



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 12, 2016*

## Hurricanes-Sabres Preview

AP

March 12, 2016

After posting one of the Eastern Conference's worst February records, this month could not be going much better for the [Carolina Hurricanes](#).

The next week could go a long way toward determining if they'll be a legitimate playoff contender over the season's final month.

Coming off an impressive win over one of the top teams in the East, the visiting Hurricanes can't afford to slip up Saturday against one of the conference's worst, the Buffalo Sabres.

Shipping captain Eric Staal to the New York Rangers at the trade deadline seemed to signal Carolina (31-26-11) was packing in the season, but coach Bill Peters' team apparently isn't giving up on it quite yet.

The Hurricanes have earned seven points in four March games after going 5-6-2 last month and are in a tight race with Detroit, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia for the two wild-card spots. They'll visit the Penguins on Thursday, two days after a matchup at league-leading Washington, which means beating the lowly Sabres (27-33-9) is paramount in their quest to reach the playoffs for the first time since 2009.

Carolina earned two points in a building in which it had dropped four in a row Thursday, opening a five-game trip with a 3-2 overtime victory over Boston to surpass last season's win total with 14 games to play. Phillip Di Giuseppe scored 1:30 into OT as the Hurricanes controlled the puck throughout the extra period and never allowed the Bruins to shoot.

"We believe you've got to hang on to the puck in overtime. Once you give it up, you typically don't get it back," Peters said. "We want to be an attacking team."

Jeff Skinner set up the winner, giving him four goals and three assists in his last five games, while Elias Lindholm scored on the power play.

The Hurricanes allowed a power-play goal but have killed off 12 of 13 penalties in the last six games.

The Sabres have gone 0 for 8 with the man advantage in their last three contests and allowed a power-play goal in five straight. They haven't yielded a power-play goal in six in a row since December 2010.

Carolina's Cam Ward stopped 30 shots Thursday to win his second straight start following a three-game losing streak. Ward, however, has dropped four straight starts in Buffalo with a 3.57 goals-against average.

In the only matchup this season Nov. 27, Ward stopped 11 of 14 shots before being replaced by Eddie Lack after two periods in a 4-1 road loss.

Ward could be facing heavy pressure as the Sabres have ramped up their attack in six games this month, averaging 33.3 shots for one of the league's highest marks.

Buffalo had 38 shots Thursday in Montreal but only Nicolas Deslauriers and Brian Gionta scored.

"It was a weird game," Gionta told the team's official website. "At spurts things were happening, at other spurts nothing was going on. But again, we've got to find ways to win these games."

Robin Lehner made 31 saves in starting for the sixth time in seven games for Buffalo. He's gone 1-5-2 in his last eight starts and has posted a 5.20 GAA in losing all three career starts against Carolina.

## One-goal games proving costly to Sabres

By John Vogl

Buffalo News

March 12, 2016

Jake McCabe looks at the NHL standings and sees the Sabres near the bottom. Then he looks at Buffalo's record in one-goal games and understands why.

The Sabres have made the leap from doormat to competitive team, but they have one huge hurdle to overcome. They need to win the close ones. Buffalo is 11-13-9 in one-goal games, a winning percentage of .333 that ranks 29th in the 30-team NHL.

"We play good hockey, but we make those big mistakes that end up costing us games," McCabe said Friday. "You look at the playoff picture and you think back, 'What if?'"

"It's five games, 10 points and we're right back in the mix of things. Looking back now, it's even tougher."

The defenseman, who will join the rest of the Sabres in hosting Carolina on Saturday afternoon, was on the mark with his assessment of five games being the difference. The teams in the middle of the rankings for one-goal games have a winning percentage of .488. Switch five losses for five wins, and Buffalo's record of 16-8-9 would be .484. Add 10 more points to the Sabres' total, and they'd be tied with the Hurricanes just three points out of a playoff spot.

Ifs, whats and buts can drive the Sabres nuts.

"It's one more win every month," McCabe lamented. "It sounds simple, but it goes back to those little mistakes we make along the way and lose those close games. It's just learning how to win and learning how to close out games."

