



Buffalo Sabres

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Panthers-Sabres Preview

By Nicolino Dibenedetto

AP

January 5, 2016

The Florida Panthers' franchise-record winning streak started during their last road trip. They should like their chances of keeping it going behind Roberto Luongo in the opener of a season-high six-game trek.

Luongo attempts to shut out the last-place Buffalo Sabres for the fourth straight time on the road as the Panthers look to continue their success at First Niagara Center on Tuesday night.

Florida (23-12-4) is the surprise leader in the Atlantic Division, thanks to a 15-3-0 stretch that includes team records for the longest overall (nine) and home (seven) winning streaks after beating Minnesota 2-1 on Sunday.

The Panthers are aiming for the longest overall run in the NHL since Boston won 12 straight March 2-22, 2014.

Florida's streak started with a 5-1 win over the New York Islanders on Dec. 15, going on to win the last three of a four-game trip.

"That last road trip really turned it around," coach Gerard Gallant told the team's official website. "I think we have 10 or 11 games left before the All-Star break. You shoot for that. You keep trying to get points; they're important points.

"It doesn't matter how many (games) you've won in a row. You don't worry about what's behind you, you look forward and try and get some more points."

Florida can look ahead at a daunting trip that includes Buffalo, Ottawa, Edmonton, Vancouver, Calgary and Tampa Bay in a span of 13 days. Four of those teams reached the playoffs last season and the Lightning advanced to the Stanley Cup Final.

"Just win," Gallant said. "We're going to take it one game at a time like we do everything. It's going to be a tough road trip."

Turning to Luongo should get this trip off to a strong start. He's blanked the Sabres (15-20-4) in three straight meetings at Buffalo, two coming with Florida.

He won seven straight overall starts against the Sabres behind a 1.00 goals-against average before making just 16 saves in a 3-2 home defeat Nov. 12.

Luongo owns a 1.26 GAA while winning seven starts in a row, setting a Panthers record while sitting one shy of his personal best from February 2009 with Vancouver.

Florida is 6-0-2 in the last eight meetings at Buffalo and 8-0-1 in its past nine overall.

Jaromir Jagr leads the Panthers with 13 goals and 28 points, and he's scored twice while getting two assists in two season meetings with the Sabres. He has three goals over the last three games after netting two Sunday.

Buffalo has lost four in a row after giving up the first two goals only for its rally to fall short in a 4-3 defeat to Detroit on Saturday.

Jack Eichel, however, is showing the promise that made him the second overall selection in last year's draft. The center scored twice Saturday and has 11 points over the last seven games, matching his total from the previous 24.

He doesn't have a point against the Panthers.

The Sabres will be without forward Nicolas Deslauriers for three to five weeks after he suffered a lower-body injury against the Red Wings.

"I think he's been our most physical guy the last 10 games," coach Dan Bylsma told the team's official website. "We saw it be a factor in a number of our games. ... It's something we're going to miss in our lineup."

Girgensons cashes in with linemates Gionta and Eichel

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

January 5, 2016

Zemgus Girgensons doesn't assess his game solely by points. As the Sabres winger said Monday, a player can have a four-point night yet still be terrible. He looks at the all-around performance before assessing a grade.

That said, it feels mighty good to be on the score sheet lately.

Girgensons' offensively challenged season is finally on an upswing.

He heads into Tuesday's home game against Florida with three points in three outings. It doesn't sound like much, but it has allowed him to nearly double his yearlong output.

"It's a better feeling when you win, but I'm glad that those have been coming a little bit," Girgensons said Monday in First Niagara Center.

Girgensons is among the many Sabres who have experienced a drastic dip in scoring this season.

Before joining center Jack Eichel and captain Brian Gionta on Wednesday in Washington, Girgensons had just two goals and three assists in 32 games. He's put up a goal and two assists since the line was formed.

"He's cashed in and his line has cashed in," coach Dan Bylsma said. "The line's been quite good. They've got a number of opportunities. Jack's been really good with his speed and creating, and both those guys have been benefactors of that play."

