



Buffalo Sabres

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Anaheim Ducks grab McGinn and Pirri, deal Maroon at deadline

By Greg Beachem

AP

February 29, 2016

The Anaheim Ducks added two goal-scoring forwards while subtracting nothing major at the trade deadline.

The Ducks acquired Jamie McGinn and Brandon Pirri and shipped out Patrick Maroon in a flurry of deals Monday.

"I just thought we became deeper and more versatile," general manager Bob Murray said. "I'm comfortable with what we did without (messing) up the chemistry too much."

Murray declined to give up goalie Frederik Andersen or defenseman Sami Vatanen, retaining his soon-to-be restricted free agents to keep his roster core in position to challenge for the Stanley Cup this spring.

"I had lots of calls on certain people on the back end," Murray said, likely indicating interest in up-and-coming defensemen Shea Theodore and Brandon Montour. "I've got lots of thinking to do in the next four months ... but I wasn't going to give certain things to get players."

The Ducks acquired McGinn from the Buffalo Sabres in exchange for a conditional third-round pick in the upcoming draft. Moments later, they picked up Pirri from the Florida Panthers in a deal for a sixth-round pick.

McGinn is likely to play for the Ducks at home against Montreal on Wednesday. Pirri could be out for two weeks with an ankle injury, but he should skate for the Ducks soon to gauge his recovery.

Anaheim traded Maroon to Edmonton for a fourth-round pick and Slovak defenseman Martin Gernat. The Ducks also swapped Tim Jackman for right wing Corey Tropp in a minor-league deal with Chicago.

With eight consecutive wins, 15 victories in their last 17 games and a 22-4-2 streak since Christmas, the Ducks are just two points behind Los Angeles in their quest for a fourth consecutive Pacific Division title. Murray apparently saw little incentive to mess with the mojo on a team with ample reason to think it can win it all.

He still found two intriguing additions to the Ducks' offense.

McGinn has 14 goals and 13 assists in 63 games this season with the Sabres, who acquired him along with Ryan O'Reilly in a trade with Colorado last summer. The two-way wing has 83 goals and 72 assists in 429 career NHL games over eight seasons with San Jose, Colorado and Buffalo.

"We know he can play in the West, let's put it that way," Murray said.

He will be an unrestricted free agent after the season, but McGinn becomes the third-leading goal-scorer on a roster that was the NHL's lowest-scoring group for most of this season. Only Corey Perry and Rickard Rakell have more goals this season among McGinn's new teammates.

If the Ducks advance at least to the Western Conference finals with McGinn playing in half of their playoff games, the third-round pick in 2016 acquired by the Sabres becomes a second-round pick in 2017.

The Ducks' new fifth-leading goal-scorer is Pirri, who has 11 goals and 13 assists in 54 games this season. Although streaky, the 24-year-old has scored 33 goals in his last 101 games with the Panthers.

Pirri hasn't played since Feb. 13 after a frightening crash into the boards, but Murray expects him back within two weeks.

Maroon will get a fresh start in Edmonton after struggling mightily this season. The power forward has just four goals and nine assists while putting up a team-worst minus-13 rating.

Murray called Maroon "the consummate team player." The forward is due \$2 million in each of the next two seasons, clearing even more room in the Ducks' budget to re-sign restricted free agents Vatanen, Andersen and Hampus Lindholm.

The 22-year-old Gernat has three assists for the Oilers' AHL affiliate in Bakersfield this season.

Oilers-Sabres Preview

By Kevin Massoth

AP

March 1, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres and Edmonton Oilers spent the trade deadline tweaking their rosters amidst largely disappointing seasons, but the future of each franchise will meet on the ice this week.

The top two picks of the June draft clash for the first time on Tuesday night when Connor McDavid and the Oilers visit Jack Eichel and the Sabres.

The teams already played this season with Edmonton (23-34-7) earning a 4-2 home win on Dec. 6 despite an Eichel goal for Buffalo (25-31-7), but that was about a month into the top pick McDavid's three-month recovery from a fractured left clavicle.

McDavid, though, has played all of February and will finally meet his highly-touted 19-year-old rookie counterpart at First Niagara Center. Eichel is third in rookie scoring with 17 goals and 41 points in 63 games behind Chicago's Artemi Panarin (22 goals, 57 points) and Arizona's Max Domi (17 goals, 42 points), while McDavid is ninth with 10 goals and 29 points in 27 games.

"For me, it's more of a bigger game because I have some family coming, some buddies coming in from Erie, so I'm more excited about the game from that sense," McDavid said. "I'm sure it's going to be pretty well-covered (by media), I think everyone expects that. I think for the both of us, it's just another game."

Despite the added punch this season from their top picks, the Sabres and Oilers are trudging through miserable offensive seasons.

Putting the puck in the back of the net has been Buffalo's Achilles heel this decade with four of the team's five lowest-scoring seasons coming in the last five years: 2.46 in 2012-13, 1.83 in 2013-14, 1.87 in 2014-15 and 2.32 in 2015-16.

This season's mark ranks in the bottom three of the NHL and is on pace to tie the third-worst mark in franchise history with the 2002-03 club.

After matching a season-high four-game point streak (3-0-1) from Feb. 12-19, the Sabres have lost three of four and have been shut out in two of their last three - giving them six scoreless games this season.

Three nights after a 1-0 loss at Anaheim, Buffalo closed a three-game road trip with Saturday's 2-0 defeat in Los Angeles. The Sabres failed to score on seven power-play chances on their trip and are 3 for 28 in the last nine games.

"Without a question, I think we haven't been able to establish any offensive presence with the power play," coach Dan Bylsma told the team's official website. "It's been a draining factor for our team."

Robin Lehner suffered the tough-luck losses in Buffalo's two shutout defeats last week, despite making 61 saves while surrendering only three goals between them.

The Sabres have scored twice in each contest of a three-game skid against the Oilers.

