IMPACT Sports Performance in HarborCenter.

This after the Ducks had a six-game homestand. Anaheim went 3-3 in that stretch, opening with a 3-2 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks and ending with a disappointing 5-1 loss to Carolina on Friday.

The Ducks are last in the Pacific Division with 27 points (11-13-5) and 28th overall in the NHL ahead only of Columbus (11-19-3) and Toronto (10-13-6) heading into Wednesday's games.

Thursday's meeting with the Sabres kicks off a four-game northeastern trip for the Ducks, who face New Jersey, the New York Islanders and the New York Rangers before the holiday break.

"There's a sense of urgency to get points," Ducks coach Bruce Boudreau said. "Everybody knows the importance of that this week. The thing is, we have to win. We have to win because players want to win. They're used to winning and don't like losing and we want to be where we should be."

Back with the Ducks is winger Jiri Sekac, who has been out of the lineup with a serious ankle sprain since early November. Sekac completed a one-game conditioning assignment with the team's AHL affiliate in San Diego and skated with the team during practice at First Niagara Center on Wednesday.

"It was my choice after they offered me to go there," Sekac said of his game with the Gulls in which he scored a goal. "I agreed to it because I think it's better to actually find out if the injury is 100 percent, if I'm able to play instead of coming into a game here and then leaving halfway through. It was definitely helpful for me and I'm glad I went down there."

His return will be critical for the Ducks, who lost Nate Thompson to a three-game suspension for an illegal check to the head of Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Justin Faulk in their last game.

"I think, first off, he'll bring energy because anybody that's out and gets a chance to play is full of energy," Boudreau said. "He can skate. He's going to bring us some energy and speed. It's needed now that Nate is out for three games. It's important (that Sekac) is back and ready to play."

Ducks begin four-game trip at Sabres

By Joe Lane

NHL.com

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DUCKS (11-13-5) at SABRES (13-16-3)

TV: PRIME, FS-SD, MSG-B, BELL TV

Season series: The Anaheim Ducks swept two games from the Buffalo Sabres last season. The Ducks outshot the Sabres 44-12 in a 5-1 win on Oct. 13, 2014, at First Niagara Center. Anaheim forward Corey Perry had a hat trick, and goalie Frederik Andersen made 22 saves in a 4-1 victory on Oct. 22, 2014, at Honda Center.

Ducks team scope: Anaheim begins a four-game road trip and will play seven of its next eight away from Honda Center. The Ducks are three points out of a Stanley Cup Playoff spot and view the trip as a chance to climb out of the Pacific Division basement. "We have to win because players want to win," coach Bruce Boudreau told the Ducks website. "They're used to winning and don't like losing, and we want to be where we should be." Mike Santorelli will be the fourth-line center for Nate Thompson, who will serve the first of his three-game suspension for an illegal check to the head of Carolina Hurricanes defenseman Justin Faulk last Friday. Forward Jiri Sekac (ankle) is back from his conditioning assignment with San Diego of the American Hockey League and will play. Boudreau did not announce his starting goalie. John Gibson started seven straight games before Andersen relieved him in a 5-1 loss to Carolina. Goalie Anton Khudobin was assigned to San Diego on Tuesday.

Sabres team scope: Forward Tyler Ennis skated wearing a red, no-contact jersey during an optional practice Wednesday. Coach Dan Bylsma said Ennis, who has missed 11 games with an upper-body injury, could be moved from week-to-week to day-to-day. "That's a good sign for him, to see him get to another level," Bylsma told the Sabres website. "... He's had a couple of good days. ... Hopefully, he could progress tomorrow or the next day." Forward Marcus Foligno remains day-to-day with an upper-body injury, which could open the door for Cal O'Reilly to play his second game with Buffalo. The Sabres are in the middle of 10 games in 19 days, so Bylsma has been working to manage his players' minutes and energy levels. "Even today we were taking a day where you get what you need as a big recovery session and a rehab session for the guys to go through to try to get in the best health to be ready to play the last few games here," he said.

Sabres' Matt Moulson mired in long scoring slump

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Given the Sabres dramatically improved their roster this season, 20 or 25 goals seemed reasonable for winger Matt Moulson following two down years.