Including Thursday's 3-2 loss in Montreal, nine of the Sabres' last 18 games have been decided by a goal. They are just 1-3-5, leaving a bunch of attainable points in the hands of others.

"There's a ton of those this year," forward Zemgus Girgensons said in First Niagara Center. "Our standings would be way different if we had half of those one-goal games the other way."

"It takes experience. If you have a lead, you know you have to play smarter. You have to limit all the mistakes. It's not easy to win those one-goal games, but that's how it is. The whole league is good, so there's going to be a lot of one-goal games."

The loss in Montreal summed up the Sabres' problems in one-goal games:

- After taking a 1-0 lead, Buffalo allowed the tying goal just nine seconds later.
- They blew coverage during a penalty kill, leaving Canadiens sniper Alex Galchenyuk wide-open in front for a goal.
- They gave up the winner with 6:39 to play, depriving them of an overtime point.

"The hardest thing about last night's game is we feel we didn't make them work very hard for what they got," coach Dan Bylsma said. "We felt we made mistakes, easy mistakes that gave them opportunities."

"We fight back in that game to get even, 2-2, in the third period, you certainly feeling like and looking like you should get out of that game with a point or an opportunity to win."

The Sabres' record in one-goal games is essentially the only area they haven't improved compared to the previous two last-place seasons. They were actually better at the close ones last year, going 18-13-8 (.462). They were 13-17-10 (.325) in one-goal games in 2013-14.

The true mark of the Sabres' competitiveness comes in the absence of blowouts. They are 6-8 in two-goal games and 10-12 in games decided by three goals or more, meaning they're almost as likely to win a rout as get routed.

Last season, they were 1-12 in two-goal games and 4-26 in three-goal contests. The year before, they were a ridiculous 1-19 in games decided by three goals or more.

They're getting closer to the rest of the NHL, but too often they play just well enough to lose.

"You look back at the goals we gave up, and it's so close," McCabe said. "We've just got to keep moving forward and improve."

## **Sabres forward Kane won't face charges after investigation**

By John Wawrow

AP

March 12, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sabres forward Evander Kane will not face criminal charges following an investigation into a possible sexual assault after prosecutors said Friday there was no evidence to support the allegation.

Acting Erie County District Attorney Michael Flaherty announced his decision after examining the facts, including forensic and toxicological test results, and closing a two-month investigation.

"No charge will be filed because there is no evidence to support the filing of a criminal filing of a criminal action," Flaherty said during a news conference. He added that no criminal complaint was ever filed.

Kane's lawyer, Paul Cambria, told The Associated Press that he was not surprised by Flaherty's decision.

"We were confident all along that there was basis to claim that Evander had done anything wrong," Cambria said. "And we're glad that he's been cleared. And now it's time for him to move forward and put this behind him."

The alleged incident occurred in the early hours of Dec. 27 at a downtown hotel, where Kane is living, and after he and the Sabres returned to Buffalo following a 6-3 win at Boston.

A person familiar with the investigation told the AP that the investigation was prompted after a woman went to a hospital to be treated for an injury, and said she had difficulty remembering what happened. The woman's comments prompted officials to follow hospital protocol and notify police, who then launched an investigation, said the person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because prosecutors have not revealed the details.

Without going into detail, Flaherty would only say: "Protocols were followed and those protocols included alerting the police."

Police searched Kane's room and had his vehicle towed and searched, which was described as standard practice in such cases.

Kane is tied for second among Sabres with 19 goals and fourth with 31 points in 58 games this season, his first in Buffalo and seventh in the NHL. The Sabres acquired the 24-year-old in a multi-player trade with Winnipeg in February 2015.

Kane was the second NHL player to be investigated for a sex offense by police in the Buffalo area this year. In November, prosecutors cited a lack of credible evidence after reviewing an allegation against Chicago Blackhawks star Patrick Kane, who was accused of assaulting a woman at his offseason home outside Buffalo in August.