Edmonton, though, is almost as offensively challenged. The Oilers scored 11 goals during an 0-5-2 skid from Feb. 13-26 before snapping it with Sunday's 3-1 win over the New York Islanders. Cam Talbot made 36 saves, improving his save percentage to .953 his last three starts.

The Oilers now open a four-game road trip, hoping to improve on their league-worst 2.03 scoring average away from home. Edmonton has lost five straight road contests, dropping its NHL-worst road record to 7-20-5, but Buffalo owns the league's worst home mark at 11-17-3.

Hence, each team's selling status at the trade deadline. After departing with goaltender Anders Nilsson, defenseman Justin Schultz and forward Teddy Purcell on Saturday, Edmonton acquired forward Patrick Maroon from the Ducks Monday in exchange for a 2016 fourth-round draft pick and defenseman Martin Gernat.

Buffalo traded Jamie McGinn to Anaheim for a conditional third-round pick. McGinn ranked fifth on the team with 14 goals and 27 points.

McDavid, Eichel to meet as pros

By Jay Skurski
Buffalo News
March 1, 2016

Try as they might, Connor McDavid and Jack Eichel aren't likely to escape the inevitable comparisons between them any time soon.

The top two picks in last June's NHL Entry Draft – McDavid No. 1 to the Edmonton Oilers, Eichel next to the Buffalo Sabres – will be forever linked.

Since that time, it's become increasingly clear neither player cares much about being compared to the other.

The latest example of that came Monday, on the eve of their first meeting as professionals. Speaking before the Oilers boarded their plane to Buffalo, McDavid was asked by Edmonton reporters if Tuesday night's game against the Sabres will carry any additional motivation given that it's the first against the player drafted right behind him.

"It's tough to say," McDavid said. "I've never talked to him about it or anything like that, so I don't really know his feeling. For me personally, it's not really too much of a big deal.

"We got drafted together, sure, but other than that we don't really share that much in common. He plays in the East, I play in the West. He went to school, I played in junior. So we're basically opposites in that sense. So for us personally, it's not much to it."

That line of thinking pretty much mirrors what Eichel expressed back in October when asked if the pre-draft process brought the two together.

"No, we're not friends," Eichel bluntly said at that time. "I don't really know him. I don't have his number. We were friendly when we were together in different situations, but that was really it. He's a good kid, so I got to know him a little bit in person."

McDavid echoed a similar comment Monday when he said he got to know Eichel on a "basic level," during the buildup to the draft, but that's the extent of their relationship.

"Share a couple words and all that," he said. "But for me, I was there with" Dylan Strome and Mitch Marner and Lawson Crouse, "guys that I knew very well going in, so I spent a lot time with them and just tried to share that whole draft experience with the guys I was close with."

So, no, don't expect McDavid and Eichel to get together for lunch any time soon. But that's not to say McDavid isn't looking forward to his first trip to Buffalo as a pro. He's plenty pumped for the game, but less because of a head-to-head matchup with Eichel and more because he'll have family in the stands and friends from his old junior team in Erie, Pa., coming up.

McDavid missed Edmonton's first game against the Sabres back in December because of a broken left clavicle suffered in November. At the time of his injury, Eichel basically bristled at any questions about it.

"Hockey is a physical game and things happen," he said then. "It's unfortunate. It doesn't really affect me at all. I'm still playing and I'm sure he'll be OK."

Eichel was right about that. Since returning from his injury, McDavid has five goals and 12 assists in 12 games.

"Obviously there's a lot of talk about the two of them," Oilers coach Todd McLellan said. "I don't think it's going to affect either of the athletes that are playing. They're going to give everything they have in the game and play

hard for their team. I think a lot more is going to be made out of it with all of the cameras and microphones than anything.

"Both of those players are still in the developmental stage and trying to make their mark in a very good league. Both have done a tremendous job. They're fun to watch. The fans are treated to some real good games by both of them and they will be for a long time."

The Sabres did not practice Monday, so Eichel was spared any more talk about McDavid for at least a day. General Manager Tim Murray touched on the much-hyped matchup during his news conference following the conclusion of the NHL trade deadline Monday afternoon.

"They're both young. They're both pretty good. I don't know if one cares about the other at all," he said of McDavid and Eichel. "I think that they both want to win tomorrow night because of their teams."

"They're both great players. Jack has settled in here very well and is obviously a huge part of our team and a huge part of the community now. I see him on TV quite a bit doing ads and that, so he's settled in. ... I guess it's about them vs. each other as far as the media goes and some fans will see it that way, too. I just think it's two teams trying to get better that will both play hard. I know we'll play hard tomorrow night."

McDavid and Eichel will face each other in a game for the first time since New Year's Eve 2014, when they were respectively part of Team Canada and Team USA in the World Juniors tournament.

The comparisons between the two date back to even before that game, as do their efforts at trying to downplay them.

"It's not at all about me vs. Connor," Eichel said before that much-hyped meeting in the World Juniors. "It's a huge matchup for the top seed in our bracket. It's Canada and the U.S."

Of course, with so much of last season being devoted to the reverse standings and chase for "McEichel," both players begrudgingly realize comparisons are inevitable. ESPN even has a tracker comparing their stats on a game-by-game basis.

"I'm sure it's going to be pretty well covered" in the media, McDavid said of their first meeting. "I think everyone expects that, but I think for the both of us, it's just another game, you know?"

Although they had played against each other before, the first time McDavid and Eichel spent any real time together was in Buffalo during the NHL Scouting Combine last June. While they'll be on separate benches Tuesday, the next time McDavid and Eichel are on the ice together will likely be as teammates.

Both are expected to be named Wednesday to the Team North America roster for the upcoming World Cup of Hockey that will be held in Toronto in September. The North American team consists of players 23 or younger from the United States and Canada.

"The potential exists. They both had very good years and if they are named to the team, I'd be very excited about having both of them," said McLellan, who will serve as the North American coach.

