



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*December 31, 2015*

## Capitals score 4 in third, rally for 5-2 win over Sabres

By Jeff Seidel

AP

December 31, 2015

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Washington Capitals entered the third period Wednesday night with key players injured, missing good scoring chances and trailing by a goal.

Then Alex Ovechkin scored twice during a four-goal rally and the Capitals beat the Buffalo Sabres 5-2 to extend their winning streak to nine games and overtake the Dallas Stars for the NHL points lead.

"Tonight, you saw some backbone when it was needed," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "It (was) an opportunity for guys to step up and they did. There wasn't any excuses."

The four-goal third period came after the team lost forward Jay Beagle to an upper-body injury and center Nicklas Backstrom to an unspecified injury in the second period. Beagle will undergo surgery and miss significant time. Backstrom's injury was not disclosed and he could play Thursday at the Carolina Hurricanes.

Washington already was playing without top defenseman John Carlson, out with a lower-body injury.

Despite that, the Capitals turned around Buffalo's 2-1 lead quickly.

"We are pretty relentless as a team," Washington goalie Braden Holtby said. "(Obviously, the injuries) makes it tougher. Those guys play a huge role on our team but we are just going to have to find different ways to win if they are out. "

Trotz shifted Marcus Johansson from left wing to center and moved Evgeny Kuznetsov to center on the top line. Those adjustments paid off when Kuznetsov set up Ovechkin's tying goal 1:24 into the third with a perfect pass, then fed Johansson for a re-direct during a power play.

That goal put Washington ahead 8:32 into the final period, and Andre Burakovsky scored 1:24 later. Kuznetsov had two assists during the third period, which also saw Ovechkin add an empty-netter. Justin Williams had the Capitals' other goal, in the second.

The Capitals improved to 28-6-2 and moved ahead of Dallas with 58 points.

Holtby finished with 25 saves and improved to 16-0-1 in his last 17 games. He has not lost in regulation since Nov. 10.

Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons scored for Buffalo.

This was the second part of a home-and-home series between the two teams. Washington won 2-0 in Buffalo on Monday night.

Gionta's first-period goal gave the Sabres an early lead, and goalie Chad Johnson helped Buffalo hold it until late in the second period despite heavy pressure from the Capitals.

Williams finally broke through with 5:52 left in the second. Johnson went behind his net to corral a loose puck and quickly tried to flip it away along the boards to teammate Zach Bogosian. Williams jumped in front, though, and picked it off. He quickly shot into the empty net to tie it.

The Sabres answered when Girgensons knocked in a loose puck from in front with 1:07 left in the period. Washington then tied the game early in the third and took the lead for good with its next goal, which Buffalo coach Dan Bylsma felt proved crucial.

"I think we sagged after the power-play goal," Bylsma said. "That was the difference in the game, really."

NOTES: Carlson missed his second straight game due to a lower-body injury after playing in 412 in a row. That was the second-longest run in Washington franchise history (behind Bob Carpenter's 422). He'll sit again against Carolina and could miss more time beyond that. ... C Michael Latta (arm injury) was out for this game but could return vs. Carolina. ... Trotz said they'll likely keep recently called up C Zach Sill with the team and add another defenseman from Hershey. ... Gionta's first-period goal ended an eight-game scoreless streak. ... Sabres assistant coach Terry Murray is a former Capitals player and head coach.

## Islanders-Sabres Preview

By Jon Palmieri

AP

December 31, 2015

Goaltending and penalty killing have been outstanding lately for the New York Islanders. They could be a very dangerous team if their last performance is indicative of where their offense is headed.

Buoyed by a remarkable run of penalty killing, the Islanders try to continue their New Year's Eve success Thursday night against the Buffalo Sabres.

New York headed into Tuesday's game in Toronto with four losses in five games and just three goals scored in those defeats. After losing the opener of their home-and-home series 3-1 on Sunday, the Islanders (20-12-5) got exactly what they were looking for on the road, as six different players scored and 13 recorded at least a point in a 6-3 victory.

