



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 26, 2016

Brassard has career-high 5 points, Rangers beat Sabres 6-3

By Tom Canavan

AP

January 26, 2016

NEW YORK (AP) — Derick Brassard ended a month of scoring woes with the best night by a New York Rangers' player in five years.

Brassard scored two goals, set up crucial third-period tallies by J.T. Miller and Mats Zuccarello and finished with a career-best five points while the Rangers blew a two-goal lead and came back to beat Buffalo 6-3 Monday night for their eighth straight win over the Sabres.

"We knew it was only a matter of time," Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh said of Brassard, who has battled a flu bug. "You get a tough illness like that, it's tough to get your body back to feeling the way you want to feel as a hockey player. It's great to see him break through before the break."

Brassard is the first Ranger to tally five points in a game since Ryan Callahan on Mar. 6, 2011 vs. Philadelphia (four goals, one assist). He also is the first to have four points in one period since Sean Avery on Mar. 17, 2007 vs. Boston.

"For me, I have been struggling the last two weeks to find some offense and I hope this will give me some confidence," said Brassard, who had two goals and an assist in his last 11 games.

Miller said playing with Brassard has been great.

"If you asked him he probably wished over the last couple of games he could have brought more production but at the same time, he plays the same way every game," Miller said. "He still brings it and this was a great example of what kind of threat he is with and without the puck."

Miller snapped a tie, Zuccarello added a power-play goal and Brassard scored into an empty net after the Sabres made it 3-3 to allow the Rangers to head into the NHL All-Star break with three wins in four games.

Rookie defenseman Dylan McIlrath and Viktor Stalberg also scored for the Rangers.

Zemgus Girgensons scored twice in a 1:13 span early in the third period to rally Buffalo from a 3-1 deficit. It was his first game after missing four with an upper-body injury.

Brian Gionta also scored for Buffalo, which lost its third straight game overall. Rookie Jack Eichel assisted on both of Girgensons' goals.

This is the Sabres' first eight-game losing streak against the Rangers. They play in Ottawa on Tuesday night in their final game before the break.

Girgensons stunned the Rangers and the Madison Square Garden crowd with his quick scores, which wiped out a lead that came courtesy of Stalberg and Brassard.

Girgensons snapped a shot in close past Henrik Lundqvist at 4:31 and he beat the goaltender with a backhander on a breakaway at 5:44.

"I didn't want to get frustrated throughout the year," said Girgensons, who had three goals in his first 40 games. "It's been a long time. It's not fun when you lose but I did like to get two goals. It's not that bad."

A minute later Miller put New York ahead for good with his fifth goal in the last six games. Jesper Fast sent a cross-ice pass from the right circle that tipped off the stick of a Sabres' defenseman and gave Miller a shot at an open net against a defenseless Chad Johnson.

"If it doesn't hit off that stick, Brass has a tap-in," Miller said.

Zuccarello increased the lead to 5-3 less than 3 minutes later, one-timing a cross-ice pass from Derek Stepan on New York's fourth power play. Brassard added his second goal in the final minute, scoring into an empty net.

Stalberg had given New York a 2-1 lead with a spinning shot late in the second period and Brassard scored when Fast's pass deflected off his skate and in.

McIlrath and Gionta exchanged goals in the first period.

NOTES: This was the first of three games between the teams this season. ... Rangers F Rick Nash missed his second straight game with a lower-body injury. ... Rangers D Dan Boyle was a healthy scratch after playing in the last 24 games. ... This was Rangers coach Alain Vigneault's 1,019th game, tying him with Pat Burns for 19th place in NHL history. ... Sabres F Evander Kane played in his 400th NHL game. ... Eichel has five goals and 13 assists in his last 17 games.

Sabres-Senators Preview

By Nicolino DiBenedetto

AP

January 26, 2016

Bobby Ryan's mouth provided the motivation while his stick helped get the Ottawa Senators back in the win column. That's not usually a problem against the Buffalo Sabres.

The Senators look to continue their success against the last-place Sabres on Tuesday night before both teams enter the All-Star break.

Ottawa (23-20-6) lost for the eighth time in 12 games after giving up three unanswered goals in the third period of a 5-2 loss to the New York Islanders on Friday. The effort was the final straw for Ryan, who ripped his teammates for a lackluster third period and failing to work for each other.

The Senators responded with a 3-0 win over the New York Rangers two days later with Ryan scoring his 17th goal of the season.

"When you put yourself out there and you make the comments, they're going to echo throughout the room," Ryan told the team's official website. "It felt like I did what I said I was going to do, and everybody followed along.

"I thought the guys that are in the leadership positions stepped up and led the way."

Ryan has been doing his part with four goals and two assists during a five-game point streak. That's two more points than he had over the previous 10 games.

He's got eight points over his last six meetings with Buffalo (19-26-4), including six in the past four at home.

Erik Karlsson has seven goals with three assists in his last eight home matchups with the Sabres, finding the net in a 3-2 win March 6. His 51 points lead all defensemen, and he's accumulated 16 in the past 10 home games.

The Senators are 13-1-3 in their last 17 meetings with Buffalo, going 7-0-1 at home over that stretch. They won the last matchup on the road 3-1 in the season opener for both teams Oct. 8.

The Sabres, occupants of the Atlantic Division cellar, have lost 10 of 14 and three in a row after falling 6-3 to the Rangers on Monday.