Expect a Sabres splash come draft week

By Mike Harrington

Buffalo News

March 1, 2016

As trade deadline days go, that was the ultimate snoozer. Far too much talk about the likes of Kris Russell being some pseudo Norris Trophy candidate. Far too much talk about guys who didn't get traded like Jonathan Drouin (fire your agent, kid), P.A. Parenteau, Dan Hamhuis and Loui Eriksson.

The Sabres were quiet, save for the late-afternoon deal of Jamie McGinn to Anaheim. The goaltending market dried up once St. Louis and San Jose got backups, so Chad Johnson will stay. And that was that.

The McGinn situation was simple. The Sabres wanted to keep him, his agent clearly wanted the Stupid Season term and dollars he can get on July 1 and the Sabres weren't going there now. If things don't go ducky for McGinn this spring out west and he finds there's no big-money market for him, he could come back. General Manager Tim Murray said he's interested in making that happen.

Trading McGinn for a draft pick leaves a hole on this team now and going forward. Ryan O'Reilly loves McGinn, his friend from Colorado, and so does everyone else in that dressing room. That's no small point.

But the bigger point that emerged Monday is this: Murray is set up to make a splash come draft week in June. Which is in Buffalo, of all places. And he knows he darn well better do it.

The standings sure count to Murray. He's not happy about being 26th in the NHL or entering Monday just five points out of 30th again. Even used a phrase I'm not supposed to put in a family newspaper to describe his feelings about it.

Murray sees what everyone else does. The young core has played in spurts, some very good ones and some not so good (With Connor McDavid in town Tuesday, it would be good if Jack Eichel would snap out of a 13-game funk that's produced one goal). He likes how hard his team plays and how coachable this group seems to be, although it would be nice if they would translate some of those listening skills to their currently anemic power play.

While you slept last week, the Sabres came close to sweeping road games in Anaheim, San Jose and Los Angeles. They gave up just four goals – four! – in three games and only won one. They need more help putting the puck in the net.

It's getting harder and harder to do "hockey trades" in the days leading up to the deadline. Too many teams still harbor playoff hopes and it's essentially just a rental market. Things change once the Stanley Cup is passed out in June.

The Canadian dollar is, ahem, tanking. Teams loading up for playoff runs this season will have to pay the piper and offload players to get under the cap. The Sabres have plenty of room to maneuver. They have 21 draft picks over the next two years. They have four third-rounders this year alone (three if the McGinn pick morphs into a '17 second-rounder based on conditions).

Between picks and moving midlevel players like Tyler Ennis, Marcus Foligno or Mark Pysyk, Murray should be able to get some more veteran talent in here to speed up this rebuild. Like he says, it's not hard to trade picks on the draft floor.

"We're not a cap team yet. Some day I hope that we are and that's the plan," Murray said. "Teams that loaded up this year are going to have to move good players. I think we'll be one of those teams that will be a buyer. I'd like to think that we're a destination, despite our standings the last couple years, for free agency and we have a ton of picks that don't have to be used on draft day."

Think of what happened last year at the draft in Florida and the few days around it.

The O'Reilly trade was announced literally 10 minutes before Murray strode to the BB&T Center podium and famously said, "Buffalo selects Jack Eichel."

Milan Lucic was traded at the draft. So were Dougie Hamilton, Carl Hagelin and Kyle Palmieri. It was an unusual swap meet with a run of goalies that included Robin Lehner, Cam Talbot and Eddie Lack.

Within the next 10 days or so, names like Patrick Sharp, Brandon Saad, Carl Soderberg and Phil Kessel also got moved. You get the idea.

By the time the draft comes, Murray will have a much better idea about his team. He'll know if he's getting Auston Matthews or some other top pick by virtue of the lottery results. He said he needs to start talking with Rasmus Ristolainen's representatives on an extension and has to decide to do likewise with Zemgus Girgensons, who is also a restricted free agent. But the Latvian was not a Murray draft pick and could be an interesting trade chip as well.

As for Ristolainen, who has emerged as their No. 1 defenseman, don't bet on the Sabres getting him to take a bridge contact. Not after 21-year-old Pittsburgh blueliner Olli Maatta set a bar Friday by signing a six-year, \$24 million extension.

The ultimate goal remains a Stanley Cup, not just making the playoffs. But getting into the postseason party for the first time since 2011 has to be Step One.

By 2017, the Sabres will be six years removed from the postseason – and 10 years removed from their last playoff series victory. That's not Murray's fault but, fair or not, that's the legacy he inherits.

Rex Ryan and Doug Whaley don't like hearing about 16 years of Bills failures but too bad. Same for Murray & Co. not liking how this franchise's failures trace to the summer day in 2007 that Tom Golisano, Larry Quinn and Darcy Regier let Daniel Briere and Chris Drury walk out the door.

Murray's state-of-the-franchise analysis on Monday was clear: "We're not at the bottom of the rebuild but we're not near the top of it either. We're somewhere in between."

It was impossible to get closer to the top Monday. A big step has to come in June.

Cole Schneider welcoming of trade to hometown Sabres' organization

By Amy Moritz

Buffalo News

March 1, 2016

It's been a while since Cole Schneider played hockey in Western New York, unless you count summers in the Fattey Hockey League.

The 25-year-old Williamsville native had his first practice with the Rochester Americans on Monday after he was part of a seven-player AHL deal between the Buffalo Sabres and Ottawa Senators late Saturday night.

Schneider left home to play in the North American Hockey League then played two seasons at the University of Connecticut before turning pro at the end of the Huskies 2011-12 season.

For the last four seasons he was a regular for the Binghamton Senators and one of the top scorers. He finished his Binghamton career with 191 points (83 goals, 108 assists) in 263 games. With 42 points, he becomes the leading scorer on the Amerks roster.

"Cole is a quiet guy," Binghamton coach Luke Richardson told reporters after the trade. "He's still a quiet guy but you can see him being more confident as a player and a person. ... He had to work his way into the lineup. He makes subtle, good little plays all the time. "

The Amerks also gained forwards Eric O'Dell and Alex Guptill along with defenseman Michael Sdao.