Captain John Tavares tallied his second goal in 11 contests, Anders Lee ended a 15-game drought and New York matched its season high in goals.

"I just need to produce," Tavares said. "Have to find a way to get the puck in the net, whether it's me, my opportunities or creating more for my line mates."

Brock Nelson, Frans Nielsen, Nikolay Kulemin and Matt Martin also scored for the Islanders, who denied the Maple Leafs on four power-play opportunities to extend their streak to 35 straight kills over a franchise-record 15 games.

"It's our second year here together with (assistant coach Greg Cronin) and we're kind of figuring out what he wants us to do and our routes," Nielsen said. "We're working hard, sacrificing and hopefully we can keep it going."

With Jaroslav Halak nursing an upper-body injury, Thomas Greiss is likely to make his third consecutive start Thursday.

Signed in the offseason to back up Halak, Greiss has been as good or possibly better than the team's No. 1 netminder with a .932 save percentage that puts him among the NHL leaders. He has allowed two goals or fewer in 10 of his 16 starts.

One area that remains a concern for New York is a power play that is 1 for 24 over the last seven games. That unit ranks in the lower third of the league at 17.5 percent.

Playing on New Year's Eve has proven very beneficial for the Islanders, who are 8-0-1 in their last nine games on Dec. 31, including 18 goals scored during four straight wins.

The last-place Sabres (15-18-4) will be happy to see any team besides Washington after they were swept in a home-and-home set. Buffalo followed Monday's 2-0 home defeat by allowing four unanswered third-period goals in a 5-2 loss Wednesday.

Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons scored for the Sabres, who were enjoying a 2-0-1 stretch before running into the league-leading Capitals.

A struggling power play continues to also be an issue for Buffalo, which went 0 for 4 Wednesday and is scoreless on 21 chances spanning seven games.

"It's always about the next opportunity," coach Dan Bylsma told the team's official website. "We've had opportunities. We just didn't capitalize."

Chad Johnson made 38 saves Wednesday and could be rested in favor of rookie Linus Ullmark, who stopped 29 shots in a 2-1 road victory over the Islanders on Nov. 1. Ullmark, though, is 1-6-2 with a 2.69 goals-against average in his last nine starts.

Matt Moulson and Sam Reinhart scored third-period goals in that win at New York.

Moulson hasn't scored in 24 games and was a healthy scratch Wednesday. He tallied 118 goals for the Islanders from 2009-13.

The Islanders are 6-1-2 in their last nine at Buffalo.

## **Sabres pay the price for failing on power play**

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 31, 2015

WASHINGTON – The power play created chances but no goals, and goals are what the power play needs. Desperately.

The broken record about the power play continues because the Buffalo Sabres can't seem to find a power-play goal to save their lives.

Wednesday night the trend continued. The Sabres went 0 for 4 on the power play while the Washington Capitals scored the game-winner on the man-advantage in a 5-2 win at the Verizon Center.

With the game tied, 2-2, in the third period the teams exchanged a series of penalties, giving the Sabres a 4-on-3 advantage. They had numerous chances to score.

They didn't.

When the Caps responded minutes later with their own power-play goal to take a 3-2 lead, well that sapped most of the remaining mojo right out of the Sabres.

"The power play is the next play always... whether you've scored, you're at 25 percent or you're at zero percent, it's always about the next time over the boards, the next opportunity," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We had the opportunity tonight with the 4 on 3 and didn't capitalize. Am I concerned about that? That was our opportunity."

While that was the opportunity on Wednesday, the opportunity has now been squandered in seven straight games. That's how long the Sabres have gone without a power-play goal, putting them on an 0 for 21 streak.

"You want your power play to be successful," Jack Eichel said. "I think we've gotten chances. At the end of the day we need to bear down and finish it. It's been good for us for a while this year and it's been a weapon and it's also hurt us at times. I think we just need to get more consistent with it."