Zemgus Girgensons provided a bright spot, scoring twice after missing four games with an upper-body injury. The tallies also ended the center's seven-game drought and brought his season total to five after he had a career-high 15 in 2014-15.

"I didn't want to get frustrated throughout the year," Girgensons said. "It's been a long time. It's not fun when you lose but I did like to get two goals. It's not that bad."

Ryan O'Reilly is looking to snap a scoring drought of his own. The left wing leads the Sabres with 17 goals and 40 points, but he's gone eight straight games without finding the net and is a minus-8 over that stretch. He was a minus-3 and didn't even register a shot against the Rangers.

O'Reilly also failed to get a shot against the Senators in October, extending his goal drought to five games with them. However, he's chipped in with six assists over that span.

Sabres continue mood swings

By Mike Harrington
Buffalo News
January 26, 2016

NEW YORK – One thing that's gone a little unnoticed about the Buffalo Sabres' latest drive to the bottom of the NHL standings is the wildly inconsistent nature of their season.

The Sabres are in yet another downturn after Monday's 6-3 loss to the New York Rangers in Madison Square Garden, a game that was tied with 15 minutes left. It was Buffalo's third straight defeat on the heels of a 4-1 stretch that featured three road wins.

Big swings have been the norm since mid-November. The Sabres went 0-4-2, 3-0-1, lost three straight, bounced back to go 4-1-1 in their next six, dropped six straight and then entered these latest two runs.

Some of it is youth and inexperience. Some of it is underachieving from veterans. All of it adds up to a real chance of a third straight last-place finish overall.

With Columbus' 5-2 win over imploding Montreal on Monday, the Sabres are just one point ahead of the last-place Blue Jackets. One.

Suffice to say that was not in the plan once Jack Eichel was in the fold.

"That consistency aspect of our game is something we want to get better at," said Eichel, who assisted on Zemgus Girgensons' two third-period goals that got the Sabres even at 3-3. "We've put ourselves in situations to win games but it seems like we're finding ways to lose."

"Obviously there's some frustration in the room. We want to get over that hump to that next tier of competitive teams and be able to come away with points in these games."

When the issue was brought out to coach Dan Bylsma, he first exhaled in agreement before pondering the point.

"You can look at stretches of hockey and say we've played good but the consistency game-in and game-out? We haven't had it," Bylsma said. "We haven't found ways to stay in hockey games, be in hockey games and win hockey games. ... It's something we don't have in our game right now."

With Buffalo down, 3-1, and nothing happening early in the third period, lightning struck twice.

Girgensons took a kicked puck from Eichel and beat Henrik Lundqvist high at 4:31 and then tied the game on a breakaway off an Eichel feed at 5:44.

After tallying one goal in 18 games, it was suddenly two goals in 73 seconds for the Latvian.

"I was just in the right place at the right time," Girgensons said of the first goal. "It was a little bit lucky I was there. I just had to keep going. It's been a little bit frustrating but you can't get that in your head. You have to keep working."

The Sabres couldn't stand prosperity.

A Rasmus Ristolainen giveaway at the Rangers line led to a 3-on-2 break. Jasper Fast's pass hit the stick of Zach Bogosian and ricocheted directly to J.T. Miller for a tap-in at 6:44 that put the Rangers ahead.

"It's two shifts later we give up a 3-on-2 against," Bylsma said. "You get back to even in the third and it's disappointing to give up a goal so easily to let them have the game."

Other than Eichel, Buffalo's big names struggled in this one as Bogosian, Ristolainen, Evander Kane and Ryan O'Reilly all posted minus-3 ratings.

O'Reilly, Buffalo's lone all-star, has not scored a goal in eight games and has a minus-14 rating in his last 13 games. Kane was woefully lax getting back into the defensive zone on a pair of goals, including the Miller winner. New York's first tally, by defenseman Dylan McIlrath, deflected off Ristolainen's stick, and a bounce of Bogosian's stick redirected the puck to Miller for his goal.

"Weird bounce off our defenseman's stick right over to them and they get the lead again," Eichel said of New York's fourth goal. "That's a tough one to swallow."

"It was great we were able to tie it but we just weren't good enough to sustain pressure," said captain Brian Gionta, who scored the Sabres' first goal. "We weren't able to handle their speed through the neutral zone and that's what made us pay."

In the final analysis, the Rangers scored four goals in the third period, with Derek Brassard giving them a 3-1 lead at 1:06 and hitting the empty net with 36 seconds left. Brassard had a career-high five-point night and his four-point third period was the first by a Ranger since Sean Avery did that against Boston in 2007.

The Sabres have one game left before the break, Tuesday's encounter at Ottawa. The Blue Jackets and Canadiens meet again, this time at the Bell Centre. A result similar to Monday would leave Buffalo alone looking up at the entire NHL. Again.

"We have the game against Ottawa, the last one we have before the break," Bylsma said. "And it's one we have to look to and say we need to win."

Sabres notebook: Lehner set for return to Ottawa

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

January 26, 2016

NEW YORK -- The Buffalo Sabres' first trip of the season to Canadian Tire Centre is Tuesday night and the game against the Ottawa Senators figures to be an intensely personal one for goaltender Robin Lehner.

It will be the first time back in his former rink for Lehner, who is almost certain to get the start in net after Chad Johnson played Monday's game against the New York Rangers. Acquired in a draft day trade from the Senators, Lehner was downplaying the return prior to Monday's game.

"It's been some time now. I have to look at it as nothing special really other than seeing some friends on the team and people after the game," he said. "It's just another game where you look to play well and hopefully get a win.