Coming into a new team with three other players made the first day with the Amerks a bit easier for Schneider.

"We were sitting at home on Saturday night, got a phone call and I was pretty excited about it," Schneider said after Amerks practice about how he learned about the trade. "I had a little bit more energy out there today. It's a little different playing with new guys, but there are three guys who came with me, so that made it a little easier."

O'Dell has 37 points (18 goals, 19 assists). Guptill has played three games in the AHL this season, 41 when combined with his time in the ECHL. Sdao had two assists and a plus-4 rating in 17 games for Binghamton.

The new-look Amerks play twice at Blue Cross Arena this week, hosting the Springfield Falcons on Friday and Toronto Marlies on Saturday.

"I think overall what we've accomplished possibly is a bigger, tougher group without losing numbers," Amerks coach Randy Cunneynworth said of the trade.

Rochester's last game was a 10-5 loss to the Marlies in Toronto where Phil Varone had a goal and two assists in his last game for the Amerks. Varone went to Binghamton in the trade along with forward Jason Akeson and defenseman Jermone Leduc.

Western Hockey League

Giorgio Estephan (Forward, Lethbridge) – Remains sidelined with a lower body injury. He has 63 points (27 goals) in 51 games.

Brendan Guhle (Defenseman, Prince Albert) – Picked up his 16th assist of the season in a 3-1 win over Regina on Friday. He has 25 points in 55 games

Brycen Martin (Defenseman, Everett) – Has 30 assists and six goals in 63 games.

Devante Stephens (Defenseman, Kelowna) – Has two goals, six assists and is a plus-8 in 63 games for the Rockets.

Ontario Hockey League

Eric Cornel (Forward, Peterborough) – Picked up an assist in a 7-4 loss to London on Friday then was held pointless on Saturday and Sunday, snapping his seven-game point streak. He has 72 points (26 goals, 46 assists) to rank 17th in scoring in the OHL. In the last three games is a combined minus-3.

Quebec Major Junior

Vaclav Karabacek (Forward, Moncton) – Has 13 goals and 24 points on the season.

College hockey

Will Borgen (Defenseman, St. Cloud State) – The freshman has 11 assists in 30 games.

Christopher Brown (Forward, Boston College) – Picked up his eighth assist of the season in BC's 3-1 win over UMass-Lowell on Friday.

Ivan Chukarov (Defenseman, UMass) – Has three goals and five assists in 34 games.

Hudson Fasching (Forward, Minnesota) – The junior scored the overtime winner just 57 seconds into the extra period to give Minnesota the win over Michigan on Friday as the Big 10 schools split their series. He has a career-high 19 goals and 34 points.

Anthony Florentino (Defenseman, Providence) – Had a pair of assists for the Friars in a sweep of UMass. The junior has five goals and seven assists.

Connor Hurley (Forward, Notre Dame) – The sophomore had a power play goal in Friday's 3-2 loss to Boston University. He has six goals and 10 assists.

Jason Kasdorf (Goaltender, Rensselaer) – The senior gave up two goals on 25 shots in a loss at Colgate on Friday. Saturday he earned a tie against Cornell giving up three goals and making 29 saves. He is 10-11-5 in 27 games with a 2.18 goals against average and a .933 save percentage.

Sean Malone (Forward, Harvard) – Has not played in the last three games for Harvard. He has seven goals and six assists in 23 games.

Cal Petersen (Goaltender, Notre Dame) – Suffered his third straight loss in a 3-2 setback against Boston University on Friday then rebounded with his first shutout of the season, stopping 39 shots in a 1-0 Fighting Irish win over BU.

Judd Peterson (Forward, St. Cloud State) – The sophomore was held off the score sheet as the Huskies were swept by Minnesota-Duluth. He has 14 goals and 20 points..

Max Willman (Forward, Brown) – The sophomore has two goals and six assists.

Europe

Jonas Johansson (Goaltender, Almtuna IS) – Through 42 games has a 2.39 goals against average and a .913 save percentage.

Victor Olofsson (Forward, MODO) – Has 25 points with 13 goals in 45 games.

Gustav Possler (Forward, MODO) – Has eight goals and 14 assists in 48 games.

McDavid-Eichel showdown highlights Oilers vs. Sabres

By Brian Hunter

NHL.com

March 1, 2016

OILERS (23-34-7) at SABRES (25-31-7)

TV: 7:30 p.m. ET; SNW, MSG-B, NHL.TV

Season series: Forward Taylor Hall had a goal and an assist to help the Edmonton Oilers to a 4-2 win against the Buffalo Sabres on Dec. 6 at Rexall Place. Rookie forward Jack Eichel opened the scoring for the Sabres.

Oilers team scope: Forward Connor McDavid, the No. 1 pick in the 2015 NHL Draft, was sidelined by a fractured clavicle the first time these teams played, so this will be his first showdown with Eichel, the No. 2 pick. Edmonton begins a four-game road trip fresh off a flurry of activity Monday. The Oilers acquired forward Patrick Maroon from the Anaheim Ducks for a minor league player and a draft pick, and claimed forward Adam Cracknell on waivers from the Vancouver Canucks and defenseman Adam Pardy from the Winnipeg Jets on Monday. "I know (Todd McLellan) is a coach that likes hard work and that's what I want to bring," Cracknell told the Oilers website. Defenseman Brandon Davidson and goaltender Laurent Brossoit were signed to new two-year contracts. Davidson had a goal and an assist when Edmonton ended a seven-game losing streak (0-5-2) with a 3-1 win against the New York Islanders on Sunday. Forward Benoit Pouliot sustained a shoulder injury against the Islanders; McLellan said Pouliot would have tests to determine its severity but is out long-term.