While the Sabres wasted their power-play chances, the Capitals gained momentum in the third.

Buffalo had taken leads of 1-0 and 2-1 on goals by the newly formed line with Eichel, Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons. With Chad Johnson making some spectacular saves, the Sabres were playing a fairly solid road game.

Then it all unraveled in the third.

Alex Ovechkin tied the game on the first shift of the third. Then came the power-play goal from Marcus Johansson.

"I think we sagged after the power-play goal," Bylsma said. "Again we had opportunity. They get that power play and they score I thought we sagged a bit after that."

The sag proved costly because just 1:24 later Andre Burakovsky scored to give the Caps a comfy 4-2 lead.

The Caps came at the Sabres hard and the Sabres blinked as they got away from their game plan and failed to recover. They threw 43 shots at Johnson, including 15 in the third.

"I thought we played well," Gionta said of the first 40 minutes with the Sabres taking the 2-1 lead. "We challenged their D, got it in deep worked it down low, got some second and third opportunities in front of the net. Did what we wanted to do. Then just third wasn't where we needed to be.

"They came hard but ... when they're doing that we've got to continue to stick with what was working, making their D go back. That was working for us all night."

Gionta's line with Girgensons and Eichel was also working all night. The trio combined for the two goals and 11 of the team's 27 shots. Eichel alone had six shots.

The goals for Gionta and Girgensons snapped scoring droughts of eight and 11 games, respectively.

"I think we just wanted to keep the game simple," Eichel said of finding instant chemistry with his new linemates. "Gussy and Gio both work really hard and I think we put pucks behind them, used our speed and came at them in waves. ... It was rewarding for us to be able to score two but at the end of the day it wasn't enough. ... We had our power play opportunities and we didn't capitalize on those. That was the difference in the game."

## **Sabres Notebook: Johnson keeps his focus on stopping pucks**

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 31, 2015

WASHINGTON – Chad Johnson went through his usual pregame routine Wednesday, working out with the team in the morning skate then taking time at center ice for his own stretches and drills and mental preparation.

That's how he rolls.

The goaltender that has emerged as the Sabres' top option stays focused on his own game, whether he's playing the NHL's hottest team or looking over his shoulder at the return of the Sabres' preseason anointed starter.

Johnson made his 21st start of the season against a Washington Capitals team that came into Wednesday night's game at Verizon Center on an eight-game winning streak and with the best record in the Eastern Conference.

The Caps are the only team in the NHL with three players who have 30 points and a plus-10 rating – Alex Ovechkin (31 points, plus-16), Nicklas Backstrom (32 points, plus-11) and Evgeny Kuznetsov (31 points, plus-17). The team ranks fourth in the league in goals scored (108).

But Johnson doesn't look at specifics of opponents. He notes tendencies in teams – the way they set up special teams or how they like to dump the puck into the offensive zone. Other than that, it's about how he plays the puck, not the opponent.

"For me, it's the same way. For my own sake, I can't really change my game with different teams," Johnson said. "I just try to prepare the same way with what I want to do, how I want to go into a game and where I want to be in certain positions. With any team, you watch power play, penalty kill and end zone stuff so I'm more prepared for different teams in that sense with what to expect with their game plan. But other than that, my game stays the same."

His game remains the same, too, as Robin Lehner worked his way back to the ice in Buffalo on Tuesday. Lehner was injured in the first game of the season and the high ankle sprain has sidelined him ever since.

In his absence, the goaltending duties fell to Johnson and Linus Ullmark. Both have been steady, putting the Sabres in positions to win.

Johnson has been particularly impressive since November. In his 14 appearances the last two months, he went 7-3-2 with a .939 save percentage and a 1.81 goals against average.

With Lehner inching closer to returning, Johnson feels no outside competitive pressure to step up his game even more. That kind of competition for him would be counterproductive.