Eichel, Girgensons and Gionta have combined for four goals and 10 points in the last three games while continually asserting their presence. The trio has put 27 shots on net and attempted 15 more.

"It's been really good playing with Gussy and Gio," Eichel said. "They play a real simple game, but hockey's a simple game, so that's usually when you're successful. They both work really hard. They make it pretty easy for me, and I just try to use my speed and creativity and create for our line. I think we've done a great job building chemistry together and producing.

"You can keep carrying this momentum into our game against Florida. They're a hot team, so we're going to need to be good."

As Eichel said, there's not much that's flashy about his wingers. Gionta and Girgensons are essentially straight-line forecheckers who put an emphasis on sound positional play.

It means Eichel knows where they'll be. The knowledge has paid off in chances and points, though not in wins. Buffalo heads into the game with four straight losses, while the Panthers have won nine in a row.

"We move the puck, support each other, moving north skating and pass it when we have to," Girgensons said. "Just playing the right way, not making mistakes that you know would hurt the team. That's one of the most important things."

Bylsma has been praising Girgensons' defensive game for some time, but there hasn't been any production to match.

It's a surprise. Before suffering a season-ending injury last February, Girgensons was on pace for a 20-goal, 40-point year. This season, he's on pace for six goals and 17 points.

Part of it is adjusting to a new role. Girgensons was the go-to guy for former coach Ted Nolan, skating 19:04 per game last season with more than two minutes each on the power play and penalty kill.

This season, Girgensons' average ice time is 15:39 with 52 seconds per game coming on the power play.

One thing that has remained the same is the losing.

"It's frustrating," Girgensons said, "but you've just got to think if you keep playing like that there's no way each team's going to get away with a win."

The Sabres still see plenty of bright spots in their play despite the losing streak. They've taken 136 shots during their four-game skid but have scored just six times.

"We've been all over teams the last four games," Girgensons said. "We've just been a little bit unlucky. Not just unlucky, but the mistakes we make are usually hurtful mistakes. It's not small mistakes.

"As long as we limit the big mistakes where it's an easy goal for anyone in the league, we'll be good."

Sabres notebook: 'Big man' Scott will spice up All-Star festivities

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
January 5, 2016

Marcus Foligno shared the Sabres' dressing room with John Scott for two years. He has a message for the NHL regarding its unlikely All-Star.

Embrace the big man.

"If I'm the NHL, I'm definitely mic'ing him up for the game and skills comp," Foligno said Monday. "He's going to bring a lot of energy to the All-Star Game. I'm sure a lot of the All-Star players who are there are going to realize how good of a guy he is off the ice.

"He'll bring a lot of goofiness but a lot of character to that weekend."

Fans voted Scott as the Pacific Division captain for this month's All-Star Game, and the enforcer will attend the two-day event in Nashville despite an outcry from some that the thrice-waived forward doesn't belong.

"I was shocked to see that went through, but good for him," Foligno said in First Niagara Center. "Fans voted. Fans know what they want. They got a big 6-9, 285-pound guy. I'm sure it'll be kind of a highlight of the weekend."

The All-Star Game has changed to a three-on-three format, while the skills challenge will remain. Foligno couldn't help but smile at the thought of Scott participating.

"I mean, what skills do you put him under?" the Sabres forward said. "I don't know if they have 'hardest hitter' or 'dump-ins' and 'chip-outs,' but he's going to be a funny guy."

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The Sabres will be without their most physical player for up for five weeks, starting with Tuesday's home game against the Florida Panthers.

Nicolas Deslauriers suffered a foot injury during Saturday's game against Detroit, and coach Dan Bylsma said Monday the left winger will be out for three to five weeks. Deslauriers blocked shots by the Red Wings' Brad Richards and Niklas Kronwall, then attended Buffalo's bowling benefit Sunday with a walking boot, according to people in attendance.

