



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 31, 2016

Maple Leafs-Sabres Preview

By Kevin Massoth

AP

March 31, 2016

With no playoff spots on tap after next week's season finale, the Buffalo Sabres and Toronto Maple Leafs are racing to stay out of the Atlantic Division basement.

The Sabres can bury the last-place Maple Leafs further down that hole by extending a lengthy run of home dominance in this series Thursday night.

Buffalo (31-35-11) was officially eliminated from postseason contention earlier this week but is 16-13-7 since Jan. 10 and can avoid a fourth consecutive last-place finish - the last two in the Atlantic after the NHL realigned into four divisions in 2013-14.

Toronto (28-37-11) is a distant six points back and may find it difficult to make up any ground in Buffalo. The Maple Leafs have picked up just three points while losing their last six games there, and the Sabres own a 16-1-1 home mark in the series since Feb. 4, 2009, including a 10-game point streak.

The Sabres are riding a 3-0-1 stretch at First Niagara Center but opened the week with consecutive losses away from home, falling 3-2 at Detroit on Monday before Tuesday's 5-4 shootout loss at Pittsburgh.

Buffalo jumped ahead 3-0 against the Penguins, but goaltender Chad Johnson surrendered four second-period goals and two more in the shootout.

While Evander Kane sat out with an upper-body injury, points leader Ryan O'Reilly scored his first goal in 25 games. However, he failed on his sixth shootout attempt of the season and the Sabres dropped to 2-7 when the game reaches that level - their only two wins coming against the Maple Leafs.

Rookie Jack Eichel was denied by fellow rookie Matt Murray on a breakaway attempt in overtime and also missed his shootout try.

"You think about all the shootouts that we've lost, that's a major reason that we're not in the playoff picture," O'Reilly told the team's official website.

Johnson finished with 42 saves but suffered his second loss in as many nights. He helped Buffalo pick up two wins in the first three games of this series despite a .909 save percentage and 2.53 goals-against average.

The Sabres extended their point streak against the Maple Leafs to five games with shootout victories in October and early March before falling 4-1 in Toronto on March 19.

Kane has two goals and an assist in this series but is considered day to day.

Toronto was eliminated from the playoffs following its win over Buffalo earlier this month, but it was the first of three straight victories in which it scored 15 goals. After totaling one in back-to-back losses, the Maple Leafs broke out in Tuesday's 5-2 win at Florida to improve to 14-22-2 on the road.

Nazem Kadri scored twice in the previous 14 games, both against Anaheim last week, but he logged his third career hat trick.

"That's the good thing about playing in the NHL, you get a chance to redeem yourself pretty quick," he said. "We just found a way to win."

Toronto, one of the lowest scoring teams in the league, had been mired in a 3-for-32 slump on the power play but scored on three of four while adding its second shorthanded tally.

Jonathan Bernier made 32 saves to improve to 4-2 over his last six with a .952 save percentage and 1.53 GAA. He made 34 saves while suffering a tough-luck 2-1 shootout loss in Buffalo on Oct. 21 to move to 0-3-1 there in his career.

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner has season-ending ankle surgery

AP

March 31, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres starting goalie Robin Lehner will miss the remainder of the season after having surgery to repair his right ankle.

The Sabres announced the news Wednesday, two days after Lehner was scheduled to meet with doctors. Lehner had missed five games since a 3-2 overtime loss to Montreal on March 16.

Buffalo has six games left, and has already been eliminated from playoff contention.

The surgery ends an injury-troubled year for Lehner, who missed 42 games after sustaining a lower body injury in Buffalo's season opener.

Lehner had a 5-9-5 record and 2.47 goals-against average in 21 games.

The Sabres were counting on Lehner to take over as their starter when they traded a first-round draft pick last June to acquire him from Ottawa.

Leafs, Sabres go at it for final time this season

By Amy Moritz
Buffalo News
March 31, 2016

A tiny bit of luster might have come off the rivalry between the Buffalo Sabres and Toronto Maple Leafs. Part of that is the schedule. The teams only meet four times in the regular season. Part of that is the on-ice product. Neither team has been a playoff contender in recent seasons. Buffalo is headed toward its fifth straight season without a postseason appearance; Toronto its third.

But the head-to-head meetings always seem to have a bit of an edge, regardless of the standings.

That's likely to continue Thursday night at First Niagara Center when Sabres host the Leafs at 7.