Heck, with two creative centers like rookie Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly available to feed him the puck, even 30 scores, a big number Moulson hit three straight seasons in Long Island skating beside superstar John Tavares, looked attainable.

So much for those thoughts. Moulson, 32, is battling a career-long 20-game goal drought entering tonight's home tilt against the Anaheim Ducks inside the First Niagara Center.

The veteran hasn't scored since Nov. 1 and has only four goals in 32 games, a stunning *10-goal pace* over a full season.

What has happened to Moulson, who's in the second season of a five-year, \$25 million contract?

"I think he's probably searching for that answer as well," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Wednesday. "He's definitely feeling a little gun shy, a little lack of confidence in those situations. You look to the last few games, he's had some opportunities in the areas where he has put those pucks in the net.

"I know he's searching for that answer right now. It's one we need him to come up with. He's a guy we count on and need to count on ... in those areas to produce for our team."

Moulson, however, hasn't produced much for the Sabres in three seasons, compiling only 28 goals and 82 points in 153 games. He scored a career-low 13 goals and 41 points last year, when he received a mulligan considering the Sabres fielded the NHL's worst lineup.

This season was supposed to be *much* different.

"I think I've had a chance to play with a lot of great players," Moulson said, "so I just have to find a way to produce."

He played with Eichel, who's living with him this season, and Evander Kane, another former 30-goal scorer, in Tuesday's 2-0 loss to New Jersey.

Moulson, who's at his best around the net, understands any type of goal will boost his waning confidence.

"It's amazing the goal off the leg or off the foot can elevate your confidence pretty quickly," he said.

But without even a "cheap" goal in the last six weeks, Moulson has started pressing and gripping "the stick a little too tight in front of the net," he said. He knows he needs to relax there, a place he's missed some strong scoring chances recently.

"I think sometimes you want to score so badly you shove it back into the goalie instead of maybe trying to make a move and not such a hard play," he said.

Moulson did that Tuesday, missing a prime power-play opportunity in front of Devils goalie Cory Schneider while under pressure midway through the third period.

He tied his season-high with four shots Tuesday but has only 58 this season, a 148-shot pace that would be a new low. He had a career-high 237 shots in 2010-11.

At least Moulson was on the ice late in a close game Tuesday. A night earlier in Detroit, Bylsma benched him for the final 7:17 of the Sabres' 2-1 comeback win.

Despite the frustrations, Moulson, one of the most affable Sabres, doesn't show much negative emotion. Walk into the dressing room, and there's a good chance he'll be smiling and laughing with his teammates.

"I don't think being negative does anyone any good – myself or any of my teammates included," Moulson said.

But Bylsma knows the streak has been wearing on Moulson.

"Regardless of his posture, (he's) extremely hard on himself," Bylsma said. "Even in the game, I might not see it from a greater distance away, but when he has an opportunity to make a play or situation where he can add and he doesn't, he's down on himself. I know he's spent a lot of time thinking about how he can be better and how he can add, and that's what he needs to work for."

Sabres' Tyler Ennis nearing return

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 17, 2015

BUFFALO – Slowly, Tyler Ennis, out the last 11 games with an upper-body injury, is improving. The Sabres winger skated in an optional practice with five teammates today and will likely join the morning skate Thursday.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Ennis could be moved from the week-to-week category to day-to-day.

If that happens, perhaps Ennis could play Saturday afternoon against Chicago, the last game before the Christmas break.

“We’ll see, see how I come along here,” Ennis said inside the First Niagara Center.

Ennis, who was injured Nov. 23, has taken the injury “as an opportunity to get in great shape,” he said.

“I’ve had some good skates and some good bike rides and I felt good and my body feels good,” he said. “Maybe I can come back with a little more energy than some of the teams, some of the players that have been in the grind the whole time.”

The season has been a tough grind for Ennis, who has only three goals and 10 points in 19 games and zero goals in his last 10 appearances. Bylsma hinted before Ennis was hurt he wanted to reunite him with Zengus Girgensons and Matt Moulson, the Sabres’ top line from last season.