Sabres team scope: This is the start of a three-game homestand for Buffalo, which traded forward Jamie McGinn to the Ducks on Monday for a conditional third-round draft pick. The Sabres allowed four goals on a three-game California road trip but won once; they were shut out in each of the losses. "We played well but not good enough," Eichel told the Buffalo News. "We weren't opportunistic at the times we needed to be. You come away from three games only scoring two goals and an empty-netter. Not enough. Puck possession needs to get better. We threw too many pucks away." Eichel is second on Buffalo in goals (17, three-way tie) and points (41), but doesn't have a point in his past four games and has one goal in his past 13 games. "He wants to be able to put the puck in the net for our team and help us win," coach Dan Bylsma said. "That's where the frustration level is for Jack. He's played three games in California against three big teams and some tough centermen to play, and he's felt that."

Connor McDavid vs. Jack Eichel not just another game

By Mike Zeisberger
Toronto Sun
March 1, 2016

Here we are, preparing for the first edition of the NHL's McEichel Bowl, and the two key components are speaking about it like it's some obscure beer league tilt at a local arena.

Noting that there should be a strong media contingent on hand in Buffalo Tuesday night when his Oilers take on Jack Eichel's Sabres, Connor McDavid told reporters in Edmonton on Monday that "I think for the both of us, it's just another game. You know, yeah, I mean it'll be ... just another game."

"Just another game?" Really? Given that this will be the first time the top two picks in the 2015 entry draft will face off against each other in an NHL regular season contest, we're having a hard time buying what the always-understated McDavid is selling.

What about it, Jack Eichel? Surely you have to be cranked up at going up against the one player who was selected ahead of you.

"It's going to be a good matchup for our team," Eichel said during a phone interview with Postmedia. "Whenever you take part in a team sport, you never get caught up in one-on-one matchups like that."

Man, these kids are sucking the life out of what should be a great storyline at the First Niagara Center. After suffering through one of the most non-eventful NHL trade dudline days in recent memory Monday, hockey fans want sizzle, not fizzle.

Not to worry. Given the pedigrees and competitive natures of these two uber-talented teens, the hockey world should see those characteristics on display -- and more -- once the puck is dropped. After all, McDavid and Eichel have always let their play do the talking for them -- and they're not about to change now.

Of course, it's fully understandable that these youngsters would want to smother any sort of snowballing hype being accrued in the days, hours, even minutes leading up to the game, considering the propaganda that surrounded them in the 12-month leadup to the draft last June in Sunrise, Fla.

Keep in mind that it wasn't so long ago that the city of Buffalo was giddy about the possibility of embracing McDavid as the future boy wonder of the Sabres, the soft spoken saviour from Newmarket who would once again lead the team to puck prominence.

With McDavid playing his junior hockey just a 70 minute drive away in Erie, Pa., the future was almost close enough to high-five for Sabres Nation. And when McDavid's Otters took their traveling road show to Buffalo, an impressive throng of 11,391 fans -- some already having stitched McDavid's name on the back of their blue-and-gold Sabres jerseys -- showed up at First Niagara Center on Oct. 22, 2014 to see Erie spank Niagara 8-4.

But the luck of the draw -- in this case the draft lottery -- went against Sabres GM Tim Murray for a second consecutive season. Despite finishing dead last in both 2013-14 and 2014-15, the Sabres did not land the No. 1 selection in either instance, thereby missing out on the opportunity to take Aaron Ekblad and, one year later, McDavid.

When Murray said at the conclusion of the 2015 lottery he was "disappointed for our fans," it was not meant as a slight of Eichel. Nor did the future Sabre take it that way. In fact, Eichel-mania exploded in the Queen City after the big centre was selected second overall, culminating in 17,000 people showing up at First Niagara Center in July to see him play in a Sabres prospects game.

From t-shirts that read "We Got Jack" to the "Eich Daddy" burgers added to the arena concessions menu, Buffalo welcomed Eichel with open arms. And he's reciprocated by endearing himself to the community thanks to gestures such as visits to kids at a local cancer treatment centre.

On the ice, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has been pleased with Eichel's development, adding that the rookie's total of 41 points in 63 games could be higher if he'd just become selfish and shoot more.

"It's a learning curve," Eichel said. "I've learned a lot. Consistency. Playing better away from the puck, things like that.

"All in all, it's a great place to play. I've really enjoyed it."

And now, here comes McDavid and his Oilers into Jack's House. Having missed the Sabres visit to Edmonton in December because of a broken collarbone, McDavid is now healthy and ready to go.

Much like McDavid, Eichel would rather the hoopla surrounding Tuesday's game wasn't at such a fever pitch. But he understands it. Moreover, he's used to it. After all, he's lived it for more than two years.

"You go through a lot of media chaos in your draft year," he admitted. "Everyone has ideas about what you did last year and what you should be doing this year."

Deep down inside, we suspect what Eichel would like to be "doing" Tuesday night is helping his Sabres beat the Edmonton McDavids.

Just another game?

Hardly.

FRIENDLY ENEMIES

From foes to friends in less than 24 hours?

That's the unique situation Jack Eichel and Connor McDavid find themselves in this week.

On Tuesday, the top two picks will meet for the first time in an NHL game when the Oilers visit Buffalo. One day later, it is expected that both will be selected to the World Cup roster of Team North America, a squad made up of the top players 23 and under from Canada and the U.S.

"It'll be different, that's for sure," Eichel said. "One day you're playing against a guy; the next day he could be a future teammate.

"There's going to be a lot of good young players picked for that team, so we'll see what happens."

Sabres knew they had to trade Jamie McGinn

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 1, 2016

BUFFALO – When free agency opens July 1, if Jamie McGinn is available, the Sabres would be interested in re-signing the popular winger they dealt to the Anaheim Ducks prior to the trade deadline, general manager Tim Murray said Monday.

In his 63-game run here, the versatile McGinn fit in well, scoring 13 goals and 27 points while skating on a slew of lines. Off the ice, McGinn, 27, grew close to rookie Jack Eichel.

Murray said he had spoken a bit with McGinn's camp about a contract extension. The two sides, he said, had "different expectations."

"It didn't get close, and I understand why," Murray said inside the First Niagara Center, where the Sabres host rookie Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers tonight, the first NHL meeting between the phenom and Eichel, the top two picks last year.