Deslauriers has three goals and seven points in 38 games. He leads the Sabres with 102 hits while playing 9:39 per night.

"Nick's been a pretty annoying guy with those 10 minutes in being physical," Bylsma said. "We saw it be a factor in a number of games, against the Capitals and the game prior to that against Boston, and it's something we're going to miss in our lineup when he's not here for this time period."

Foligno will be expected to fill Deslauriers' physical role. Tim Schaller, meanwhile, will take Deslauriers' roster spot. The Sabres have recalled the center from Rochester, and he will play in the middle of Foligno and David Legwand.

Schaller had two assists during his first six-game callup with the Sabres. He has five goals and 10 points in 18 games with the Amerks, including a hot stretch of four goals and eight points in his last eight games.

"I've been clicking with my linemates and putting the work in on and off the ice," Schaller said. "It shows in the games, and they rewarded me by calling me up."

The Sabres are expected to call up an extra forward for insurance later this week as they head on a three-game road trip to Chicago, Winnipeg and Minnesota.

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Bylsma said Mark Pysyk could return this weekend. The defenseman has been out since breaking a bone in his foot Nov. 17.

"He's had now four conditioning skates and three practices with the team, so he is very close to returning to play," Bylsma said.

As long as no blue-liners are injured against the Panthers, Pysyk's return will give the Sabres eight healthy defensemen. Two would need to be scratched every game.

"Eight's not a great number to have," Bylsma said. "It's good for practice situations sometimes, but it's not where you're going to rotate the seventh and eighth defensemen in on a regular basis. It's good for competition. It's good for having depth."

Panthers aim for 10th straight win as they face Sabres

By Tim Wharnsby

NHL.com

January 5, 2016

PANTHERS (23-12-4) at SABRES (15-20-4)

TV: BELL TV, FS-F, MSG-B

Season series: The Florida Panthers and Buffalo Sabres have split two games in Sunrise, Fla. Forward Jaromir Jagr scored twice in a 3-2 win by the Panthers on Oct. 15; goalie Linus Ullmark made 36 saves in a 3-2 win by the Sabres on Nov. 12.

Panthers team scope: Florida, which has won a franchise record nine in a row, starts a six-game road trip. General manager Dale Tallon told the Miami Herald that center David Bolland (undisclosed) likely won't play until after the NHL All-Star break. "We want him to help us in the playoff run," Tallon said. "It's lingering, minor stuff. It's been enough to take him off his game. We're going to make sure he's 100 percent. We won't bring him back at 80. When he's right, he's one [heck] of a hockey player." Bolland has been limited to 25 games and hasn't played since Dec. 12. The Panthers reassigned forward Connor Brickley to the Portland Pirates of the American Hockey League. He was a healthy scratch in three of the past five games and wasn't going to play with the return of forward Nick Bjugstad for Florida's 2-1 win Sunday against the Minnesota Wild. Defenseman Steven Kampfer, out with a foot injury since Dec. 10, could return soon, coach Gerard Gallant said.

Sabres team scope: Fourth-line left wing Nicolas Deslauriers will miss 3-5 weeks with a lower-body injury sustained in a 4-3 loss to the Detroit Red Wings on Saturday, coach Dan Bylsma told the Sabres website. "I think he's been our most physical guy the last 10 games," Bylsma said. "Marcus [Foligno] getting back in there has offered that as well, but Nic's been a pretty annoying guy with those 10 minutes in being physical and being hard. We saw it be a factor in a number of our games ... It's something we're going to miss." Forward Tyler Ennis (upper body) is week-to-week after being hit into the boards in a game against the Washington Capitals last Wednesday. The Sabres have recalled forward Tim Schaller from Rochester of the AHL. Bylsma said defenseman Mark Pysyk (foot) could return this weekend. He's been out since Nov. 17. The Sabres worked on their penalty-killing in practice. They are 27th in the NHL at 76.8 percent.