"I knew I was going to play one of these two games. They asked me and I said it really doesn't matter. ... But it will be a fun game against a lot of good friends and with some good memories."

Lehner played 28 minutes of the season opener against the Senators before suffering the high ankle sprain that kept him out of the lineup for three months. He's 0-3 since his return despite a .936 save percentage and 2.36 goals-against average.

"It was a little weird in the beginning of that first half game. But it's been a few months now and I really feel a part of this team now," Lehner said. "Leaving Ottawa was really a mixture of a lot of things. I was injured, had a tough stretch, Andrew Hammond played so well, there was a chance for them to save a little bit of money. There were a lot of things. But I'm happy here."

Lehner has been particularly happy with his play of late, despite the lack of victories. The Sabres have scored just two goals in his three starts and Lehner has been playing in hard luck the last two games as he stopped 75 of 79 shots but got no reward despite plenty of quality work with goaltending coach Andrew Allen.

"Stuff is really nicely coming together," Lehner said. "I feel like a better goalie this year than I was last year. And even with a long-term injury, that's a pretty good place to be. The ankle is still sore sometimes but it's very functional. There's a few situations where you still feel it but that's getting better. The medical staff has really helped me out here."

Matt Moulson's goal less streak hit 36 games and counting Monday as the the veteran was back on a line with his housemate, Jack Eichel, and winger Zemgus Girgensons. Eichel said prior to the game he was hoping to help Moulson snap out of the skid.

"I don't know how many guys go through a tough stretch like this and work the way he does," Eichel said. "He's at the rink every day, brings a good attitude to the rink and the locker room. Living with him, he never brings home the fact he's in this drought. You would never know. Just the way he handles it, you can learn a lot from that. He's definitely a professional."

Eichel said he will be doing everything to help Moulson get a goal, even if that calls for unorthodox means.

"The guy lets me live at his house and does everything for me. Of course, I want to help him," Eichel said. "If I could, I'd like to take a slapshot off his" butt.

Top defense pair Rasmus Ristolainen and Zach Bogosian each played 28 minutes, 15 seconds in Friday's loss to Detroit. It was a season high for Bogosian and the third-highest time on ice total of the year for Ristolainen -- all in the last three games.

Since joining as a pair, Ristolainen has played 30:15, 28:17 and 28:15, while Bogosian has gone 26:16, 24:18 and 28:15. How feasible were those kind of minutes with another game coming Tuesday night? The pattern continued Monday as Ristolainen played 28:12 while Bogosian clocked in at 25:16.

"I think you do have to be aware of that and concerned with that. You also have to be in the moment," said coach Dan Bylsma. "You want to win the hockey game, put the best guys out there to give you a chance to do that. If that's Zach and Risto for 30 minutes, then it might be 30 minutes and we'll figure out Ottawa."

"You go into every game on its own and if you're worried about the next game you're not focused enough on the one that's right in front of you," added Bogosian. "During the course of a game, you try to be as smart as you can be about your minutes. You can be smart about it if you're aware of how many times you're jumping over the boards."

Ristolainen, of course, is a 21-year-old who's not worried about fatigue. He said postgame recovery is the key.

"Eat well, sleep well, get rest. That's your recovery," he said. "I feel like I'm in pretty good shape to handle those minutes and I really enjoy it. You never know how much ice time you'll get. I always think I have to earn it. You play as well and as much as I can."

"It feels great for me," said Bogosian, who missed the season's first 17 games with a lower-body injury. "Any time you get a chance to play that amount, you're going to strive and step up in those situations. I feel good where my game is going. As a competitive person, you always want to play a lot. To get chances like that is a good feeling."

It was Eichel's first trip to Madison Square Garden, which is just two years removed from the completion of a massive \$1 billion renovation.

"There's a lot of history in the building and you hear a lot about," he said. "It's pretty cool to play my first game here."

Eichel had never been inside until Monday's morning skate. He said he came to New York during a trip to a New Jersey tournament with the Boston Junior Bruins and the team drove by the arena during a double decker bus tour.

Even though the city and environs were buried in two feet of snow on Saturday, you would not have known it by looking around Monday. Traffic and pedestrians moved as normal through Manhattan and the only remaining disruptions were Long Island Railroad trains heading in the direction of JFK Airport in Queens, which was hit by a record 27.7 inches of snow.

Pedestrians had some issues because it was sunny and temperatures were approaching 40 on Monday. That created huge water puddles of melting snow at intersections and snow and ice melt flying to the sidewalks off tall buildings.

Quick hits: Rangers 6, Sabres 3

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

January 26, 2016

NEW YORK -- A relatively tame affair for 40 minutes erupted into a frenetic final period Monday in Madison Square Garden.

The entertainment value was high but the damage tab was nonetheless heavy for the Buffalo Sabres.

After Zemgus Girgensons wiped out a 3-1 deficit with two goals in 74 seconds, the Sabres quickly gave up the two goals right back and eventually suffered a 6-3 loss to the New York Rangers. It was Buffalo's third straight defeat overall.

It was also the Sabres' eighth straight loss to the Rangers, their worst stretch ever against New York. Buffalo is 0-7-1 in those games since a 3-1 win in March, 2013 at First Niagara Center. In the previous seven games Buffalo had scored just six goals.

J.T. Miller scored the game-winning goal at 6:44, sweeping home a deflected pass into an empty net exactly one minute after Girgensons' second tally.

