



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 26, 2016

Sabres-Sharks Preview

Associated Press
February 25, 2016

One of the mysteries of the NHL is why the San Jose Sharks have had so much trouble with the lowly Buffalo Sabres.

The Sharks ended an eight-game slide to the Sabres earlier this season and now hope to halt a four-game home losing streak in the series Friday night.

San Jose (32-21-6) missed the playoffs last season after 10 consecutive appearances while Buffalo (24-30-7) is on the verge of a fifth straight campaign without reaching the postseason. That doesn't explain how these teams have fared against each other.

The Sharks were on an 0-7-1 skid in this series before Patrick Marleau scored in overtime of a 2-1 win Nov. 14. That caused a sigh of relief for first-year coach Peter DeBoer to break that hex in his first try.

"I accidentally dug into it because everyone was talking about it," he said after that game. "I knew we hadn't had much success against Buffalo recently, but I didn't realize it was as long as it has been."

San Jose's previous win over the Sabres was a 5-2 home victory in January 2010, and it's gone 0-3-1 in Buffalo's last four visits.

The Sharks play their first home game after completing a 3-1-1 trip with Wednesday's 4-3 shootout loss to Colorado. Joel Ward scored with 91 seconds left in the third period to salvage a point.

"Some of the cities we're in and how desperate some of the teams are that we're playing, it's a good road trip," DeBoer said. "The guys found a way to get some points. That's important."

Nick Spaling scored 2:10 into the game in his Sharks debut after being acquired Monday from Toronto. He had one goal in 35 games with the Maple Leafs.

Joe Thornton assisted on Ward's goal to give him 15 points in the last 10 games. Thirty five of his team high-tying 56 points and 13 of his 14 goals have come on the road. He has no goals and 13 assists in 11 home games in 2016.

Joe Pavelski leads the Sharks with 26 goals but hasn't scored in his last eight games against the Sabres. Thornton has three assists in his past nine matchups.

Buffalo opened a three-game California trip with Wednesday's 1-0 loss to Anaheim, marking the fifth time it was shut out.

"We want to show that we can play with the best teams, but it's the small margins," goaltender Robin Lehner said. "I think we need to get tougher in front of both nets. We need to make it harder for the other goalies. In this league if you want to beat the goalies you need to get traffic in front."

The Sabres went 0 for 4 on the power play after going 3 for 8 in their two previous games in which they totaled seven goals. Buffalo is among the league's best teams with 30.4 shots per game on the road.

"I'm not going to be satisfied with being stride-for-stride with a good hockey team," coach Dan Bylsma told the Sabres' official website. "We had every opportunity I think to get a few goals in that game and win the hockey game and we come up short."

Sabres' goalie Chad Johnson knows he's trade bait

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

February 25, 2016

SAN JOSE, Calif. – Chad Johnson insists his preparation this week is the same as at any other point in the season. But the Buffalo Sabres backup goaltender is not naive to his circumstances either.

Johnson is expected to get the start in one of the Sabres' next two games, either Friday night against the San Jose Sharks or Saturday at Los Angeles, and it's likely that will be his final game in the Blue and Gold.

As an unrestricted free agent, the 29-year-old is a good bet to be dealt prior to Monday's NHL trade deadline. And with a cap hit of only \$1.3 million and some decent numbers to his season, Johnson and Toronto's James Reimer appear to be the top available goaltenders for a contender to add in the next few days.

"You're nervous, excited, there's a lot of unknown," Johnson said. "For me, I just take every day a day at a time. It's something I've learned in my career. Worry about today and prepare for tomorrow."

Advertisement

Johnson is 13-14-3 this season with a 2.50 goals-against average and .916 save percentage while Reimer entered Thursday at 11-12-7/2.49/.918. Reimer's cap hit, however, is \$2.3 million.

Johnson has been particularly strong since November 1, with a line of 10-8-3/2.24/928.