Ryan O'Reilly has a big role in Buffalo, and he's embracing it

By Tommy Chalk

Fox Sports

January 5, 2016

In an open area of the Verizon Center, a slew of Buffalo Sabres players are stretching and warming up just outside of their locker room. They are preparing to take on the Washington Capitals, one of the top teams in the NHL.

One player not with the group is Ryan O'Reilly. He's around the corner, in a narrow hallway all by himself.

O'Reilly is crouched, rapidly moving his hands all around in a stickhandling motion. He has two small balls in each hand, rotating them around his palms as quickly as he darts his hands. His eyes remain concentrated, locked into his imagination, uninterrupted by the various hockey arena members that walk right by him. His hands move back and forth, twisting and turning as he dekes the imaginary guys in front of him. He doesn't take any notice of the security guard shooting him weird looks. He only remains focused in his vision.

It's just one of the few quirky things O'Reilly does, but it's also one of the things that makes him the hockey player that he is today.

The 24-year-old center hasn't played half a season for the Sabres, but they have to be happy with their investment. Through 39 games, O'Reilly has 15 goals and 18 assists, leading the Sabres in goals and points. But O'Reilly has also brought so much more to the organization than on-ice production. He's provided Buffalo with an immeasurable amount of leadership and a voice of reason within the locker room.

Buffalo, of course, acquired O'Reilly in a blockbuster deal this offseason that sent he and Jamie McGinn from the Colorado Avalanche to the Buffalo in exchange for Nikita Zadorov, Mikhail Grigorenko, J.T. Compher and the 31st-overall pick. And before O'Reilly even suited up for a single game, Buffalo signed him to a seven-year, \$52.5 million deal that kicks in next season.

"Obviously it was a great contract offer," O'Reilly said with a chuckle. "I really couldn't say no to that when it was done.

O'Reilly didn't have to sign that contract right away. He had the option of playing this season on the last year of his current deal, testing the waters of Buffalo along the way. And if he didn't like his first year in Buffalo, he could have entered free agency, where he would have had his pick from a large handful of teams. But he was confident in signing the long-term extension because Buffalo offered him opportunities he was never afforded with the Avalanche. The Sabres offered O'Reilly a specific role, a sense of meaning and stability.

"Getting out of Colorado and kind of wanting a bigger role, being one of the go-to guys," O'Reilly said of his desires with a new team. "I think being (in Buffalo), talking to them, that was their offer to me. That's the role they were looking for. So for me to obviously commit long term made it so much easier to not have to worry about the contract stuff. You know, just focus on playing hockey and winning games. It's much easier, and that transition has been great."

In the tail end of a rebuild, the Sabres needed guys like O'Reilly. Despite being only 24, he's one of the most experienced players on the Sabres, with six prior seasons under his belt. O'Reilly, who is listed as an alternate captain, takes a certain amount of responsibility in helping out his teammates. And those teammates include several young players, guys like Jake McCabe, Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel. All three play critical roles in the Sabres, but all are right in the middle of their rookie seasons. O'Reilly plays a provable role in helping each of the young players out, but, according to him, it's a relatively simple job.

"Our young guys are all very talented, and they're all hardworking," O'Reilly said. "So, I think having that staple and work ethic (makes) it easy. We just go on the ice and constantly challenge each other and push each other."

One player O'Reilly has really had an effect on is Reinhart. The two have become each other's primary line mates, and they are developing a strong sense of chemistry. O'Reilly has scored four of his five goals at even strength 5-v-5 with Reinhart on the ice, and Reinhart has scored three of his six even strength 5-v-5 goals with O'Reilly on the ice (according to Hockey Analysis). That relationship spawned because the two complement, and compliment, each other so well. The two have a great amount of respect for one another, and Reinhart certainly credits O'Reilly with a certain degree of his initial success in his rookie year.

"I mean, right when he came in, and I was trying to secure a spot on the team, I just tried to pick up as much as I could from him," Reinhart said of O'Reilly. "There's so much you can learn just by watching him and how he conducts himself on a daily basis. He's probably the easiest guy to play with, because he's so smart and he's always in the right spot."