McGinn, an unrestricted free agent, could possibly earn a few extra million or a longer term by waiting to sign. Murray couldn't let his top asset walk for no return, so he traded him to the NHL's hottest team for a conditional third-round pick in 2016, the Sabres' lone deal of the day.

"There's a difference between a guy signing now and signing July 1," Murray said. "All the comparables that we have and they have right now go out the door July 1. So they have to decide at that time there could be a big payday out there."

If the Ducks win two playoff rounds and McGinn plays half the games, the pick becomes a second-rounder in 2017, Murray said. The Sabres have 21 picks in the next two drafts.

Murray believes McGinn, a physical presence with a nose for the net, will fit in well with the Ducks, a heavy team.

"I think McGinn has a chance to be a valuable piece to a heavy playoff team," Murray said. "He knows no other way to play but hard."

The three other Sabres due to become unrestricted – defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo, goalie Chad Johnson and center David Legwand – all stayed put.

"Not close (to deals) and not disappointed," Murray said. "You need a partner to dance."

There weren't many dance partners around the NHL for much of the day, especially early on. The McGinn deal – like many others – was announced after the official deadline.

"It's the same every year," Murray said. "We've sat up there for five days. We think we're at least prepared for every scenario. You're making calls and getting some calls but there's no urgency. I guess as we all know, in any walk of life there's never urgency until there's a deadline. I never did my homework until the day the project had to be in."

Then Murray joked about at his colleagues.

"From 2 o'clock to 3 o'clock it was stupid, and I'm mad at every other GM because of it," he said.

He added: "You do more in 45 minutes than you do in the full week before."

Murray also traded defenseman Mike Weber to Washington for a third-round pick a week ago and made a seven-player AHL deal Saturday that netted them high-scoring forward Cole Schneider, a Williamsville native.

Monday was *much* quieter for the Sabres than recent years. They made four trades last year in the hours before the deadline and three in 2014.

Murray has a track record of making big, multi-player "hockey deals." Those, however, can be difficult to complete during the season. He said four GMs he chatted with told him they could talk again in the summer.

"We're in a position to do a hockey deal," he said. "It's just so hard today."

Why was there less action than usual all over Monday?

"I think teams are getting more specific in what they need as a rentals versus let's just go out and get the best player available and he really doesn't fit our team," Murray said.

This is, of course, a new era for the Sabres. They're no longer a laughingstock. They've made some significant strides this season coming out of their long rebuild.

Still, they rank among the NHL's bottom-feeders again.

"We're not at the bottom of the rebuild," Murray said. "But we're not at the top of it, either. We're somewhere in between."

He added: "I know where we are in the standings. It's frustrating. It (ticks) me off. But I think we've improved greatly."

Sabres goalie Chad Johnson could return as backup

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 1, 2016

BUFFALO – Just days ago, it appeared Sabres goalie Chad Johnson's days here were numbered.

In fact, after the backup's strong 24-save performance in Friday's 3-1 win in San Jose, the joke became the Sabres should've left him there because the Sharks needed a new No. 2 goalie badly.

But the Sharks acquired James Reimer from Toronto on Saturday, the same day St. Louis received Anders Nilsson from Edmonton.

In a matter of hours, the market for Johnson, an unrestricted free agent after the season, shrunk significantly. The trade deadline passed Monday and Johnson, 29, stayed put.

Johnson has enjoyed a strong season, going 14-14-3 with a 2.45 goals-against average, a .917 save percentage and one shutout in 33 games (29 starts). He subbed admirably for Robin Lehner during the starter's three-month absence.

So could Johnson be re-signed and be the backup again next season?

"I could envision it, yes," Sabres general manager Tim Murray said Monday inside the First Niagara Center. "I haven't spoken to him or his representative. I don't know what their expectation will be after having the year that he's had, a pretty good year with pretty good stats. I like the way Chad's played."

Murray also noted he likes Johnson's personality and work ethic.

Johnson has spoken about his desire to stay. Still, he could want a two-year deal and the Sabres might only want to offer a single season with rookie Linus Ullmark in the pipeline.

Whatever the happens in the future, the Sabres kept a quality No. 2 goalie on Monday.

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While many fans will make a big deal about the first NHL meeting between Edmonton Oilers phenom Connor McDavid and young Sabres star Jack Eichel tonight, the rookies picked first and second last year and forever linked together aren't close and barely know each other.

To McDavid, a prospect Sabres fans swooned over last year, it's just another game.

"For me, it's a bigger game because I have some family and some buddies from Erie coming, so I'm more excited from that sense," McDavid, who played junior hockey in Erie, told the Edmonton Journal. "I'm sure it'll be fairly well covered but I think for both of us it's just another game."

He added: "We were drafted together, sure, but other than that we don't share that much in common."

A broken collarbone kept McDavid out the Oilers' 4-2 win against the Sabres on Dec. 6 in Edmonton.

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Some other updates:

- Murray said the Sabres sent rookie winger Justin Bailey and forward Cal O'Reilly to the Rochester Americans on Monday so they're eligible for the AHL playoffs. O'Reilly will be recalled again. Someone else could also be summoned.
- Murray expects winger Tyler Ennis, out since Dec. 30 with a suspected concussion, to play again this season. Ennis has been skating on his own without experiencing any symptoms.
- Murray said the Sabres haven't had any talks with defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen's camp. The Finn's due to become a restricted free agent this summer.
- Murray said he had a conversation about forwards Jonathan Drouin and Brandon Pirri with their GMs. Tampa Bay kept Drouin, who has stopped playing for the organization. Florida dished Pirri to Anaheim.
- The Sabres had Monday off.

A quiet prelude to what should be an active Sabres summer

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

March 1, 2016

Well, that was pretty boring. It almost made me yearn for the time I woke up from my afternoon nap to find out the Sabres big move was acquiring Bob Corkum.