On Wednesday, NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman ruled the allegations against Patrick Kane to be "unfounded," in announcing the player won't be disciplined by the league.

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Associated Press Writer Carolyn Thompson contributed to this report.

## **Sabres notebook: O'Reilly hits the ice, hopes to practice soon**

By John Vogl  
Buffalo News  
March 12, 2016

Ryan O'Reilly waited three weeks to skate, the longest stretch of inactivity he can remember in his NHL career. Once he got on the ice, he wasn't leaving until they kicked him off.

The Sabres center skated Friday for the first time since breaking his foot Feb. 19. He and injured defenseman Cody Franson carved up the auxiliary rink in HarborCenter for more than 90 minutes, ending their session only because the Carolina Hurricanes had reserved the ice.

"It's always nice to get back on the ice," O'Reilly said. "It feels like a lot longer than it has been once you get out there. It's awkward kind of coming back, but it was a good workout. Hopefully, I'll continue to improve and get back soon."

O'Reilly will miss his 11th straight game Saturday afternoon when the Sabres host the Hurricanes in First Niagara Center, but coach Dan Bylsma hopes the center can join the team's practices Monday and Tuesday.

"They want to review it and talk about it and go from there," O'Reilly said. "Unfortunately, there's no direct timeline now, but I'm hoping as soon as possible.

"I don't think I've ever been hurt this long in my career. It's definitely different coming back."

O'Reilly suffered his injury when he stopped a pass around the boards in the offensive zone in Columbus.

"I just kind of turned my foot to take the puck, and I felt it hit weird," he said. "I thought it was a stinger till after the game, and they looked at it and obviously unfortunate that I had to miss some time. It's good. It feels a lot better now. I'm just excited to get back out there and get going."

Despite missing 10 games, O'Reilly remains the Sabres' leading scorer with 49 points. The three members of the reconfigured top line - Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane - have passed O'Reilly's goal total of 17.

"Watching these guys out there together, every shift they're making stuff happen," O'Reilly said. "It's not easy to do in this league, especially for guys at their age. To have that responsibility and be effective, it's only kind of the first taste we're seeing of that, and it's only going to get better."

Franson, who suffered a head and neck injury on the same day O'Reilly got hurt, has skated for three straight days.

"Hopefully, that means he can progress into next week," Bylsma said.

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Montreal defenseman P.K. Subban suffered a "non-serious neck injury" during Thursday's game against the Sabres and was released from the hospital after comprehensive testing, the Canadiens announced. Subban was put on a stretcher and transported to the hospital for precautionary reasons after being injured by teammate Alexei Emelin in the closing minutes of the Habs' 3-2 victory over Buffalo in Bell Centre.

"Feeling good and feeling the love. Thanks for all the support!" Subban wrote on his Twitter account.

Subban will sit out Saturday's game against Minnesota. The sixth-year veteran has never missed a game because of injury.

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Fans from the Southtowns who are attending the 1 p.m. game between the Sabres and Hurricanes will need to avoid Ohio Street. The road will be closed prior to puck drop because of the Shamrock Run.

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The Hurricanes were supposed to fold after trading captain Eric Staal to the New York Rangers at the deadline. Instead, they've gone 3-1-1 to remain in the Eastern Conference playoff race. They were three points out of a wild-card spot entering Friday night's schedule.

"They've been able to scratch and claw here the last few games to win some hockey games," Bylsma said. "They're fighting for their playoff lives every night, and they've shown that."

## **No charges against Evander Kane after sex encounter investigation**

By Lou Michel, Dan Herbeck  
Buffalo News  
March 12, 2016

Buffalo Sabres star Evander Kane has been cleared of any wrongdoing after an investigation into a sexual encounter in December.

No accusation was ever made against Kane, but authorities said an investigation was started after a young woman who spent the night with Kane sought medical treatment at a local hospital and said she could not remember what happened.

The Erie County District Attorney's Office and the Buffalo Police sex offense squad determined that nothing illegal occurred, sources familiar with the probe told The Buffalo News on Friday.