"Gosh, he's just so easy to play with," O'Reilly said of Reinhart. "He's just so intelligent out there and he really thinks the game so (well). Anytime there's a turnover, or anytime there is some sort of play out there, he finds the right area to be in. And as a centerman, you want that, and it makes my job a lot easier. He works hard, too. He works hard at his game and he's competitive. Those are his staples. His hockey sense takes over. It's easy to find chemistry with him."

That instant chemistry has worked well for O'Reilly and Buffalo. O'Reilly is on pace to not only pass his 15-goal mark he set last year, but he's on pace to pass his career high of 28 goals set in the 2013-14 season. And while he may not pass his career high of 38 assists set just last season, if he continues his overall play, he should pass his career high of 64 points.

All of his offensive production likely won't convert Buffalo into a playoff contender this season. The Sabres have comfortably placed themselves within the lottery pick conversation once again this season. But patience is a virtue in Buffalo. Several crucial players are still in the early stages of their career. O'Reilly hasn't reached his prime yet. Evander Kane is also only 24. Eichel, McCabe and Reinhart have many standout years ahead of them. Zemgus Girgensons is only 21. So is Rasmus Ristolainen. Even the team's future franchise goaltender, Robin Lehner, who has been out since the season opener with an ankle injury, is only 24. And that doesn't even include the slew of prospects the Sabres have in waiting, or even that high-end 2016 NHL draft prospect the Sabres will nab later this year.

But what they do have right now is a voice, a future leader, someone who is still learning everyday, but is willing to help others along the way. They have someone who is vocal, and someone who commands attention.

"When he's saying something, everyone is definitely listening," Reinhart said. "He can definitely change the mentality in a hurry, no matter what part of the game it is."

That's a good thing to have on a team. And it's even better when you consider the fact that O'Reilly has seven more seasons in Buffalo ahead of him. And even though he's in the midst of his seventh season, he knows there's always something new to soak in.

"It's still a learning process," O'Reilly said of his newfound role in Buffalo. "And there's a lot of learning to become more of a leader and do things that way. But I'm very lucky that I'm here and I'm apart of this."

Jack Eichel's recent hot streak proves youth movement won't save Buffalo

By Arielle Aronson

Fox Sports

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The Buffalo Sabres' 2014-15 campaign was almost entirely devoted to the Tank for McDavid concept, as fans found solace in the team's woes by the idea of landing Connor McDavid through the NHL Draft lottery. When that plan failed and the Sabres ended up with Jack Eichel instead, the consolation prize was nearly as good as landing McDavid, and Buffalo fans focused their hopes on Eichel reviving the franchise a la Sidney Crosby with the Pittsburgh Penguins or Alexander Ovechkin with the Washington Capitals.

As Eichel took time to adjust to the NHL through the first few months of the season, Buffalo did not make any great strides toward any serious improvement in its division. The Sabres have managed to stay in last place in the Atlantic despite rough seasons for nearly every team in the division. The division-leading Florida Panthers, fueled by a 9-1-0 run, still have the fewest points (50) of any division leader in the NHL as of Jan. 4.

Buffalo meanwhile has the second fewest points of any team in the NHL with 34 points through 39 games, just one point more than the hapless Columbus Blue Jackets (33 points in 40 games). The Sabres have proudly deemed this year as the start of the "next chapter", but it does not look much different than the previous chapter in the standings thus far.

Of course, young players like Eichel need time to develop. Neither Sidney Crosby nor Alex Ovechkin led their respective teams to the playoffs in their first season in the NHL.

But even when Eichel does heat up, the Sabres still cannot manage any significant steps forward. Eichel has nine points in his last five games off four goals and five assists. The Sabres are 1-4-0 in those five games.