"I think I've had a pretty good year. I don't know what the word is out there. I don't have an inside scoop or anything like that," he said. "I don't hear that. I've felt good I've had some talk about my season and potential maybe to have a bigger role somewhere. I don't really know what's going on but for unrestricted guys around the league, I would hope I'm right up there."

Thursday was a quiet day for the Sabres as they took a CBA-mandated day off in Northern California ahead of Friday night's game in SAP Center. Meanwhile, General Manager Tim Murray made no moves back in Buffalo as the countdown to the deadline continues.

The Sabres have yet to play starter Robin Lehner on consecutive days, and may not do it at all this season as Lehner continues to work his way back from the high ankle sprain that sidelined him for more than three months.

It will be interesting to see which game Johnson plays because San Jose is widely believed to be a team looking to upgrade at backup goalie with Alex Stalock struggling at 2.94/.884 in his 13 appearances. Another logical landing spot could be St. Louis, which just put Brian Elliott on injured reserve this week and needs a more veteran backup to play with Jake Allen.

Johnson learned about NHL business realities last year when he was traded at the deadline from the New York Islanders to Buffalo for Michal Neuvirth. He never played for the Sabres after getting injured in a morning skate in Ottawa shortly after the trade.

"That to me was a little shock, realizing you're joining a new team and putting on a new jersey pretty much the next day," he said. "It's definitely a shock. For me, this situation is little more comfortable than last year but it's always difficult. I love this team, the organization, the fans. It's just part of the game. I'm unrestricted and we are where we are as a team."

Johnson had a big season backing up Tuukka Rask in Boston two years ago (17-4-3/2.10/.925), and said he feels his game is close to that level again.

"I wasn't reliable enough last year," he said of his time with the Islanders. "This year, I really feel I've been consistent all year. I feel great about my game right now, just like I felt good in Boston. But a lot of it has to do with other people's feelings about you in other organizations. They're the ones who decide if you can play games, if you get paid or don't get paid."

Johnson, who is always up for a good chat with the media, joked with reporters on this trip that he's not paying attention to scenarios floating around.

"I'm here today and hopefully tomorrow and the next start I'll just prepare for that and help this team win hockey games," he said. "You can't worry about it because it will start just messing you up. And that's your job to sort of put out the hypotheticals of it all. That's what you get paid for. I just worry about stopping pucks."

Sabres continue California trip against Sharks

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

February 25, 2016

SABRES (24-30-7) at SHARKS (32-21-6)

TV: 10:30 p.m. ET; SNE, SNO, SNP, MSG-B, CSN-CA, NHL.TV

Season series: San Jose Sharks forward Patrick Marleau scored 2:59 into overtime for a 2-1 win against the Buffalo Sabres on Nov. 14 at First Niagara Center. Defenseman Marc-Edouard Vlasic, who set up Marleau's goal, opened the scoring on a first-period power play. Sabres forward Ryan O'Reilly had the tying goal in the third. Sharks goalie Martin Jones and Sabres goalie Chad Johnson each made 30 saves.

Sabres team scope: After getting shut out in the opener of a three-game California road trip, 1-0 against the Anaheim Ducks on Wednesday, Buffalo will try to get more bodies to the net to disrupt the rhythm of the goaltender, and continue to play strong in front of their own net. "It's something we want to get better at for sure," goalie Robin Lehner told the Sabres website. "But it's a skill. It's a skill, it's not something you just do, it's a skill of getting there, it's a skill of getting in the goalie's face, it's a skill of reading off each other. It's something we've got to work on." Lehner has given up one goal or fewer in four of his past five starts, but is 2-2-1 in that stretch despite a .956 save percentage.