"I think, regardless of who's here, whether it's Robin or Linus or somebody else, you're always competing with everybody," Johnson said. "I'm competing with the 6-year-old kid that's just starting to play hockey. You're competing against everybody in the whole entire world at this level. For me and my mindset, from Day One I've always just tried to worry about myself. Competing with other people is good but you don't always get the most out of yourself sometimes, but then other times you're trying to do too much. Regardless of who is here, I just try to challenge myself and work on my game."

"I'm excited to have Robin back because he's such a good guy, and I get along with him really well, and I think a piece of this team and the future. But again for me, the competition is always with myself. I think that focus for me is needing to worry about my own game. You can't worry about what anyone else is doing."

...

There really isn't a big rivalry between the Sabres and Capitals, but play twice in three days and throw in a fight and a little bit of nastiness starts to boil underneath the surface.

"I kinda like it," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "You get some animosity between teams playing them for six periods back-to-back whether there's anything physical in the game or not. It's back to back. You get sick of seeing the same people back to back."

"I think the second time when you play, if anything goes on, it tends to be probably a little more personal," Washington coach Barry Trotz said. "If you play one game, you move on. When you play a team twice, depending on how the game is going, I think it becomes a little more personal."

Of course, something did go on in the first game.

In Monday's 2-0 Caps win in Buffalo, Sabres forward Nicolas Deslauriers put a big hit on Justin Williams. A stick caught Williams in the face as he was falling. No penalty was called and the Capitals took exception to it so Michael Latta went after Deslauriers. Deslauriers got the best of Latta in the fight, injuring Latta's arm in the process.

"It can go both ways," Deslauriers said before Wednesday's game of the possibility of more retaliation. "It can be nothing or it could be something. For me, it's just play the same game. Be physical. I'm ready to respond to anything."

## Quick hits: Washington 5, Sabres 2

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

December 31, 2015

WASHINGTON -- With four third-period goals the Washington Capitals picked up their ninth straight win -- a 5-2 decision over the Buffalo Sabres in the Verizon Center Wednesday night.

The Sabres took leads of 1-0 and 2-1 on goals by Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons with Jack Eichel setting up both goals.

Then the Caps took charge in the third. Alex Ovechkin tied the game early in the period with a perfectly placed a backhand past Sabres goalie Chad Johnson.

With a series of penalties on both teams, it was Washington which cashed in on an Evander Kane hooking call when Marcus Johansson redirected a pass from Evgeny Kuznetsov for a 3-2 lead.

The Caps had all the mojo after that, adding another goal by Andre Burakovsky to cushion the lead while Ovechkin added an empty netter with 1:13 left.

**Beauty passing:** The line combination of Zemgus Girgensons, Jack Eichel and Brian Gionta paid off early for the Sabres. Driving into the Caps' zone, Girgensons had a perfect drop pass to a streaking Eichel who did what Eichel does -- jute, jive and dish. His sick backhand pass to Gionta set up the captain perfectly to beat Braden Holtby for a 1-0 Sabres lead just 5:48 into the game. It was the first goal for Gionta in nine games.

**Johnson with the save:** Chad Johnson was brilliant for 25 minutes for the Sabres. The netminder made some big saves, particularly in the second period when the Caps came in waves. He stopped Justin Williams, who was all alone in front of him, twice. He then robbed Marcus Johansson with a glove save.

**Johnson with the giveaway:** Then came the giveaway. He left the crease to play the puck behind the net. When players charged from one side he turned to play the puck up the wall on the other, but put it right on the stick of Williams. With no Johnson in net to stymie him, Williams buried his opportunity and tied the game, 1-1, with 5:52 left in the second. It was the Caps' 26th shot on goal.

**A goal for Zemgus:** The Sabres tied the game with 1:07 left in the second. Braden Holtby made the save on an Eichel shot, which he made from his knees, but followed Brian Gionta who was to his left in the crease and tangled with Caps defenseman Connor Carrick. So he didn't notice the puck bouncing in front of him or a hard-charging Zemgus Girgensons who pounded the puck home for a 2-1 Sabres lead. It was the first goal for Girgensons in 12 games.