And Eichel is not the only young player blossoming for the Sabres this season. The 20-year-old Sam Reinhart is enjoying his first full year at the NHL level and is one of the Sabres' top-six forwards. He ranks fifth on the Sabres in scoring with 16 points (nine goals, seven assists) in 39 games. Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, a 21-year-old playing his third year of NHL hockey, ranks second in scoring with 26 points (seven goals, 19 assists) in 39 games.

The young players are chipping in as much as can be expected for the Sabres. But the veterans on the team are not strong enough to help Buffalo make a jump from a cellar-dweller to even a middle-of-the-pack club.

Saturday's 4-3 loss to the Detroit Red Wings, one of 13 one-goal losses for Buffalo this season, was prime proof of this issue. With the Sabres down 2-0 midway through the game, Eichel scored two goals within 3:01 -- including a highlight-reel breakaway tally -- to tie the game at 2-2. In the third period, the Sabres fell into a 3-2 deficit when Henrik Zetterberg scored 2:27 into the frame, but Reinhart netted an equalizer for Buffalo on a power play 8:58 into the period.

But Buffalo allowed the game-winning goal to the Red Wings with 2:50 left in regulation when its veterans could not finish the job. Evander Kane, Ryan O'Reilly, Marcus Foligno, Josh Gorges and Zach Bogosian -- some of the most experienced players on the team -- were all on the ice for the final Detroit goal.

After the game, Reinhart hinted that the Sabres need to learn how to win from those with experience with winning.

Via Buffalo Hockey Beat:

"Good teams find a way to win," Reinhart told reporters. "If we want to be one of them, we're going to have to find ways to win in situations like that. We can learn a lot from a team like that with a lot of experience."

When the Sabres added veterans to the team ahead of this season, the one thing they failed to add were veterans who could effectively teach the team how to win. Evander Kane spent his entire pre-Buffalo career with the Thrashers/Jets and has never been to the NHL playoffs. Ryan O'Reilly has been to the playoffs twice with the Colorado Avalanche, but one of those trips was during his rookie season. The other playoff campaign, a 2013-14 first-round appearance against the Minnesota Wild, was a tough seven-game battle which the Avalanche lost.

Josh Gorges should know something about winning from his time with the Montreal Canadiens, but it does not seem like he has been effective in teaching the young team how to win. Goaltender Robin Lehner, who had a breakout year last season with the upstart Ottawa Senators before going down with an injury, has only been able to play in one game for the Sabres this season before he suffered a high ankle sprain. Any contributions from Lehner could also be a huge boost to the team.

Buffalo has shown in the first half of the season that its rookies can help the team in meaningful ways. Their futures should be bright. But in the immediate future, Buffalo needs to look to its veterans to help out, and that remains a question mark nearly 40 games into the season.

Sabres' defense corps much improved

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 5, 2016

BUFFALO – When Mark Pysyk returns from his broken foot later this week, the Sabres will receive a smooth, puck-moving defenseman and have what coach Dan Bylsma believes is a good problem.

Assuming no one else gets injured before Pysyk plays his first game since Nov. 17, the Sabres, who have used the same six defensemen the last 11 games, will have eight on the roster, “not a good number to have,” Bylsma said.

Still, two spares creates competition and means the Sabres possess depth at a valuable position.

“I’m good with that problem,” Bylsma said Monday inside the First Niagara Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s home tilt against the scorching Florida Panthers, who have won nine straight games.

Almost halfway through the season, the Sabres, losers of four straight contests, have showcased development all over the ice, yet still rank 29th in the NHL with only 34 points.

The defense corps, while hardly elite, might be the Sabres’ most improved area. The Sabres have allowed 33 fewer goals through 39 games compared to a year ago and trimmed six shots off a contest from the end of last season. Much of that, of course, can be traced to the defensemen.

A season ago, the Sabres relied heavily on the likes of Andre Benoit, Andrej Meszaros and Tyson Strachan. The trio combined for a ghastly minus-62 rating in 165 games. Not surprisingly, all three are out of the NHL.