Mats Zuccarello made it 5-3 at 9:23 with a power-play goal, one-timing home a wicked cross-ice pass from Derek Stepan with David Legwand in the penalty box for holding. Derek Brassard hit the empty net with 35.2 seconds left.

Latvian Locomotive: Girgensons' return to the lineup -- and to Jack Eichel's wing after a four-game absence due to injury -- was a huge success. He scored at 4:31 of the third with a shot just under the crossbar on Henrik Lundqvist and tied the game at 3-3 at 5:44 on a breakaway after a neat Jack Eichel feed.

Eichel line summary: Girgensons posted the first multi-game road game of his career and his two quick goals equaled his output of the last 31 games. He has five goals on the season. Eichel posted his fourth two-assist game of the season, and Matt Moulson's assist on Girgensons' first goal was his first point in 19 games.

Coach on the warpath: The Rangers were playing the second half of a back-to-back following Sunday's 3-0 loss at Ottawa. A disgusted coach Alain Vigneault cut off his press conference after that game after just 90 seconds.

"We had so many guys that were off their game, it was unbelievable," Vigneault said. "We were on the outside the whole night. Just didn't have a good game at all."

Similar feeling: The Sabres were also coming off a 3-0 loss, Friday to Detroit. So that left coach Dan Bylsma wary of what his team might see. Joked Bylsma: "There were similar scores and similar 'talking-tos.' "

Tough tip: The Rangers opened the scoring at 5:58 of the first period as defenseman Dylan McIlrath's snapshot from the left circle ticked off the shaft of Rasmus Ristolainen's stick and beat Johnson.

Tough tip II: Buffalo tied it at 16:13 of the first as Brian Gionta took a Marcus Foligno flip out of mid air and tipped it between the legs of Henrik Lundqvist for his sixth goal of the season.

Drought city: Gionta's goal ended the Sabres' shutout string at 99 minutes, 35 seconds. And it was Buffalo's first goal in 5-on-5 play in more than 228 minutes. The Sabres did not have a single goal at even strength in any of their three previous games.

Killer Killers: The Sabres killed off their first three penalties before the Zuccarello goal. That tally ended a run of 22 straight penalties killed that was their most since Oct. 14-29, 2011, when they killed 24 in eight games.

Milestone Watch: Sabres winger Evander Kane played in his 400th NHL game. Kane entered the game fourth in the NHL in shots on goal per game at 3.9, and as the only player in the league to lead his team in shots and hits per game (2.8).

Roster report: Josh Gorges (upper body) did not take the morning skate and sat for the second straight game, as well as the fourth in the last five. Carlo Colaiacovo and Phil Varone were healthy scratches. Buffalo's injury list includes Tyler Ennis, Nic Deslauriers and Sam Reinhart.

Up Next: The Sabres were to fly to Ottawa right after the game to take on the Senators Tuesday night at Canadian Tire Centre in their final game prior to the All-Star Break. After that, the team doesn't play again until Feb. 3 in Montreal. The next home game in First Niagara Center is Feb. 4 against Boston.

Sabres' Eichel, Reinhart seeing progress in games

By Mike G. Morreale

NHL.com

January 26, 2016

Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma is set for the foreseeable future with twin-bill centers Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart in the fold.

Not only is each beginning to find his niche within the structure of how Bylsma would like to operate on a daily basis, but they're making major contributions for a team five wins from exceeding its 2014-15 win total (23).

"Where will Jack and Sam be four years from now? That's a good question," Bylsma told NHL.com. "I think you can't quite look at them and say they're grown men and they're the best that they're going to be right now. They're playing a grown man's game and being effective at it, and I look forward to the future. I think they are both going to get better and it's going to be fun to watch."

It's been fun for fans watching them mature and gain more confidence as the season has progressed.

There are a few similarities between Eichel and Reinhart. Reinhart was selected No. 2 by the Sabres in the 2014 NHL Draft; Eichel was chosen No. 2 in the 2015 NHL Draft.

They each have a tremendous work ethic, are given considerable responsibility on the power play and are among Buffalo's leaders in shot attempts for (SATF).

Reinhart has a 12.77 personal shooting percentage; Eichel a 9.66 shooting percentage. They each have provided quality scoring chances when on the ice. Reinhart has a 12.25 HSCF60 (On-Ice High-Danger Scoring Chances for, per 60 minutes) and Eichel an 11.65 HSCF60. They have worked well together as linemates on the power play; each has four power-play goals.

In a 2-1 win at the Arizona Coyotes on Jan. 18, Eichel scored his 14th goal of the season off a one-timer from the left circle against goaltender Louis Domingue 10:07 into the second period. Reinhart did his part on the power-play goal by winning a faceoff.

"We both want to be that well-rounded, 200-foot player, and I think we're both developing into that," Eichel said. "You want to be versatile in the game and want to be able to play in any situation you are needed. I think there are similarities but also differences in our game."

Differences, according to Bylsma, that are pretty evident. Eichel has excelled on faceoffs. He has taken the most faceoffs among NHL rookies with 582.

"They have played some time together recently and they both can read off each other and are able to use each other's assets to be successful," Bylsma said.

Bylsma doesn't remember coaching a player that has made such a drastic improvement in his game as has Reinhart since September.

"I think you've seen him improve in so many areas," Bylsma said. "The pace in which he plays, how he's skating, his ability to battle on pucks and ability to battle in tough areas, and his shot. He's really worked on his shot and now it's a weapon."