"There was never a criminal complaint filed. After a careful and diligent examination of all the known facts, including the results of forensic and toxicological testing, neither the provable facts nor the applicable law support the filing of any criminal charges or a prosecution in this matter," acting District Attorney Michael J. Flaherty Jr. said in a statement.

At a press conference, Flaherty told reporters he feels badly for Kane because of all the publicity generated by the probe. He said Kane has been cooperative with authorities during the "thorough and exhaustive" investigation, which lasted about 10 weeks.

"If Mr. Kane was Evander Smith, none of you would be here," Flaherty told reporters. "He didn't ask for this ... It was put on him by forces beyond his control."

Paul J. Cambria, Kane's attorney, said the hockey player indicated to him that he is "relieved but not surprised."

"After all the interviews that were conducted, after all the toxicology tests were completed, there was no evidence of a crime ... and there was no evidence to file any kind of charge," Cambria said. "I spoke to my client. He was relieved, but not surprised in any way, because he did nothing wrong."

Kane has stated that he had consensual sex with the woman after meeting her in a downtown bar Dec. 27 and taking her back to his hotel room, sources close to the case have said.

Hospital officials contacted police after finding evidence of trauma and examining the woman for signs of sexual assault. That resulted in police searches of Kane's downtown hotel room and his sport utility vehicle.

"As I understand it, there are certain triggers that would cause hospital officials to" contact police about a possible sexual assault, Cambria said. "The reason this investigation started in the first place is that something triggered one of these automatic protocols. The young woman made no criminal complaint."

On Dec. 28, one day after his encounter with the woman, Kane declared his innocence and said he respected the legal process:

"I just want to say I've done nothing wrong," Kane told reporters in the team's locker room at First Niagara Center. "I look forward to clearing my name."

Cambria previously said his office conducted its own investigation and determined there was no basis for criminal charges against Kane.



He said toxicology tests are taken when police conduct such investigations, looking for DNA evidence and evidence of drugs in an individual's bloodstream.

Two days ago, another of Cambria's clients, Patrick Kane, the South Buffalo native who stars for the Chicago Blackhawks, was cleared in a National Hockey League investigation of a rape allegation dating back to August. The league determined the allegation was unfounded and there would be no disciplinary action against the league's leading scorer.

The Erie County DA's office four months ago decided not to pursue charges against Patrick Kane, who had also previously declared his innocence saying that he "did nothing wrong."

A 21-year-old woman had claimed she was raped by Patrick Kane in his waterfront home on Old Lakeshore Road in Hamburg, after meeting at a downtown bar and going back to his home.

## **Sabres' Lehner, Bogosian should be available**

By Adam Kimelman

NHL.com

March 12, 2016

### **HURRICANES (31-26-11) at SABRES (27-33-9)**

**TV: 1:00 p.m. ET; FS-CR, MSG-B, BELL TV, NHL.TV**

**Season series:** Jack Eichel scored the game-winning goal in the Buffalo Sabres' 4-1 defeat of the Carolina Hurricanes at First Niagara Center on Nov. 27. Josh Gorges, Brian Gionta and David Legwand also scored for the Sabres. Victor Rask scored for the Hurricanes.

**Hurricanes team scope:** Phillip Di Giuseppe got credit for the overtime goal against the Boston Bruins on Thursday, but Jordan Staal's strong defensive play against the Bruins' David Pastrnak to defuse a scoring opportunity was just as important. Staal leads the Carolina with a plus-5 rating and is second among Hurricanes forwards with an average ice time of 18:03 per game. "He plays against the best every night," assistant coach Rod Brind'Amour told the Raleigh News and Observer. "Check the score sheet of the other team's best players and they're hardly ever on it or not a big factor." Coach Bill Peters said knowing Staal is on the ice makes his job easier. "You don't have to worry about the next 45 seconds. That's a very nice luxury to have."