**No guff:** Perhaps the on-ice officials had heard about the bad blood between the teams that sprouted in Buffalo on Monday. Just 27 seconds into the game Alex Ovechkin was called for roughing but the Caps killed off the penalty and the Sabres power play skid stretched to 0 for 18.

**But guff there would be:** Tempers started to flair at the end of the first when Tom Wilson took exception to Gionta's bump of Holtby and the two tangled behind the net. Zach Bogosian stepped in. Bogosian got two for roughing while Wilson got four. The Sabres still didn't score on the power play. That's an 0 for 19 skid if you're still counting.

**Ennis out:** Tyler Ennis took a hit from Ovechkin in the second period and went to the dressing room. He did not return and the Sabres said he suffered an upper body injury.

**The wins keep on coming:** The Caps extended their winning streak to nine games. They have earned a point in 17 of their last 18 games while their 28-6-2 overall record builds on the team's best start in franchise history.

**Protecting the barn:** The Caps are 15-3-1 at Verizon Center this year, tying the Dallas Stars for most home wins in the NHL. Washington has won nine straight at home, outscoring opponents 33-17 in that span.

**Scratched:** Matt Moulson sat for the first time this season as his offense continued to flounder. Inserted into the lineup in his place was Marcus Foligno, who missed the last five games with an upper body injury. "He's a big, strong, physical. Could be a dominate player with his size and skating ability and that's, when Marcus gets an opportunity, what we need to see from him," Bylsma said.

Carlo Colaiacovo was also scratched. For the Caps, it was Michael Latta, John Carlson and Stanislav Galiev.

**World Junior Report:** The American offense exploded for a 10-1 win over Switzerland at the IIHF World Junior Championships on Wednesday but Sabres prospect Will Borgen didn't pick up a point. The defenseman was a plus-1 in the win. Borgan has an assist and is a plus-2 through three games in the tournament.

**Next game:** The Sabres host the New York Islanders for an early New Year's Eve title. The teams meet at 6 p.m. in First Niagara Center. That kicks off a three-game homestand for the Sabres who host Detroit at 1 p.m. on Saturday and Florida at 7 p.m. Jan. 5.

## Capitals use big third to top Sabres, win ninth in row

By Katie Brown

NHL.com

December 31, 2015

**WASHINGTON** -- Down by a goal and two centers, the Washington Capitals scored four times in the third period to defeat the Buffalo Sabres 5-2 at Verizon Center on Wednesday for their ninth consecutive win.

"We are pretty relentless as a team," Capitals goalie Braden Holtby said. "We are pretty confident in ourselves and what we can do as a group. Obviously, [losing players to injury] makes it tougher...but we are going to have to find different ways to win if they are out. I thought we played [well] all game; it just seemed that the goals came in the third, but they could have come anytime. We've been successful because we have depth. We're not going to fall apart if we lose a couple of guys."

Washington centers Nicklas Backstrom and Jay Beagle each sustained an upper-body injury in the second period and did not play in the third.

Alex Ovechkin scored twice, Justin Williams, Marcus Johansson and Andre Burakovsky each had a goal, and Holtby made 25 saves for the Capitals (28-6-2, 58 points), who lead the New York Rangers and Florida Panthers by 12 points for first place in the Eastern Conference. Holtby is 16-0-1 in his past 17 games and has 24 wins in 30 games this season.

Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons scored for the Sabres (15-18-4), and Chad Johnson made 38 saves.

With Beagle and Backstrom out, coach Barry Trotz called on Evgeny Kuznetsov to play a bigger role. Back on a line with Ovechkin and T.J. Oshie, where he started the season, Kuznetsov adjusted seamlessly and assisted on two goals.

"He knows that he's played at the highest level against very good teams and has had success," Trotz said of Kuznetsov. "It's just a confidence. He's always had the ability and the skill, but it's now the confidence and the trust that I think he has with us as a staff. He trusts his teammates; he trusts everything about how he's playing."