With both teams off on Wednesday after playing back-to-back road games, the surprise news came out of Sabres camp late in the afternoon. The team announced in a terse press release that goaltender Robin Lehner underwent successful surgery on his right ankle and "will be unavailable for the remainder of the team's games this season."

Lehner suffered a high ankle sprain in the season opener and missed 39 games. He returned to the Sabres lineup on Jan. 15 and played 21 before apparently again injuring the ankle. He had missed the last six games. Lehner went 5-9-5 with a 2.47 goals against average and a .924 save percentage.

Odds are high then that Chad Johnson could get his fourth start against the Leafs. Buffalo holds a 2-1 advantage in the season series, but the Sabres haven't played their best hockey against Toronto.

The first win came on Oct. 21 when Matt Moulson scored the game-deciding goal in a shootout for a 2-1 win at First Niagara Center.

Then there were games at Air Canada Centre.

The Sabres drove away from Toronto with a 4-3 shootout win on March 7, but the team was largely a no-show for the first two and a half periods as the Leafs built a 3-1 lead. In the final 13 minutes of regulation, Jack Eichel and Evander Kane scored off turnovers to tie the game. Sam Reinhart notched the game-deciding goal in the shootout.

The performance was worse on March 19. With superstar rookie Jack Eichel out of the lineup due to illness, the Sabres were lackluster from puck drop to final horn in a 4-1 loss.

"We knew our last game against them was crap and same thing tonight," Sabres forward Marcus Foligno said after that game. "It wasn't there. It wasn't a full 60. Seemed like when we started getting frustrated we played a little bit better but they capitalized on their chances because they had more.

"We didn't have a lot of compete," coach Dan Bylsma said after that loss. "We didn't have a lot of battle."

The Leafs may be flirting with 30th place, but their roster is filled with players hungry to make an impression.

The team has a solid group of players who have spent most of the season with the Leafs' American Hockey League affiliate, the Toronto Marlies. Most notable have been the additions of William Nylander, who has four goals and seven points in 16 games and Zach Hyman who has four goals and six points in 16 games. Connor Brown picked up three assists for the Leafs in their 5-2 win against the Florida Panthers Tuesday night, giving him six points in seven NHL games this season.

"They've got a lot of guys who are working hard right now and trying to make the lineup for next year and they're not going to take a shift off," Foligno said.

Both Toronto and Buffalo are coming off back-to-back games. The Leafs split their Florida road trip, losing to Tampa Bay, 3-0, on Monday then knocking off the Panthers, 5-2, on the strength of three power play goals Tuesday.

The Sabres has plenty of special teams action on Tuesday as well – only a bit more chaotic, scoring two power play goals but giving up two shorthanded goals in Pittsburgh. In the end, Buffalo dropped a 5-4 shootout loss to the Penguins after losing to the Red Wings, 3-2, in Detroit on Monday.

Sabres notebook: Conacher looks to learn with Marlies

By Amy Moritz
Buffalo News
March 31, 2016

When the Toronto Maple Leafs started to raid the roster of their American Hockey League affiliate, it created opportunities.

Shane Conacher decided to take advantage of one of those opportunities.

The junior forward left Canisius College to sign with the Toronto Marlies, turning pro and forgoing his final year of collegiate eligibility.

"Around the last two games of the regular season I started talking to my advisor and thinking about what was the best option for me and my future," Conacher said. "I think my development at Canisius, and how well I developed there and the coaching staff and how much they worked to get my game better made me ready for the pro level. I had a good year this year so I just thought it was the time and place."

Conacher signed an Amateur Try Out (ATO) contract with the Marlies but also signed a one-year AHL deal with the organization for next season.

"That was a big part of the talk as well," Conacher said. "I didn't want to leave Canisius or lose eligibility to play a couple games with the Marlies and be stuck with no teams for next year. That was a big part of my decision making."

Conacher, who led Canisius with 46 points and finished his collegiate career with 106, has played in two games for the Marlies, who have clinched a playoff berth and sit in first place in the Eastern Conference. The team is missing a chunk of players who have been up with the Leafs for the last month.

Those players will return to the Marlies when the Leafs end their season on April 9. The Marlies continue on, with the regular season ending April 17 and the Calder Cup playoffs just beginning.

Conacher knows up front that he will likely be out of the lineup once players return to the Marlies.

"They kinda told me I'd play maybe four games," Conacher said. "Then when those guys come back unless I'm playing really well, it's hard to take one of the veteran guys out of the lineup. So I'm there just for injuries. It's hard not to play going down the stretch, but I'll practice with them and be around the rink. A lot of guys learn the most by watching. Obviously you want to play, but I hope to be a good dressing-room guy."