Now, Bylsma might have a difficult decision looming. Another defenseman must sit out when Pysyk’s ready. Despite some solid play from Carlo Colaiacovo earlier this season, Bylsma has already scratched the veteran 11 straight games.

“I think it creates that little bit of competition within,” Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said about the depth. “It’s also a reminder to all of us your job is never safe and you should never take it for granted. ... There’s a lot of guys that are hungry and waiting to come in and do your job. It’s good internal pressure that we’ll have as a group.”

The group doesn’t possess much flash. Even with Rasmus Ristolainen rapidly developing into a franchise defenseman and playing big minutes beside Gorges, the Sabres still want to utilize a defense by committee.

“We don’t have a straight shutdown pair and we’re going to count on the six to defend against the opposition,” Bylsma said.

When a lower-body injury sidelined Zach Bogosian for six weeks earlier this season, the Sabres leaned on Ristolainen and Gorges as the shutdown pair. But with Bogosian’s recovery and rookie Jake McCabe’s emergence giving the Sabres what Bylsma called a “credible pair,” he has spread the minutes out a little more.

“I think you’ve seen that over the last six or seven games,” said Bylsma, who uses Cody Franson and Mike Weber as his third pair. “Josh’s minutes haven’t been as large as they were when it was just the two guys shutting down the opposition’s top line. Zach’s kind of stepped into a little more of that position against other teams’ top guys. We are more by committee.”

Finally, 22 games into his season, Bogosian might be feeling comfortable again. For perhaps the first time all season, Bogosian displayed some jump when he roared in on a breakaway late in Saturday afternoon's 4-3 loss to Detroit.

Bylsma thinks Bogosian, who likely hurt his groin or hamstring early in training camp, has had the injury on his mind.

"(It) prevented him from being able to skate, being able to condition, being able to maintain his strength and power that he does have," Bylsma said about the injury. "So he's gotten back to health. He's had to work his way back to where he's good at, and that's skating and that's strength and that's power ...

"To try to get up to speed in the middle of a season is a difficult thing. I think while he's been healthy, he's still working to get up to that speed."

Pysyk should be fully up to speed later this week. That will give the Sabres another asset on the blue line.

"He just does all the little things well," Gorges said. "He's not a flashy guy, he's not a guy that's going to go out there and people are going to be wowed with some spectacular play, but he's a very headsy player. He sees the ice and he just subtly makes good plays all the time. That's a big thing on the back end."

Sabres' Nick Deslauriers out 3-5 weeks with lower-body injury

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 5, 2016

BUFFALO – Winger Nick Deslauriers, the Sabres' top physical presence recently, will be out three to five weeks with a lower-body injury, coach Dan Bylsma said this afternoon.

Deslauriers was injured Saturday afternoon in the Sabres' 4-3 loss to Detroit but finished the game. He was seen today wearing a boot on his right foot.

Bylsma said Deslauriers has "been our most physical guy the last 10 games" as a fourth-liner. Deslauriers has three goals, seven points and a team-high 102 hits in 38 games. He's also the team's best fighter.

"Nick's been a pretty annoying guy with those 10 minutes and being physical and being hard," Bylsma said inside the First Niagara Center. "We saw it be a factor in a number of our games. ... It's something we're going to miss."

To replace Deslauriers, the Sabres recalled center Tim Schaller from the Rochester Americans, where he had four goals and eight points in the last nine games. Schaller played six games with the Sabres earlier this season, compiling two assists.

In other news, defenseman Mark Pysyk, out since Nov. 17 with a broken foot, practiced again today and could play later this week, Bylsma said.

Sabres' Deslauriers injured. Schaller comes up

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 5, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres have lost their most physical player. Nick Deslauriers is out approximately three to five weeks with a lower body injury. Dan Bylsma said he got it against the Wings, but did finish the game. Bylsma said it's a physical loss, "I think he's been our most physical guy the past 10 games, but Nick's been an annoying guy with his 10 minutes being physical, mean and hard, so it's something we're going to miss."