Gionta scored his fourth of the season at 5:48 of the first period for a 1-0 Sabres lead. Center Jack Eichel fed Gionta with a toe-drag pass, and the Buffalo captain scored on Holtby's glove side.

The Capitals dominated play for most of the second period, but Johnson made saves on 13 of 14 shots to allow the Sabres to take a 2-1 lead into the third.

"We exchange power plays in the third period there and we have an opportunity to go up in the game with a power play, and then when [Washington] gets theirs, they go up with it," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "That was the difference in the game really."

Williams tied it 1-1 at 14:08. Johnson went behind the net to play the puck, saw Kuznetsov approaching and inadvertently backhanded the puck to Williams, who scored his 11th goal into an open net.

Girgensons put the Sabres back ahead with 1:07 left in the second. Holtby played Eichel's weak backhand from his knees from the top of the left faceoff circle into the air, and Girgensons, who was crashing the net, scored his third of the season from the top of the crease.

"It was rewarding for [his line with Girgensons and Gionta] to be able to score two [goals], but today it wasn't enough," Eichel said. "We had other chances. We come back and hit a couple posts, a couple crossbars as a

team, and we had our power-play opportunities and didn't capitalize on those; that was the difference in the game."

Capitals defenseman John Carlson missed his second consecutive game with a lower-body injury. Center Zach Sill made his NHL season debut in place of center Michael Latta, who was injured against the Sabres on Monday.

Sabres forward Tyler Ennis sustained an upper-body injury in the second period and did not return.

Ovechkin tied it 2-2 with his goal at 1:24 of the third period. Kuznetsov's backhand pass from behind the net found Ovechkin in the goal mouth, and his backhand shot beat Johnson.

"I think maybe the beginning of the second period, [we] start to put the puck in the net, through the net and try to find rebounds and some traffic," Ovechkin said. "We knew it was going to come. Our second goal was huge. [Kuznetsov] made a pretty good play."

Johansson gave Washington its first lead of the game with a power-play goal at 8:32 of the third. He tipped in Kuznetsov's shot from in front of Johnson for his eighth goal.

Burakovsky scored 1:24 later to make it 4-2. It was his third goal of the season and first in 25 games, dating to Oct. 23.

Ovechkin scored an empty-net goal with 1:13 remaining to make it 5-2. He has 20 goals this season and is five shy of 500 in his NHL career.

Backstrom will travel with the Capitals and might play against the Carolina Hurricanes on Thursday.

## **Capitals dump Sabres 5-2**

WGR 550

December 31, 2015

Washington -- Four unanswered goals in the third period helped the Washington Capitals upend the Sabres 5-2 on Wednesday night. It was the second win for the Capitals over the Sabres in the last three days.

### **Scoring**

- All three Buffalo forwards combined to get the team on the scoresheet first. Brian Gionta capped the chance by sliding the puck between the legs of Braden Holtby. Zemgus Girgensons created the opportunity with a nice drop pass for Jack Eichel, who feathered a pass to the captain.
- Chad Johnson made a play he would like back, and the game was tied as a result. The goaltender played the puck behind his net, but slid the puck to Justin Williams who swung to the front of the net and scored his eleventh goal of the season.
- Late in the second it was Jack Eichel again helping create the chance that leads to a Sabres goal. He won a face-off and flung the puck at the net, which went straight up in the air. Once it came down Girgensons was at the top of the crease to slam it home past Braden Holtby.
- Buffalo tried to weather the proverbial storm that the Capitals threw at them to start the third period, but it proved to be too much. Alex Ovechkin took a nifty pass right at the front of the net and did not miss. This was just moments after Zach Bogosian preserved the Sabres lead by sweeping the puck off of the goal line and away from the net.
- A second Evander Kane penalty of the third period proved to be too much for the blue and gold. Marcus Johansson tipped home a nice Evgeny Kuznetsov pass at the front of the net for their first lead of the night.
- Andre Burakovsky's third goal of the season doubled the Capitals lead. At the time of the goal Washington had a 7-3 advantage in shots.
- Alex Ovechkin capped the night with his second goal of the game with an empty net score. It capped a furious comeback by the home team.