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The third goal may have been an empty-netter but it still counted as a hat trick for Nazem Kadri when the Maple Leafs beat Florida, 5-2, on Tuesday. The center has seven points (five goals, two assists) in his last four games. He now has 17 goals on the season, approaching his career-best mark of 20.

"I just have to stay with it, I've been saying that since the beginning of the year," Kadri said to reporters after the win in Florida. "You can't be frustrated. I felt like this year I found a whole different dimension to my game playing on the defensive side. I've just become more reliable, better in the faceoff circle, things like that are going to be important down the line, not just scoring goals."

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Six of the last 10 games between the Sabres and Leafs have gone to overtime, including shootouts in five of the last nine. ... The Leafs have not won in First Niagara Center since a 4-3 overtime win on Jan. 29, 2013. Their last

regulation win in Buffalo was a 2-1 decision on Feb. 16, 2011. ... Sabres' forward Matt Moulson has 19 points (11 goals, eight assists) in his last 16 games against Toronto. In 27 career games against the Leafs he has 25 points.

Maple Leafs look to keep up recent success

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

March 31, 2016

MAPLE LEAFS (28-37-11) at SABRES (31-35-11)

TV: 7 p.m. ET; MSG-B, BELL TV, TSN4, NHL.TV

Season series: The Buffalo Sabres have defeated the Toronto Maple Leafs in two of three games this season. The Sabres won 2-1 in a shootout at home Oct. 21 and 4-3 in a shootout in Toronto March 7. The Maple Leafs won 4-1 in Toronto on March 19. Sabres forward Evander Kane has two goals and an assist and goalie Chad Johnson is 2-1-0 with a .909 save percentage. Maple Leafs forward PA Parenteau has a goal and two assists.

Maple Leafs team scope: Toronto has won four of the past six games and seven of the past 10. "We're not laying down, we're in the games right to the end," defenseman Morgan Rielly told the Toronto Star after a 5-2 win Tuesday against the Florida Panthers in which forward Nazem Kadri had a hat trick. "We're playing hard. We're playing with a lot of pride." The Maple Leafs did not practice Wednesday and complete a three-game road trip in Buffalo. Goalie Garret Sparks is 1-0-1 against the Sabres this season with a .917 save percentage and 1.92 goals-against average.

Sabres team scope: Buffalo has lost two straight games but has won its past two games at home. Kane did not play in the Sabres' 5-4 shootout loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins on Tuesday after he sustained an upper-body injury on Monday against the Detroit Red Wings. The Sabres did not practice Wednesday and Kane's status is still day-to-day. Cal O'Reilly replaced Kane in the lineup. Johnson is expected to start. He has made six consecutive starts since Robin Lehner re-aggravated his right ankle injury March 16 against the Montreal Canadiens. Lehner had season-ending surgery to repair the ankle Wednesday.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly productive during goal slump

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 31, 2016

BUFFALO – For almost three months, Ryan O'Reilly compiled the Sabres' oddest stat line.

On Jan. 8 in Chicago, O'Reilly scored his 17th goal. At that point, halfway through the season, the NHL All-Star was on pace for a career-high 34 goals.

Then, O'Reilly suddenly went dry, enduring a marathon drought before finally scoring short-handed early in Tuesday's 5-4 shootout loss in Pittsburgh.

In that odd 24-game run, which was interrupted when a broken foot sidelined him 11 games, O'Reilly accumulated a gaudy 18 assists – 49 percent of his season total – to go beside his zero.

Throughout his career-long goal slump – he, ironically, had three 23-game goal droughts in his first two seasons – O'Reilly kept producing.

"He's been providing a ton of offense for us," said coach Dan Bylsma, whose Sabres host the Toronto Maple Leafs tonight at the First Niagara Center.

Early on, the slump bothered O'Reilly, who's notoriously hard on himself. Bylsma said "it was wearing on him a little bit" and he "could sense the frustration in his game."

"It was for a while there," O'Reilly said Tuesday inside Consol Energy Center before scoring. "I was getting really frustrated there. You look at the goals, it's outcome focused, and that's something you can't control. You only control how you shoot the puck, how you skate, how you get to certain areas, and that's what I've tried to focus on."