I'm just kidding. I wasn't really expecting much from the Sabres because Tim Murray's big moves will come in the off season. I thought for sure Jamie McGinn would be traded with the only question being whether the return was a 2nd or 3rd round pick. As it turned out, it was a 3rd that could become a 2nd.

I thought Chad Johnson would be moved but perhaps the backup goalie market went kaput after St. Louis and San Jose decided on other options. I'm guessing Sabres general manager Tim Murray couldn't give away David Legwand or Carlo Colaiacovo.

I would have preferred the Sabres keep McGinn but if Murray figured the former Avalanche would leave for nothing come July then it made no sense to hang on to him for what will amount to a meaningless final month plus of the season. McGinn was a nice pickup and a player I felt would have had a spot on a bottom two line on the team the Sabres eventually build to compete for a Stanley Cup. You always got an honest effort from McGinn who provided scoring off the wings and a physical presence. I was hoping, in the event McGinn was traded, the Sabres would be able to bring him back in free agency but I'm not expecting that after hearing from Murray. The two sides didn't come close to a contract extension so whatever gap there was on money and/or term, I doubt it would be smaller when McGinn is on the open market.

Like I said, I was hoping Murray could swing a real hockey deal or two but it seems like that will have to wait until late June.

There are still a number of areas the GM needs to address like more scoring off the wings and bolstering the defense corps. As far as the wings go, finding the right fit or fits on Jack Eichel's line should be a top priority.

Sam Reinhart seems to have good chemistry with Ryan O'Reilly but no one has consistently fared well playing alongside Eichel although Zemgus Girgensons has shown some promise there.

I hope Tyler Ennis can come back and play this season(Murray said he expects that to happen) because I'd like to find out if Ennis is a top six piece going forward. At the very least, if he comes back and regains his game perhaps the Sabres use him as a trade piece in the off season. They certainly have lots of draft picks that can be used as assets but there aren't as many prospects to move as a result of the O'Reilly and Evander Kane trades.

Murray had a conversation with Tampa Bay about Jonathan Drouin which is very intriguing. I don't know why things went south for Drouin with the Lightning but he showed some high level skill in his junior career and if the Sabres are okay with his character then I'm on board with trying to make a deal.

Of course, there's always free agency and the expected pursuit of Steven Stamkos by...almost everybody? That would certainly help cure the Sabres scoring woes. I guess I'm getting ahead of myself. Can we just fast forward to late June?

The Sabres weren't real active on Deadline Day.

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 1, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tim Murray made one trade on NHL Trade Deadline Day and it came very late. Jamie McGinn went to the Ducks for a conditional pick.

It's a third round pick this season unless Anaheim makes the Conference Finals and he plays 50 percent of the games. If that happens, it becomes a 2017 second round pick.

The trade came late and Murray said it's not his preference, "It's the same every year, we've sat up there for five days and nights and you're making some calls and getting some calls, but there's no urgency. There's never urgency until there's a deadline, so from 2:00 and until 3:00 it was stupid and I'm mad at every other GM because of it, I don't understand it, but that's the way it is."

"I made sure we got the McGinn deal agreed to, well before 3:00 and with the backup of trade calls and you're waiting for that but you're also trying to do other things and everything just gets jammed into the last 45 minutes. I've got some rattled guys upstairs, but they'll get over it."

A few weeks ago Murray told Schopp and the Bulldog that he had conversations with McGinn's agent about a contract extension. Murray said they were far apart, "It didn't get close and I understand why, there's a difference with a guy signing now and a guy signing July 1 and there could be a big pay day out there for him and I get that and he deserves it, but maybe it's not there and maybe he comes back to us on July 3. Would we have interest, for sure we'd have interest."

Murray didn't trade his other UFA's in Chad Johnson, David Legwand and Carlo Colaiacovo. Murray said, "It was not close and I'm not disappointed."

Much has been made of the Sabres in the standing. Before New Year's Day they were 29th and now they're 26th. Some fans only look at the standings and have no idea about the improvement in the team. Murray said, "I was hoping I wasn't the only that thought we had improved in many different areas besides where we are in the standings." Murray added, "It's frustrating and it pisses me off, but I think we've improved greatly. Out west we gave up four goals and won one game. I think we're a competitive team. With the injuries we have, we're not going to score very easily, but I think we've improved puck possession and I think we've improved our compete level, I think we've improved all over the ice."

Murray talked about the obvious improvement in Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel, but he said there are others, "Jake McCabe has made huge strides and he's a first year player, so I think there's a lot to like."

Tyler Ennis was back on the ice today with development coach Dennis Miller. Murray said Ennis' recovery is a slow process, "He skated today and he had no issues, but that doesn't mean he won't have an issue tomorrow." Murray added, "I think Tyler will come back this year, I think that they're being careful and he still does have certain problems, it's heart rate and fatigue, so there's no rush."

Rasmus Ristolainen will be a restricted free agent after the season, but those talks haven't started, "We haven't reached out and they haven't reached out and we're at the point where the numbers will speak for themselves and there will be comparables on a long term deal and a bridge deal, so we shouldn't be that far apart, but obviously there will be a gap to start, but I don't see a big issue."

The Sabres had to send Justin Bailey and Cal O'Reilly back to Rochester to make them eligible for the AHL playoffs. O'Reilly was recalled at 5:01. Bailey could be recalled on Tuesday.

Murray recaps a relatively quiet deadline day

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 1, 2016

It came down to the final hour and wasn't announced until well after the 3 p.m. deadline had passed, but the Buffalo Sabres made their mark on Deadline Day by acquiring a conditional third-round pick in the 2016 NHL Draft from the Anaheim Ducks for forward Jamie McGinn.

The third-round pick becomes a second-round pick in the 2017 Draft should Anaheim advance to the Western Conference Finals this postseason and if McGinn plays in half the games.

The deal marks the third trade made by the Sabres in the past week. Defenseman Mike Weber was dealt to the Washington Capitals for a third-round pick on Tuesday and seven minor leaguers were swapped in a trade with the Ottawa Senators on Saturday.