### **Game Notes**

- Gionta's goal was his first in nine games.
- The two teams combined for 25 shots in the first period. Buffalo had 14 shots, while Washington recorded 11.
- Tyler Ennis left the game in the second period after a check by Alex Ovechkin. The Sabre forward took the brunt of the hit in the back and shoulder area and crashed to the ice hard. Ennis was able to finish his shift and skate to the bench on his own. He did not return to the game after suffering an upper-body injury according to the team.
- Buffalo had a 4-on-3 power play opportunity early in the third, but did not get a quality chance on goal.

### **1st Period**

#### **Goals**

5:48 - BUF - Brian Gionta (4) (Jack Eichel, Zemgus Girgensons)

#### **Penalties**

0:27 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (2 min., roughing)  
12:10 - BUF - Tyler Ennis (2 min., tripping)  
17:30 - WSH - Tom Wilson (2 min., roughing)  
17:30 - WSH - Tom Wilson (2 min., roughing)  
17:30 - BUF - Zach Bogosian (2 min., roughing)

### **2nd Period**

#### **Goals**

14:08 - WSH - Justin Williams (11) (unassisted)  
18:53 - BUF - Zemgus Girgensons (3) (Jack Eichel)

#### **Penalties**

5:55 - BUF - Johan Larsson (2 min., hooking)

### **3rd Period**

#### **Goals**

1:24 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (19) (Evgeny Kuznetsov, TJ Oshie)  
8:32 - WSH - Marcus Johansson (8) PPG (Evgeny Kuznetsov, Matt Niskanen)  
9:56 - WSH - Andre Burakovsky (3) (Marcus Johansson)  
18:47 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (20) ENG (unassisted)

#### **Penalties**

3:44 - WSH - Marcus Johansson (2 min., boarding)  
4:54 - BUF - Evander Kane (2 min., tripping)  
5:51 - WSH - Alex Ovechkin (2 min., high sticking)  
7:26 - BUF - Evander Kane (2 min., hooking)

## Third-period lapses lead to loss in Washington

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

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**WASHINGTON, D.C.** — Alexander Ovechkin continued to hurt the Buffalo Sabres on Wednesday night, and he did it in more ways than one. The captain of the Washington Capitals scored to tie the game, drew the penalty that led to the go-ahead goal and added an empty-netter to nail the door shut in a 5-2 Washington win at Verizon Center.

The loss concluded a home-and-home set between the Sabres and Capitals. Ovechkin also scored in their first meeting, a 2-0 win for Washington on Monday night at First Niagara Center.

After coming out of the second period with a 2-1 lead, the Sabres allowed the Capitals to score four-straight goals in the third.

"They come out and they're a skilled team," Sabres forward Jack Eichel said. "We've got to be better in our own zone as a whole, harder to play against. [We had] a couple costly turnovers and you can't turn the puck over to a team like that."

Eichel tallied the primary assists on both Sabres goals, which were scored by linemates Brian Gionta and Zemgus Girgensons. Chad Johnson made 38 saves for Buffalo in the loss.

Justin Williams, Marcus Johansson, and Andre Burakovsky tallied for Washington in addition to Ovechkin's two goals. Braden Holtby made 25 saves to extend his streak to 17-straight decisions in which he's earned at least a point in the standings.

Ovechkin produced a game-high 10 shots and 15 shot attempts, but he didn't score until early in the third period. With his team trailing 2-1, he received an offering from T.J. Oshie behind the net and beat Johnson to tie it up with 18:36 still left to play.

The Sabres seemed primed to regain the lead when Ovechkin was called for high-sticking less than four minutes later, but it yielded the opposite result. After Washington killed the penalty, Ovechkin exploded out of the box with his team in transition and drew a hooking call of his own against Evander Kane.