"When you're talking about Sam Reinhart it's all about intelligence and smarts in how he plays the game; he's more deliberate and not as dynamic and flashy as Eichel, but he has the ability to outsmart and outthink veteran NHL players."

Not too bad for a 20-year-old in his rookie season.

Eichel, meanwhile, will frustrate the opposition with his speed and power game.

"I think in virtually every game he showcases that speed and quickness and he can dazzle," Bylsma said. "He's one of those unique players where, when he gets going and skating and has the puck on his stick, he's going to bring you to the edge of your seat. That's something you don't see very often in the game."

It's also rare a 19-year-old can exhibit that kind of confidence. Earlier in the season, when Eichel struggled to get goals, he blamed his effort and felt accountable for not helping the Sabres succeed.

Eichel had two assists during a seven-game stretch from Dec. 7-19 and wasn't happy about it. He admitted it was tough for him personally, but said he would also learn from the experience.

"I did love to see the accountability in Jack and how he played, but I also took some time to talk to him; he was playing better than maybe he was making it out to be," Bylsma said. "He thinks he can contribute and wants to contribute in a lot of ways, and I like that about him. I like that about his drive. He's settled in to not being so hard on himself and found what he can do to be effective for our team."

Eichel has made his own adjustments to become that effective player. Bylsma hasn't had to change his game at all.

"I don't think [Bylsma] wants to change my game and I don't think I would want him to do that," Eichel said. "He helps me in different aspects and areas and has given me advice on things, but I don't think his intention would be to change my game because my game is what has gotten me to this point, gotten me to become the player I am."

Eichel is more comfortable in his game now than in September and thinks he'll be even more confident in another month. He has great respect for Reinhart, who he feels is probably going through the same things, because he can do so much in so many different ways.

"He's very versatile, he can play on your fourth line or your top line, and he can play the middle or either wing," Eichel said of Reinhart. "He can do the job on the power play and can kill penalties and he can take big faceoffs. There's really so many things Sam can do and he's so underrated. He understands the game so well and his skills are top of the line."

Reinhart became the first Sabres rookie to score a hat trick in nearly 10 years on Jan. 10 in a 4-2 win at the Winnipeg Jets. Jason Pominville had been the last to accomplish the feat in 2006. On the first of his three goals, Reinhart came off the bench, took a pass from Johan Larsson in the left circle and beat goaltender Connor Hellebuyck to the long side 1:37 into the first.

Edmonton Oilers center Connor McDavid, meanwhile, remains on schedule to return to the lineup after the All-Star break. The Oilers play against the Columbus Blue Jackets on Feb. 2.

McDavid said Sunday he's been cleared for full contact. He will practice with Bakersfield of the American Hockey League during the NHL All-Star break but won't play in any games. NHL All-Star weekend is Jan. 30-31 in Nashville.

"Management and I came together and agreed to go to Bakersfield for a few days and skate and keep practicing," McDavid told the Oilers website. "It's a long break between now and then, just going to skate and get ready for what hopefully is a return on [Feb. 2]."

McDavid, the No. 1 selection in the 2015 NHL Draft, has been out since fracturing his left clavicle in a 4-2 win against the Philadelphia Flyers on Nov. 3. He had five goals and 12 points in 13 games at the time of his injury.

Brassard's five points help Rangers past Sabres

By Dan Rosen

NHL.com

January 26, 2016

NEW YORK -- Derick Brassard was disappointed in his offensive play lately, feeling as though he wasn't doing his job well enough to help the New York Rangers win consistently. He had no points in his previous five games prior to Monday and even missed a game last week because of the flu.

Now he will head into the All-Star break feeling relieved and confident, because his career-best five-point game helped the Rangers defeat the Buffalo Sabres 6-3 at Madison Square Garden on Monday.

Brassard had two goals and three assists when the Rangers, who don't play again until Feb. 2, guaranteed they would enter the All-Star break, which begins after games are finished Wednesday, in second place in the Metropolitan Division with 59 points.

The Rangers (27-17-5) are 14 points behind the first-place Washington Capitals and three points up on the third-place New York Islanders. Buffalo (19-26-4), which plays against the Ottawa Senators on Tuesday, is last in the Atlantic Division with 42 points through 49 games.

"I was just worried about trying to get some scoring chances, that's where I was in my game," Brassard said. "I take my role really [seriously] on this team and I felt it has been a tough stretch for me the last two weeks, but I tried to answer with a good effort [Monday]. The most important thing is I did my job for the team. If everyone does their job here, we're going to have a good chance to win every night."

Brassard also had a five-point game that included a hat trick in Game 6 of the Eastern Conference Final against the Tampa Bay Lightning last season. His previous high in a regular season game was four points in a 6-1 win against the Pittsburgh Penguins on April 3, 2013, his first game with the Rangers following a trade from the Columbus Blue Jackets.

His five-point game Monday was the first five-point game for any Rangers player in the regular season since Ryan Callahan did it with four goals and an assist against the Philadelphia Flyers on March 6, 2011.

"We knew it was only a matter of time," Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh said of Brassard breaking out of his scoring slump. "You get an illness like that, it's tough to get your body back to feeling the way you want to feel as a hockey player. It's great to see him break through here before the break and obviously get some confidence back in his game."

In addition to Brassard, New York got goals from J.T. Miller, Mats Zuccarello, Viktor Stalberg and Dylan McIlrath. Jesper Fast had two assists and Henrik Lundqvist made 23 saves to send the Rangers into the break on a winning note.