**Sabres team scope:** Ryan O'Reilly skated Friday for the first time since sustaining a lower-body injury Feb. 19. He was on a secondary rink while his teammates were on the ice on the main rink. The belief was that O'Reilly would need 3-4 weeks to recover; Friday marked three weeks. "Three weeks was a date to see the doctor and the fact that he's gotten on the ice is an indication that he's had some healing and some progression," coach Dan Bylsma told the Sabres website. "Hopefully as he gets tested on the ice significantly today, hopefully we can continue to progress into next week when we practice Monday and Tuesday." Goaltender Robin Lehner and defenseman Zach Bogosian did not practice Friday. Bylsma said they were given maintenance days and expects they will be available Saturday.

## Buffalo's young guns are getting used to the NHL grind

By Ryan Kennedy  
The Hockey News  
March 12, 2016

Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart are the future up front in Buffalo. They're a big part of the present, as well, actually – but they are rookies in the best league in the world. With all the hype that comes along with the high picks (they were each taken second overall; Eichel last year and Reinhart the year before), it is important to remember an NHL career is a process – one that is filled with ups and downs.

"I do think it's at another level for both of them – the number of games, the rapid succession of games," said coach Dan Bylsma. "That's something they're learning to battle through."

Reinhart played nine games with the Sabres last year, but the team needed him to get stronger, so he was dispatched back to junior. He ended up being crucial to Canada's gold-medal win at the world juniors and helped Kootenay get to the second round of the WHL playoffs, while putting up an impressive 65 points in 47 regular season games.

The smart-as-a-whip right winger has four points in his past four games, playing on a line centered by Eichel, with power forward Evander Kane on the left side. Eichel himself has five points in the past five games and that line is Buffalo's top unit right now, even in terms of ice time. Not bad for Kane and a couple of kids.

"They're learning every day," said veteran defenseman Zach Bogosian. "You see them get into a groove and get more comfortable. The first year is a whirlwind, with so much going on, but they're handling it great."

Bogosian noted that the 18-year-olds of today are much different than the 18-year-olds of eight years ago (that would include himself, as he turns 26 in the summer) and those players were much different than the 18-year-olds prior to that.

"They're a lot more mature now on and off the ice," he said. "They have to be. They're forced into the spotlight and all our young guys have handled it well."

They key is managing expectations. Even for players like Eichel, Reinhart and Edmonton's Connor McDavid – who uncharacteristically has just one point in his past three outings – the grind is hard. Bogosian, who was always a beast of a physical specimen, even as a teen, says that man strength is just one part of the equation; there's also the learning side of the game that allows older players to read plays without putting their bodies in harm's way unnecessarily.

Luckily, Eichel and Reinhart are pretty smart cookies. For them, a lot of the mental work comes before the puck even drops at night.

"More than anything it's about preparation, being ready to play every night," Eichel said. "Preparing on days before the game, at practices, just coming in and working hard. It's a long season – you play back-to-back games, you're travelling a lot, there's a lot of ups and downs and you have to keep moving forward and keep a positive attitude."

By this time last year, Eichel's season at Boston University was nearing the end. The Terriers had the Hockey East tournament to win (they did) before charging through to the Frozen Four final, where they were upset by Providence College. But that schedule was much more forgiving than the three games in four days (all in different cities) that Buffalo just completed. Oh, and Saturday features an afternoon tilt against a surging Carolina squad gunning for a playoff spot – so it doesn't get any easier.

On the other hand, what kid *wouldn't* want to be playing a starring role in the NHL at this time of year? There's plenty more hockey to come from Eichel and Reinhart and if they can keep up the preparation, playoff hockey will return to Buffalo soon enough.

## **Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly skates for first time since injury**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 12, 2016

BUFFALO – If Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly had his way, he might've stayed out for hours. But the rink inside HarborCenter was only available until 1:30 p.m., so the NHL All-Star's first skate since hurting his right foot three weeks ago ended a little early.

"Kind of kicked off, I guess," O'Reilly said after walking back to the First Niagara Center.

O'Reilly, who was joined by defenseman Cody Franson, skated at least 90 minutes.

O'Reilly, 25, has missed 10 games since a puck rimmed around the boards and hit him Feb. 19 in Columbus. He finished the Sabres' 4-0 win before getting examined after the game.