Sharks team scope: San Jose returns home after completing a five-game road trip with a 3-1-1 record, though the finale was a 4-3 shootout loss Wednesday to the Colorado Avalanche. The Sharks have a stretch of four out of seven on the road before playing nine of 10 at SAP Center, where they're looking to improve upon an 11-12-3 record. "We've been playing better in our own barn, so it's good to see if we can capitalize on those opportunities coming up here," forward Joel Ward told CSNBayArea.com. "We still have got a lot of hockey left. We play a lot of games; every other day, I think, but the good thing about it is we're at home." Forward Nick Spaling has goals in his past two games, including one in his San Jose debut against Colorado after he was acquired Monday from the Toronto Maple Leafs. Spaling hadn't scored in his first 34 games this season.

Five big names Sabres could target at the deadline

By Matthew Coller

WGR 550

February 25, 2016

As we approach the NHL trade deadline, most analysts expect the Buffalo Sabres to be sellers. They have already traded Mike Weber to the Washington Capitals and are likely to deal Unrestricted Free Agents Jamie McGinn and Chad Johnson.

While the Sabres don't have valuable young prospects like Joel Armia or Mikhail Grigorenko anymore or a bevy of first-round picks from the old days of selling off star players, but they do have 20 draft picks over the next two seasons and several other non-untouchable players like Mark Pysyk, Zemgus Girgensons and Tyler Ennis who would draw interest on the market.

The Sabres are also looking for a left-handed defenseman and a scorer to play alongside Jack Eichel.

Here are five potentially available big-name players

Cam Fowler

Key stat: 30+ points in three of five NHL seasons

The 24-year-old blueliner could be the odd man out in Anaheim as they are facing a difficult salary situation next season. The Ducks will have to pay Restricted Free Agents Hampus Lindholm and Sami Vatanen big dollars and may not have the money to retain Fowler's \$4 million cap hit. A former first-round pick, Fowler is a quality puck mover and power play producer. As an offensive-minded lefty, he would be a perfect fit to play along

Jonathan Drouin

Key stat: 1.88 points per 60 minutes (5v5) in last two seasons, similar rate to Thomas Vanek and Bobby Ryan

Pouting over an AHL assignment is not a good look for the former No. 3 overall pick, but Drouin is still exceptionally talented and has produced as a set-up man in his first two seasons with the Lightning. Drouin is a tremendous skater and athlete with top-end offensive skill. He has a lot to learn at the NHL level and seemingly struggled to pick up the defensive game, but he is only 20 and has the chance to be an elite offensive player.

Jeff Skinner

Key stat: 1.00 goals per 60 minutes (5v5) over past three years, similar to Phil Kessel and Matt Duchene

The Carolina Hurricanes won't be selling off Skinner to the highest bidder, but he is set to make a lot of money (\$5.75M cap hit) over the next several years and the 'Canes may want to bring younger players through their system to fill forward spots. Skinner had injuries in his past, but has played 71 and 77 games the last two seasons and has been fully healthy this year. In Skinner the Sabres would not be getting the next Marian Hossa as he is far from a two-way talent, but he is a pure goal scorer, which would make Jack Eichel every happy.

Chris Kreider

Key stat: 1.77 points per 60 (5v5) over the last three years, slightly higher than Ryan O'Reilly, plus-3.3% Relative Corsi over last three years

The Rangers are the prime example of a team in "cap jail." They already had to sell off Carl Hagelin to the Anaheim Ducks (then traded to PIT) because Hagelin was a Restricted Free Agent. Kreider is an RFA this year, which may prompt the Rangers to move him at the draft, but they could try to fill his role with another player and

grab a prospect and/or picks to use in the future. He is not an elite offensive talent like Drouin, but Kreider has top-six skill and is one of the fastest skaters in the NHL.

Jordan Eberle

Key stat: 1.92 points per 60 (5v5) over last three years, similar to Logan Couture and Daniel Sedin

The Edmonton Oilers are a mess. They keep drafting No. 1 overall and keep finishing at the bottom of the standings. The Oilers have struggled to keep pucks out of their own net and could be seeking a defenseman. Eberle could be the one-dimensional scorer they move on from as they build around Connor McDavid and Leon Draisaitl. Nail Yakupov also may be available.