Tim Schaller is up for the second time this season. Schaller played six games last time picking up two assists.

In Rochester he had eight points in his last nine games. He's played 18 games with the Amerks scoring five goals and five assists. Schaller said things have been coming together, "Yes, I've been playing well, I've been putting in the work and it's showing in the games and they rewarded me by calling me up."

Bylsma said there will be no more callup before Tuesday's game, but there may be another forward recalled before the team leaves on a three game road trip Thursday.

Deslauriers out 3-5 weeks with lower-body injury

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

January 5, 2016

Yet another injury has bitten the Buffalo Sabres, who now appear to be at least a few more weeks away from returning to full health.

Nicolas Deslauriers was absent from practice on Monday morning and will be out for 3-5 weeks with a lower-body injury, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. Deslauriers sustained the injury Saturday during the 4-3 loss to Detroit but stayed in the game.

Fellow forward Tyler Ennis is also week-to-week with an upper-body injury stemming from a hit against the boards on Dec. 30 in Washington. Tim Schaller was recalled from Rochester on Monday to help fill the void.

Deslauriers has seven points (3+4) in 38 contests this season, averaging 9:39 of ice time. The role that he plays on the Sabres' fourth line, however, will not be easily replaced.

"I think he's been our most physical guy the last 10 games," Bylsma said. "Marcus [Foligno] getting back in there has offered that as well, but Nic's been a pretty annoying guy with those 10 minutes in being physical and being hard. We saw it be a factor in a number of our games ... It's something we're going to miss in our lineup."

Having often played on the wing opposite Deslauriers this season, Foligno recognizes as well as anyone what Deslauriers' absence will mean.

"We're gonna miss that jam on the left side," Foligno said. "If we need someone to step up on a hit, he can deliver it. For me, it's good because we read off each other, where we're hitting, so we're going to have to get used to Tim Schaller a little bit, but we have guys that can step up and I'm sure they will."

Schaller tallied two assists in six games during his first stint in Buffalo this season, which ended with his re-assignment on Dec. 3. He's scored eight points (4+4) in his last nine games for Rochester.

Asked why Schaller was the choice to call up, Bylsma's answer was simple.

"He'd been the best player down there," the coach said. "I talked to [Amerks coach Randy Cunneyworth] and he was the best forward down there and that's why he's getting the opportunity."

Bylsma said that he prefers to play Schaller at center as opposed to a wing position, meaning David Legwand will move to the wing while Schaller's in the lineup. Schaller is willing to play any position – he even played defense in junior, which shows in his two-way game at the pro level.

"I don't like to get too carried away with strictly playing defense but that's one of the strong points of my game," he said. "I always say with good defense comes offense."

As it stands, the Sabres do not have any extra forwards on their roster. Whether or not they'll recall one prior to a three-game road trip that begins in Chicago on Thursday is a decision that will be made after their game at home on Tuesday, Bylsma said.

PYSYK UPDATE

There was a bit of good news regarding a player's injury status on Monday, too. Both goaltender Robin Lehner and defenseman Mark Pysyk continued to practice with the team as they rehab from lower-body injuries, with Bylsma offering an update on the latter.

"He's had now four conditioning skates and three practices with the team so he is very close to returning to play," Bylsma said of Pysyk. "It may happen this weekend."

MONDAY'S PRACTICE

The Sabres practice special teams almost every day, but with one caveat: a large portion of their penalty kill unit also belongs to their power play. For this reason, the amount of action that players like Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane and Brian Gionta see on the penalty kill in practice is limited.

Buffalo took the time to change that on Monday, using a chunk of the workout to focus on the penalty kill with their full units.

"We had Ryan O'Reilly and [Kane] and Brian Gionta and [Zemgus Girgensons] all killing," Bylsma said. "It's something they don't get to do often and we have to practice it and get better at it. This was just an opportunity to do that."

More on the Sabres' penalty kill can be found in today's Sabres in: 90.