In other injury news, Sabres winger Marcus Foligno, who missed Tuesday’s 2-0 loss to New Jersey, is still day-to-day with an upper-body injury. Foligno was hurt Monday, Bylsma said.

Ennis returns as Sabres hold optional practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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Only five skaters and one goaltender took the ice for an optional practice at First Niagara Center on Wednesday morning with the Buffalo Sabres currently in a stretch of six games in 10 days leading into the holiday break.

One of those players was forward Tyler Ennis, who donned a red non-contact jersey in his first skate with the team since Nov. 24. Ennis has missed 11 games with an upper-body injury, but Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said that his status had moved closer to being upgraded from week-to-week to day-to-day.

"Yeah, day-to-day is what I am now," Ennis said. "We'll see how I come along here. I'll practice with the guys tomorrow and just continue to get my conditioning back, get some workouts but yeah, I feel good right now."

Another player on the ice Wednesday was forward Cal O'Reilly, who made his Sabres debut on Tuesday night in place of injured forward Marcus Foligno. Prior to Tuesday, O'Reilly's last NHL game came with the Pittsburgh Penguins on Feb. 12, 2012.

After sitting for five games since his recall on Dec. 5, the forward savored his long-awaited return.

"It was pretty exciting, it's been a couple of years since I played an NHL game," he said. "I'm pretty thankful for this organization to give me a chance, especially alongside my brother. It's a pretty special thing; not many people can say they played a National Hockey League game with their younger brother."

Only two others can say that they've done it for the Sabres. When Cal and Ryan O'Reilly were inserted into the lineup on Tuesday, they became the first pair of brothers to play in the same game for Buffalo since Bob and J.F. Sauve were teammates from 1980-1983.

Cal and Ryan did play once together against the Toronto Maple Leafs in the preseason. But, as they expected, sharing this game felt different.

"Yeah, because it was an actual regular season game," Cal said. "The preseason was pretty cool, we got some shifts together, but to be in an actual regular season game it means a little more and the game means something so it's even more special."

Cal found out he would be in the lineup prior to warmups, when it was determined that Foligno wouldn't be ready to play. That 15-minute warmup, he said, was when the reality of his return struck him the most.

The Sabres lost 2-0, but the game still held a positive meaning for both brothers.

"Absolutely, yeah," Ryan said. "It's great seeing him out there ... Obviously it wasn't the outcome we wanted but to play together at this level, it's pretty amazing."

As for the game itself, Cal played 6:46 on a line centering David Legwand and Nicolas Deslauriers. He won both of the faceoffs he took and recorded a blocked shot.

"It was OK," he said. "I just tried to keep it simple and kind of click with my linemates, make sure we were solid defensively and not get scored on. I think we did a pretty good job. Obviously we [didn't] win and there's always a little bit more [to give], but I think for a first game back it was OK."

"He's a really intelligent player," Ryan said. "I thought he did very well, he moved in the right areas, he was doing little details that helped their line be successful."

Bylsma said that Foligno remains day-to-day with an upper-body injury, so it remains to be seen whether or not Cal's next chance will come against the Anaheim Ducks on Thursday night or beyond. When he does play again, he hopes to make more of an impact in the offensive zone.

"The more you play the more comfortable you get out there, the more confident you get carrying the puck making plays and creating some offense," he said. "I think a few shifts we were hindered in our zone a little bit and we want to get in their end."

WEDNESDAY'S PRACTICE

Defensemen Carlo Colaiacovo and Jake McCabe, forward Nicolas Deslauriers and goaltender Chad Johnson participated in the optional practice along with Ennis and O'Reilly. The Sabres also held an optional morning skate prior to the game against New Jersey on Tuesday.

All of this, Bylsma said, is part of managing the players' energy during a grueling stretch of the schedule. The Sabres have played four games in the past six days, flying from Calgary to Buffalo to Detroit and back again in the process.

The nature of those contests – all four were one-goal games at points of the third period – has made it even more difficult to manage his players' minutes.

"It's been a big part of the last two weeks when you look at scheduling," he said. "It's been not a lot of time on the ice and a lot of minutes in back-to-back games so there's a lot of managing of minutes, energy levels, and we'd like to get in games where you can manage everybody's minutes and spread them out."