"Just kind of turned my foot to take the puck," he said. "I felt it hit weird. I thought it was a stinger until after the game, then they looked at it."

After they looked at it, the Sabres announced O'Reilly would miss three to four weeks. He doesn't have a timeline for his return, however. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma hopes he progresses enough to practice early next week.

"I don't think I've ever been hurt this long in my career," O'Reilly said. "It's different. It's definitely different coming back this late in the season."

The Sabres clearly miss O'Reilly, their most versatile and top all-around asset. They're 3-5-2 without him.

"It feels like a lot longer than it has been," O'Reilly said. "Once you get out there, it's awkward coming back. It was a good workout today."

O'Reilly has been seen wearing a boot on his right foot. Early on, that limited his workouts. He recently started riding an exercise bike.

"It's nice to start getting some of that feel back," he said about skating. "There's no way to train for that off the ice."

Meanwhile, Franson (neck) skated for a third straight day.

Defenseman Zach Bogosian and goalie Robin Lehner both had maintenance days today, Bylsma said.

## **Sabres' Evander Kane won't be charged after investigation**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 12, 2016

BUFFALO – Evander Kane won't be charged after an investigation into a sexual encounter the Sabres winger had Dec. 27 at a downtown hotel.

The Erie County District Attorney's Office and the Buffalo Police sex offense squad followed automatic protocols and determined Kane, 24, did nothing illegal. No criminal complaint was ever filed.

"After careful and diligent examination of all the known facts, including the results of forensic and toxicology testing, neither the provable facts nor the applicable law support the filing of any criminal charges or a prosecution in the matter," said Michael J. Flaherty, Jr., Erie County's Acting District Attorney, in a statement.

Kane, who's in his first season with the Sabres, declared his innocence Dec. 28.

"I just want to say I've done nothing wrong," he said. "I look forward to clearing my name."

## **Sources: Kane not to be charged**

WGR 550

March 12, 2016

Sources report today that Sabres forward Evander Kane will not be charged after he was the subject of an investigation regarding a sexual encounter. No accusation was ever made against Kane, but a young woman sought medical treatment at ECMC and said she couldn't remember what happened after she spent the night with him.

Acting Erie County District Attorney Michael Flaherty Jr. held a press conference today addressing the media. "In this case, protocols were followed and those protocols included alerting the police, and the police conducted it's investigation," Flaherty Jr. said. "I'm here today to tell you the results of that investigation are that there's no evidence to support the filing of a criminal action against Mr. Kane."

Flaherty Jr. said that Kane was cooperative throughout the process, saying that Kane spoke to first responders. "I do feel bad for him," Flaherty Jr said. "He didn't ask for this, it was put on him by forces beyond his control. But, I want to remind the public that if you or someone you love is the victim of a sexual assault, we are here to help you."

## **O'Reilly skates for first time since injury**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 12, 2016

While the rest of the Buffalo Sabres have taken the ice for practice over the past few weeks, sounds of ricocheting pucks would resound loudly from a room just outside the main concourse at First Niagara Center. There in a shooting booth would be Ryan O'Reilly, firing shot after shot as he worked toward recovering from a lower-body injury sustained on Feb. 19.

On Friday, O'Reilly took another step forward toward doing just that. O'Reilly and defenseman Cody Franson – both out since Feb. 19 with their respective injuries – skated on a second rink off to the side as the team practiced on the feature rink.

O'Reilly and Franson didn't return from their skate until well after their teammates had made their way back to the locker room at First Niagara Center. If the ice wasn't booked for another group, they might still be there now.

"[We were] kind of kicked off I guess," O'Reilly said, smiling. "It was a tough day. It might not look that tough but still just getting out there, trying to get my feel back and just skating. I think I can do all the stuff off the ice, the gym and that, but to actually get out there and do the drills and all the different skills, it's different but it's coming."

O'Reilly was sustained his lower-body injury three weeks ago when he was hit in the foot with a pass around the boards in the offensive zone. At first, he said, he thought it was just a stinger, but tests afterward revealed it was something more.