Still, O'Reilly was hardly happy following the loss, a contest in which the Sabres blew a 3-0 first-period lead. He missed in the shootout against Penguins goalie Matt Murray, making him scoreless in six attempts this season.

"I'm a bit more frustrated in the shootout," he said. "I think I haven't scored one this year. Look at all the shootout games we've lost. That's a major reason why we're not in the playoff picture."

While the versatile O'Reilly went 81 days between scoring goals and hasn't been successful in shootouts, he's enjoyed one of the best seasons by a Sabres forward in recent memory.

His 55 points, as many as he had in 82 games last season, still leads the team. He could hit 20 goals and 60 points for the second time in his seven-year-career if he finishes strongly. In an attempt to ignite O'Reilly's goal scoring, Bylsma switched his No. 1 center to the left wing on the team's top two lines Tuesday.

O'Reilly plays more each game – 21 minutes, 47 seconds – than any NHL forward. He's won 56.3 percent of the 1,681 faceoffs (fourth overall) he's taken in 66 games.

The Buffalo chapter of the Professional Hockey Writers' Association nominated him earlier this week for the Masterton Trophy, an award given for dedication to hockey. Long after most of his teammates have left, O'Reilly is usually still on the ice working on drills.

Basically, O'Reilly's never satisfied.

"I don't think I've been my best," he said about his season. "I think there's been times I've done well, grew in certain things. Again, there is a lot of room for improvement. Going forward with the guys on this team, I'm going to need to be a big voice leading the way.

"Myself, I was a little too inconsistent with creating offense, putting the puck in the net. Going forward, going into next season, it's going to be a huge thing."

Next season, the first year of O'Reilly's seven-year, \$52.5 million contract kicks in. When he left the Colorado Avalanche in the June 26 blockbuster trade, he wasn't sure what to expect from Buffalo.

Now, it's a place that feels like home.

"It's a lot better than I expected," he said. "I didn't know much coming into it, just only from my short time here, just driving by. But getting through the neighborhoods and going to all these different great restaurants and meeting all these people that are super Sabres fans, it's great.

"It's a great hockey town. I can sense they want a team and they want players who are going to work hard. So it's nice to be a part of that."

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Penguins superstar Sidney Crosby on Sabres rookie center Jack Eichel, one of the NHL's biggest young stars: "I haven't seen a ton. You see him on the highlights. I feel like he's on there every week. He's got great hands, amazing speed. That's probably the biggest thing that sticks out right away is his speed. He looks like he's really comfortable out there. He's confident with the puck, makes a lot of plays. I think he's done a great job his first year here."

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The Sabres had Wednesday off.

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner undergoes season-ending ankle surgery

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 31, 2016

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Robin Lehner has undergone successful season-ending surgery on his right ankle, the club announced this afternoon.

Lehner, 24, suffered a high ankle sprain opening night and recently jammed the tender ankle into the post twice in a week. The Swede hasn't played since March 16.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma recently said Lehner has been resting and rehabbing the ankle. Lehner was supposed to see the team doctors on Saturday, but the Sabres never offered an update until today.

After getting hurt Oct. 8, Lehner returned Jan. 15. The Sabres originally pegged Lehner's recovery at six to 10 weeks before he suffered a setback around Christmastime and starting wearing a cast and using a scooter again.

The Sabres traded Ottawa a first-round pick for Lehner on June 26. In what was supposed to be his first season as their starter, Lehner played only 21 games, going 5-9-5 with a 2.47 goals-against average, a .924 save percentage and one shutout.

In Lehner's absence this season, backup Chad Johnson has performed like a No. 1 goalie. Johnson has started six straight games and seven out of the last eight entering tonight's tilt against the Toronto Maple Leafs inside the First Niagara Center.

Johnson just played Monday and Tuesday, when he faced 46 shots in the Sabres' 5-4 shootout loss in Pittsburgh. Bylsma said following the game he wasn't concerned about Johnson getting fatigued.

"He's well-prepared," Bylsma said.

That means Johnson could start Thursday. Nathan Lieuwen has been backing him up.

Five games are left this season.

Lehner Out for Remainder of Season after Ankle Surgery

WGR 550

March 31, 2016

Sabres' goalie Robin Lehner undergoes season-ending surgery, according to the team Wednesday afternoon.

The organization reports it was a successful procedure on his right ankle -- an injury that caused him to miss the majority of the season. In 21 starts the Swede posted a .942 save percentage with a 2.47 goals against mark.

With Nathan Lieuwen on the roster, no other moves have been announced.