Johansson cut in front of the net to score on the ensuing Capitals power play, giving them a 3-2 lead they never relinquished.

"I think we sagged after the power-play goal," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Again, we had opportunities — they get that power play and they score; I thought we sagged a bit after that."

Just 1:24 after Johansson scored, he took the puck away from Gionta in the corner and fed Burakovsky to make it 5-3. The score held until Ovechkin scored on the empty net with 1:13 remaining.

Buffalo continued to struggle to generate offense with the extra man, going 0-for-4 on the night and extending their streak to seven games without a power-play goal.

"The power play is the next power play, next play always," Bylsma said. "Whether you're at 25 percent or you're at zero percent, it's always about the next time over the boards, the next opportunity. We had the opportunity tonight with the 4-on-3 and didn't capitalize."

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## **ENNIS EXITS EARLY**

Tyler Ennis left the game early with an upper-body injury after being on the receiving end of a hard hit against the boards by Ovechkin. He went to the dressing room and did not return.

Ennis has only played in three games since returning from the upper-body injury that caused him to miss 12 contests from Nov. 25 to Dec. 17. Bylsma had no further information on his status after the game.

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## **A POSITIVE CHANGE**

Bylsma said before the game that he switched Eichel to a line with Girgensons and Gionta for defensive reasons, but it was their offense that stood out on Wednesday. The trio combined for both of Buffalo's goals, beginning early in the first period.

Girgensons received a stretch pass from defenseman Cody Franson and dished the puck behind his back to Eichel. The rookie glided from right to left across the slot, pulled the puck back to evade a defender and delivered a beauty of an off-balance backhand pass across the net to Gionta, who tipped in the goal to give Buffalo a 1-0 lead 5:48 into the game.

"I thought, for the most part tonight, we had a lot of good looks," Gionta said. "We challenged hard and we had some good opportunities."

After Washington tied it up in the second, the line struck again to regain the lead. This time, Eichel backhanded the puck towards the net from his knees. It deflected off net-front traffic, bounced high in the air and landed in the blue paint. With Gionta demanding Holtby's attention, Girgensons scored the puck on an open net.

"Any chance you get to play with guys like that, it's fun to play," Girgensons said.

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## **A DISAPPOINTING GOAL**

Johnson had been outstanding in making the first 24 saves of the game for the Sabres, none better than when he robbed Justin Williams midway through the second period. Johnson stopped an initial shot by Williams with his left pad and then quickly pulled it back against the post to stuff the rebound attempt.

Johnson's first mistake came not in net, but rather behind it – and it was Williams who capitalized. The Washington forward picked off an attempted pass by the goaltender and scored on a wide-open net to tie the game 1-1 with 5:52 remaining in the second.

"They'd had some good looks and he'd made some great saves up to that point," Bylsma said. "That one, [there was] miscommunication and it's a disappointing way to give them a goal."

Ovechkin tied the game for Washington 1:24 into the third period for his first goal of the game. The Capitals' captain was dished an offering from behind the net by T.J. Oshie and beat Johnson with a backhand.

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## **BACK TO BACK TO END THE YEAR**

The Sabres will return for one last contest in 2015 at First Niagara Center when they host the New York Islanders on Thursday at 6 p.m. Buffalo previously beat New York 2-1 on Nov. 1 at Barclays Center.

The contest will conclude the sixth of 15 sets of back-to-back games for the Sabres this season. After the loss on Friday, Buffalo is 2-4-0 in the first game of back-to-back sets and 2-3-0 in the second game this season.

Thursday will also see the return of Tux & Pucks at First Niagara Center, where fans are encouraged to dress up in formal wear to celebrate New Year's Eve. There will also be a guaranteed \$30,000 50-50 raffle pot and a postgame celebration at (716) Food & Sport where fans can watch the ball drop on the restaurant's 38-foot video screen. Reservations are recommended and will be available online at **[716FoodandSport.com](http://716FoodandSport.com)**.