"It's a bummer," he said. "You never like watching the game and watching your team go out there, but it's an unfortunate bounce that happened. I just try to control what I can control, which is getting the rest I need. But at the same time, [I've been] getting that kind of hunger back for this last little bit."

With an initial timetable of 3-to-4 weeks for his recovery time, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said that he's progressing right on schedule.

"Three weeks was a date to see the doctor and the fact that he's gotten on the ice is an indication that he's had some healing and some progression," Bylsma said. "Hopefully as he gets tested on the ice significantly today, hopefully we can continue to progress into next week when we practice Monday and Tuesday."

Franson, meanwhile, has been skating throughout the week as he looks to return from a neck injury he sustained on a hit into the boards in Columbus.

"He skated a little bit Wednesday, skated yesterday and again today so hopefully that means he can progress into next week," Bylsma said.

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### **FILLING IN ON FACEOFFS**

O'Reilly led the team in faceoff percentage and led the entire League in faceoffs taken at the time of his injury, and his absence was noticeable in the faceoff circle in Buffalo's first game without him. The Sabres won only 42 percent of their draws in that game, a 4-3 loss to Pittsburgh.

As the games have gone on, however, the team's performance in the faceoff circle has steadily improved. In their last four games, the Sabres have won 50 percent of their faceoffs three times and 51 percent the other. That includes games against second-ranked Minnesota Wild, fifth-ranked Toronto Maple Leafs and sixth-ranked Montreal Canadiens.

"We've had to make some adjustments in personnel and deployment of guys," Bylsma said. "I think you've seen guys step up in Ryan's absence in the faceoff circle."

Johan Larsson, Cal O'Reilly and Jack Eichel are three players who have stepped up notably. Larsson has taken begun to take draws on the penalty kill in Ryan O'Reilly's former spot and has won a season-best 13 draws in two of his last three games.

Cal O'Reilly, meanwhile, has stepped in for situational draws in the defensive zone as well as on the power play.

"I think as a group we're trying to get better," he said. "When you take a lot of draws you get good at them and you learn what works for you. Each centerman has some things that they do that works ... For myself, I'm not going in there to outmuscle guys. I kind of use my brain more and my timing."

Learning what works has been part of the process for the rookie Eichel, who's won 50 percent or more of his faceoffs in three of his last five games. That's come not only in practice, but also in learning from opponents in his first tour of the League.

"You've got a lot of guys that come in and they'll tie your stick up and kick it with their feet, you have guys that will cover the dot with their foot, they'll come in and they'll kind of carve they're skate through the dot and cover it, little things like that," Eichel said.

"I think [Claude] Giroux in Philadelphia is really good at draws, I think Bergeron is really good. Bergeron is usually the best in the League every year, he bears down, he gets really low and he battles. I think you can just watch those guys, get a sense of what they're doing and kind of emulate it."

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## **FRIDAY'S PRACTICE**

Robin Lehner and Zach Bogosian both were absent from practice on Friday for maintenance days, Bylsma said. Both are expected to be available against the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday afternoon. The rest of the lineup had the same look from recent games:

9 Evander Kane – 15 Jack Eichel – 23 Sam Reinhart  
82 Marcus Foligno – 22 Johan Larsson – 12 Brian Gionta  
28 Zemgus Girgensons – 19 Cal O'Reilly – 44 Nicolas Deslauriers  
43 Daniel Catenacci – 17 David Legwand – 26 Matt Moulson

4 Josh Gorges – 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
25 Carlo Colaiacovo – 3 Mark Pysyk  
29 Jake McCabe

31 Chad Johnson

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## **UP NEXT**

The Sabres will begin a three-game homestand at First Niagara Center against the Carolina Hurricanes on Saturday afternoon. Rick Jeanerette and Rob Ray will call the game from the 200 level and will be joined by special guests throughout the broadcast.

Coverage on Saturday begins at 12:30 p.m. with Tops Sabres Gamenight on MSG-B and Bell TV. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.