It was a far cry from how they played in a 3-0 loss at the Ottawa Senators on Sunday, when coach Alain Vigneault criticized the Rangers' poor performance and blamed everyone but Lundqvist and Fast for the loss.

Vigneault said the loss in Ottawa "buckled" him because he didn't see it coming. It made him question his own opinion that the Rangers were heading in the right direction following wins against the Vancouver Canucks and Carolina Hurricanes.

He had renewed faith in his opinion of his team following the game Monday, when the Rangers blew a two-goal lead in the third period and got it back in less than five minutes. They even scored a power play goal, their second in the past 13 games (2-for-35).

"Definitely in the last I want to say month I think we have shown more consistency," Vigneault said. "I mean, we've [won] three out of four, other than that stinker we had in Ottawa. If you look at the way we've been playing, 5-on-5, we've definitely been getting better. We need to improve on our specialty teams and we need to be better on the road. We know that. But I do believe that this group is on the right track right here."

The Rangers had a lapse for less than two minutes early in the third period Monday, when Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons scored two goals in a span of 73 seconds to tie the game at 3-3 with 14:16 to play. Rookie center Jack Eichel had assists on each of the goals.

"It's nice to get a little bit of momentum going there," Eichel said, "but it's tough to give it back to them."

The Rangers responded with goals from Miller at even strength and Zuccarello on the power play in a span of 2:39 to regain a two-goal lead at 5-3 with 10:37 remaining. Brassard had assists on each of the goals before capping the scoring with an empty net goal at 19:24.

He opened the scoring in a six-goal third period by giving the Rangers a 3-1 lead at 1:06. He also had an assist on McIlrath's goal at 5:58 of the first period.

"They almost got us there, but we responded well," Lundqvist said. "It's about confidence and experience in that situation, and finding ways to win instead of finding ways to lose. That's the difference from being in the top half or the bottom half of the League, you find ways to win or you find ways to lose, because the difference is not big. A lot of teams are good. It was crucial for us to get it done."

The Sabres play the Senators Tuesday before the All-Star break. They've lost three in a row, all in regulation and are not in the same Stanley Cup Playoff predicament as the Rangers, but there is a sense of urgency to get a win.

"There are a lot of aspects in our game we need to clean up," Eichel said.

Sabres visit Senators, aim to end three-game skid

By David Satriano

NHL.com

January 26, 2016

SABRES (19-26-4) at SENATORS (23-20-6)

TV: MSG-B, BELL TV, RDS2, TSN5

Season series: The Ottawa Senators defeated the Buffalo Sabres 3-1 on Oct. 8. Center Kyle Turris had two goals; forwards Mark Stone and Mike Hoffman assisted on each. Ottawa goalie Craig Anderson made 26 saves. Buffalo center Jack Eichel, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, scored his first NHL goal in his debut.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo will try to end a three-game losing streak in its final game before the All-Star break. The Sabres, who have four losing streaks of three games or longer, lost 6-3 to the New York Rangers on Monday. They trailed 3-1 in the third period before scoring twice to tie it, but then allowed the final three goals. "We put ourselves in situations to win games, but it seems like we're finding ways to lose," Eichel, who had two assists, told the Sabres website. "Obviously, I think there is some frustration in the room. We want to get over that hump to that next tier of competitive teams and be able to come out with points in these games." Buffalo has scored six goals in its past four games. Center Zemgus Girgensons, who returned Monday after missing four games with an upper-body injury, scored two goals. "It's not fun when you lose, but to get two goals [after returning from injury] was not bad for me." Goalie Robin Lehner, who is 0-3-0, likely will start against his former team.

Senators team scope: Defenseman Marc Methot, who has missed four games with an undisclosed injury, returned to practice Monday and likely will be a game-time decision. "At this point, we are just kind of taking it day-by-day," Methot told the Senators website after practice. "For me to even speculate right now would be silly. I am going to come in tomorrow morning, and we will make the decision then." The Senators, who defeated the Rangers 3-0 on Sunday, are looking to win consecutive games for the third time in two months. They are in sixth place in the Atlantic Division. "It's a big game for us," Stone said. "We are still sitting a little bit behind [for a Stanley Cup Playoff spot]. We need a win going into the [All-Star] break to feel a little bit better about ourselves." Forward Bobby Ryan has four goals in the past five games.

Sabres' Cal O'Reilly waited for fresh NHL opportunity

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 26, 2016

BUFFALO – For sure, Cal O'Reilly said, the thought had crossed his mind. Before he even hit his late 20s, the Sabres forward knew his NHL dream could be over.

Despite some big league success and gaudy minor league numbers, teams never showed much interest in the playmaker after he broke his leg with the Nashville Predators five years ago. O'Reilly, 29, understood he might have to settle into a career as a very good and well-compensated AHL or European player.

"I was starting to establish myself a little bit, and then I had a setback like that," O'Reilly said Friday about the break. "And then it's such a tough league if you don't come back from that almost right where you left off, someone's going to go right over you."

That certainly happened to O'Reilly. After centering the Predators' first line for a chunk of 2010-11, they traded him to the Arizona Coyotes, who quickly waived him. Pittsburgh claimed him, and he played six games for the Penguins, who were led then by Sabres coach Dan Bylsma.

Prior to his Sabres debut Dec. 15, O'Reilly, hadn't played an NHL game since Feb. 15, 2012. As he toiled in the minors and overseas, his younger brother, Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly, developed into one of the NHL's best all-around forwards.