"I'd like to really quickly thank Mike and Jamie for all of their contributions here," Sabres general manager Tim Murray said at the outset of his press conference Monday. "They're both character guys that, more often than not, you're looking for versus trading away. But that's the position we're in, so that's that."

McGinn, 27, is an unrestricted free agent at the end of this season. He joins a Western Conference contender in the Ducks, winners in nine of their last 10 games and just two points behind the first-place Los Angeles Kings in the Pacific Division.

"We had a couple different offers and I thought that Anaheim was the best fit as of the team that they have there. That's what we try to do – is find a good fit for guys that are going out anyway," Murray said. "Anaheim was, to me, the team that had the best chance to win out of the teams I spoke to."

McGinn played in all 63 games for the Sabres this season after being acquired alongside Ryan O'Reilly in a trade with the Colorado Avalanche in June. A consistent face among Buffalo's top-six forwards, his 27 points (14+13) ranked fifth on the team.

McGinn has had quite the comeback season. His 2014-15 campaign was cut short when he underwent back surgery after only 19 games .

Murray said that although he spoke with McGinn's representatives and the two sides never came close to a contract extension, he wouldn't rule out the potential for a return once the forward hits the open market on July 1.

"It didn't get close and I understand why," Murray said. "There's a difference between a guy signing now and a guy signing on July 1. All the comparables that we have and they have today go out the door on July 1. There could be a big payday out there for him, and I get that and he deserves it."

"But maybe it's not there, maybe he comes back to us on July 3. Would we have interest? For sure, we would have interest."

The bulk of trades around the League were announced within the final two hours before the deadline on Monday, which Murray said is the norm from year-to-year. He said the McGinn deal was done well before 3 p.m., but wasn't announced until later due to the number of other calls that were being made in the final hour.

"As we all know in any walk of life there's no urgency until there's a deadline, like I never did my homework until the day the project had to be in," Murray said. "From two o'clock to three o'clock it was stupid [busy] ... I've got some rattled guys upstairs but they'll get over it."

WHAT ABOUT THE OTHER UFA'S?

The Sabres entered Monday with four players set to become unrestricted free agents at the end of the season: McGinn, fellow forward David Legwand, defenseman Carlo Colaiacovo and goaltender Chad Johnson.

The GM said that he took calls on his other UFAs but didn't approach any deals. In Johnson's case specifically, he wouldn't rule out re-signing the goaltender to be the backup to Robin Lehner again next season.

"I could envision it, yes," Murray said when asked about that possible scenario. "I haven't spoken to him or his representative, I don't know what their expectation will be after having a year that he's had, a pretty good year with pretty good stats. I've liked the way Chad's played ... There's very little not to like about him right now especially with his stats, so I can envision it for sure."

Johnson, 29, seized the opportunity for playing time after Lehner was injured in the season opener this season. He's 14-14-3 with a .917 save percentage and a 2.45 goals-against average in 33 appearances.

UPDATE ON TYLER ENNIS

Murray was asked about the status of the forward on Friday, and while he admitted that it wasn't within his realm of his expertise to make a projection for Ennis' return he did provide an update on his recent activities.

Ennis has missed 26 games with an upper-body injury.

"I've talked to Tyler, I've talked to the doctors; when you're dealing with this stuff it's day-to-day," Murray said. "He skated yesterday and today and he had no issues. But that doesn't mean he won't have any issues tomorrow

"... I think Tyler will come back this year. I think that they're being careful, very careful with him. He doesn't have headaches and he's not going blind, light doesn't bother him now, none of that. It's heart rate and fatigue, so there's no rush."

MURRAY'S TAKE ON THE SEASON SO FAR

Although they were sellers this season, Murray made no secret of his thoughts on the Sabres' improvements from a year ago. He pointed to their recent California road trip – in which they allowed four goals in three games against the top teams in the Pacific Division – as examples of the team's competitive nature.

"I think we have a lot of bright spots and we're young," Murray said. "Veterans are playing hard and our young kids are only going to get better. Every day, they're going to get better and I know that when they come to camp next year we're going to see an improvement again."

Murray said that with the continued development of the team's young players – he pointed to the significant bump in Sam Reinhart's play, for example, from his nine-game stint last season and said he still believes there's growth to be seen – he can envision the team being in a different position on future deadline days.

"We're not a cap team yet," Murray said. "Someday I hope that we are and that's the plan. You see trades – teams that loaded up this year are going to have to move good players. I think that we'll be one of those teams that will be a buyer.

"I'd like to think that we're a destination, despite our standings the past couple years, in free agency and we have a ton of picks."

Reinhart: Being on the west coast near the trade deadline

By Sam Reinhart

Sabres.com

March 1, 2016

Rookie Sam Reinhart shares with Sabres.com what the week leading up to his first Trade Deadline in the NHL has been like while the team was on its West Coast road trip.

It takes a couple of days to get used to the time difference on a Western road trip. It's a little bit tougher coming back this way. Sometimes it seems quite a bit later than it actually is. But once you're on the ice during a game, it doesn't really affect you.

A long road trip like this is good for team bonding. On days off like the one we had in San Jose, everyone makes sure to spend the day together so it definitely helps and keeps everyone close. It's a little tougher this week with what's going on right now, having Webby [Mike Weber] leave, and nobody really knows what's next.

My NHL Trade Deadline has been a tough experience. I think it's a little bit different being on the road and going through it because everyone's together every day. The team being so close it makes it that much tougher. You're just kind of hoping that guys don't go, but at the same time it's a part of the business and everyone kind of accepts that.

Seeing Webby traded wasn't my first taste of the business side of the NHL, but it was still tough. It doesn't get easier, that's for sure. There aren't too many guys on our team that weren't close with him. It was tough to say goodbye but I'm hoping to still stay close with him.

Even with the deadline, we've been able to stay close on this road trip and have fun with each other. Whatever happens, happens and there's nothing really we can do about it. Regardless of the time of day or time of year, we go out there as a team every night and play the same way no matter what.