To see his brother, someone he has called an "idol," out of the NHL was "discouraging," Ryan O'Reilly said.

"His hockey sense, his playmaking ability, his passing ability is some of the best I think I've ever seen in hockey," he said. "For him not to be at the best stage in the world, it is frustrating. I feel bad for him because he deserves much better than that."

Incredibly, Cal O'Reilly has 42 points in 116 NHL appearances, 0.36 points a game, notable numbers in this low-scoring era.

"It's outrageous those numbers," Bylsma said.

Between his NHL stints, O'Reilly spent a season and part of another playing for Magnitogorsk Metallurg, a KHL team in Russia coached by former Stanley Cup winner Mike Keenan.

"At one point, I thought, 'Wow, I could play as long as I could in this league,'" O'Reilly said. "It's good money and it's great hockey."

Still, he soured on the opportunity and bolted back to North America, where he spent almost two years starring for the Utica Comets, the Vancouver Canucks' top affiliate.

"I just decided, you know what, let's give it another shot, go back home and give it another shot at the NHL, and I'm glad I did," O'Reilly said.

O'Reilly earned an AHL All-Star berth last season and led the Comets to the Calder Cup final. Despite scoring 61 points, he never received a recall.

"I knew with the how far we went and everything I would have a lot of interest for myself this summer," O'Reilly said. "Teams would see that I was healthy and I was playing well again. I just hoped that somebody would give me an opportunity again, and Buffalo has."

The Sabres signed O'Reilly on July 3, just days after acquiring his brother, to a two-year, \$1.4 million one-way contract, a massive sum for a player likely to spend most of his time in the minors.

O'Reilly impressed Bylsma during training camp before going to Rochester, where he was named the Americans' captain and earned another All-Star berth.

"I was surprised at his skating this year compared to the way he was in Pittsburgh and the way he skated in the seven months or so after his injury," Bylsma said.

With a slew of injuries and only raw prospects with the Amerks, O'Reilly received his second recall Friday.

"I had some tough breaks, and then coming back from those breaks I didn't really perform to my capabilities," he said. "But I knew I could play here, so I stuck with it."

To Bylsma, O'Reilly possessed the right attitude to get back to the NHL.

"Every opportunity he gets is one he's going to relish," Bylsma said. "Every opportunity he gets is going to be one he proves he can be a regular up here. That may last one game. That may last more than that. But that's something I know he's got the right mindset for."

Rangers Pull Away for 6-3 Win Over Sabres

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

January 26, 2016

Zemgus Girgensons found the net twice in his return to the Sabres lineup, but the Rangers scored three unanswered goals for the 6-3 win at Madison Square Garden on Monday. Derick Brassard (2 G, 3 A) picked up five points for New York while Jesper Fast contributed with two assists. Jack Eichel assisted on both Girgensons goals, taking place just 1:13 apart in the final period, with impressive set-ups.

Scoring

- The Rangers were all over the Sabres right out of the gate, capping off early pressure with Dylan McIlrath's snap shot. J.T. Miller was initially credited with the goal, but McIlrath was awarded his 2nd of the season later in the game.
- Brian Gionta responded later in the opening period, tipping Marcus Foligno's shot out of mid-air from a bad angle, making it 1-1.
- New York regained the lead at 14:51 of the 2nd on Viktor Stalberg's 7th. Stalberg got to a loose puck in front of the Buffalo net and spun it through Chad Johnson's five-hole.
- Brassard made it 3-1 just 1:06 into the final frame, but Buffalo responded with back-to-back goals by Girgensons. The Sabres forward scored twice in the span of 1:13, tying the game 3-3. Eichel picked up the primary assists on both Girgensons goals.
- As quickly as Girgensons got the Sabres back in the game, the Rangers came right back exactly one minute later on Miller's 13th. A power play goal by Mats Zuccarello made it 5-3 at 9:23 of the final period.

Game Notes

- Gionta's goal marked Buffalo's first in 99:35 of action, and the Sabres' first even strength tally in 228:59.
- Gionta and Girgensons both entered tonight's game battling goalless droughts. Gionta's goal marked his 3rd in 21 games while Girgensons' pair gave him 4 goals in 20 games.
- Matt Moulson's assist on Girgensons' first goal marked his 1st point in 19 games.
- The Sabres' penalty kill was 22 for its last 22 attempts prior to Zuccarello's power play marker.
- Eichel's pair of helpers pulled him even with Dylan Larkin (18) among rookie assist leaders.
- A deflected 3rd period shot by Cody Franson hit Jamie McGinn in the face, drawing a good amount of blood. Following the game, head coach Dan Bylsma said, "other than some repair work, [McGinn]'s gonna be fine."

What's Next

The Sabres stay on the road for their final game before the All-Star break, heading to Ottawa for a Tuesday night faceoff against the Senators. Hear it on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network.

Sabres-Rangers: From the Locker Room

WGR 550

January 26, 2016

Returning from an upper body injury on Monday, Zemgus Girgensons buried two goals in the span of 1:13, but it wasn't enough in a 6-3 loss to the Rangers. Jack Eichel picked up the assists on both goals and Brian Gionta rounded out the scoring. See what all three players told the media following the game.

Zemgus Girgensons

"I didn't want to get frustrated throughout the year. It's been a long time. It's not fun when you lose, but I like to get two goals. It's not bad for me."

"You gotta give credit how [the Rangers] played. It was back to back, but they came out pretty heavy. They got a lot of power play chances, so I think we just gotta do a better job on that."

Jack Eichel

"Great to see [Girgensons] be rewarded for how hard he works. He comes to the rink every day, works hard...obviously it shows. Gets to the right areas, I just know what to expect from him."

"I think [my line was] just working hard, getting pucks behind their defensemen. We weren't giving them time, we were creating a lot of turnovers. I think we were just trying to play with speed. Obviously, [Girgensons] a couple big goals for us and [Moulson] did a lot of work for us. It's nice to get a little bit of momentum going there, but it's tough to give it back to them."

Brian Gionta

"It was great that we were able to tie it, but all night we just weren't getting enough sustained pressure down there. We had a tough time handling their speed in through the neutral zone. That's what made us pay."

"Right from the first or second shift, we had a quick turnover coming out because their speed is all over you. They jump on you. Their D are down on you, their D are active. We needed to be crisper with the puck and we weren't against a team like that, that's how you break that pressure."

Girgensons scores twice in loss to Rangers

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 26, 2016

NEW YORK - For a minute on Monday night, it appeared as if Zemgus Girgensons had tipped the pendulum in the Buffalo Sabres' direction. Two goals from the forward in a span of 1:13 not only added drama to his return from a four-game absence, but forced a third-period tie at Madison Square Garden.

One minute was all it lasted. New York created a turnover in their own zone on the ensuing shift and sped down the ice ahead of the Sabres' defenders, ultimately creating a one-time opportunity that J.T. Miller used to regain the lead for New York exactly 60 seconds after Girgensons took it away.

Add a power-play goal from Mats Zuccarello less than three minutes later and an empty-netter in the final minute and Buffalo's comeback seemed like a distant memory by the end of a 6-3 loss to the New York Rangers.

"Obviously it was great that we were able to tie it but all night we just weren't getting enough sustained pressure," said Sabres captain Brian Gionta, who scored in the first period. "We had a tough time handling their speed in through the neutral zone."

Derek Brassard scored twice including the empty-netter as part of a career-high five-point night while Dylan McIlrath and Viktor Stalberg also tallied goals for the Rangers. Henrik Lundqvist stopped 23 shots in net to earn the win.

Chad Johnson made 27 saves for the Sabres, including multiple impressive stops to keep the Rangers off the board early. The goals he did allow were hardly his fault – McIlrath's goal deflected in off the stick of Rasmus Ristolainen, Stalberg's came from point-blank range and the last two on cross-ice one-timers.

"Johnny's played so well for us throughout the year," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "It's disappointing. Obviously we let in five tonight and it's tough to win a hockey game that way but a lot of it didn't have a lot to do with him and his play."

GIRGENSONS RETURNS

After McIlrath and Gionta traded goals in the first period and Stalberg scored the lone marker in the second, the Sabres began the third period trailing 2-1. That deficit seemed a lot less manageable when, just 1:06 into the period, Brassard scored on a one-time pass from Jesper Fast to make it a two-goal game.

The combination of Girgensons and Jack Eichel wasted little time in responding. With Eichel battling for the puck near the left-wing boards, he was able to tap it out to Girgensons at Lundqvist's doorstep. Girgensons lifted a shot over the goaltender's shoulder to bring the Sabres within one 4:31 into the period.

"I thought I was just in the right place at the right time," Girgensons admitted. "It's a little bit lucky that I was there and the puck came there so good play by Jack."

The two forwards hooked up again 73 seconds later after a Rangers defender tripped in the neutral zone to create a 2-on-1 opportunity. Eichel found Girgensons alone in the slot and the latter backhanded a shot over Lundqvist's left pad to tie the game.

The overall results weren't what they wanted, of course, but it was a glimpse into the potential success for the newly formed line of Girgensons, Eichel and Matt Moulson, who also tallied an assist.

"He's an easy player to play with," Eichel said of Girgensons. "He works so hard, hits the right areas, I just know what to expect from him. I think Matt's able to complement us well, he goes to the net hard, [and Girgensons] is a strong kid. He's really good on the boards so it's nice to see him be rewarded."

A BROKEN STREAK

After killing off the Rangers' first three power plays of the game, it looked like Buffalo might escape New York with an impressive penalty kill streak still intact. Zuccarello's goal on the Rangers' fourth power-play ended a streak of 22 straight kills for the Sabres.

"They found a lot of seams, which gets that box kind of running," Gionta said. "They're a shooting-mentality power play so they hit that seam and they're taking shots, it's tough to scramble from there and that's kind of how it was all night."

UP NEXT

Buffalo has just one more game to go before the All-Star break, concluding a back-to-back set on Tuesday night in Ottawa. The Sabres opened their season against the Senators, dropping a 3-1 contest at First Niagara Center on Oct. 8.

With three straight losses since a stretch in which they won four out of five, the Sabres' main focus coming out of the All-Star break will be trying to develop a consistency in their game. Bylsma said it's important that the team begins that mission on Tuesday.

"You can look at stretches of hockey and say we played good but yes, the consistency game in and game out – we haven't had it," he said. "We haven't found ways to stay in hockey games and compete in hockey games and win hockey games – even though we've played some good hockey at times in that stretch it's something we don't have in our game right now."

"We have a game against Ottawa tomorrow night before the break, one we really have to look forward to and say we need to win."

Coverage on Tuesday begins at 7 p.m. with Tops Sabres Gamenight on MSG-B and Bell TV. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.