



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 5, 2016

Wild-Sabres Preview

By Steve Garbarini

AP

March 5, 2016

While the Buffalo Sabres have shown gradual progress during their latest rebuilding effort, the Minnesota Wild have gotten the short-term boost they were seeking.

Back in the thick of the Western Conference playoff race, the Wild hope to stay hot under interim coach John Torchetti on Saturday in Buffalo.

After a miserable 1-11-2 stretch dropped the Wild out of the West's top eight and forced Mike Yeo's dismissal on Feb. 13, they've righted themselves with seven wins in 10 games with Torchetti in charge. The surge has pulled Minnesota (30-25-10) even with Colorado for the final wild-card spot while owning a game in hand on the Avalanche.

The coaching change provided an immediate offensive spark, with the Wild scoring 21 goals in winning their first four under Torchetti. They've been more timely than plentiful during a three-game winning streak, extended Thursday with power-play goals by Mikko Koivu and Mikael Granlund in a 2-1 victory at Toronto.

Minnesota has converted 25.6 percent (10 of 39) of its man-advantage chances during Torchetti's tenure and has recorded a power-play goal in a franchise-record 11 consecutive road games, going 13 of 39 over that stretch.

"It's been a huge key for us the games we have won, especially on the road," Granlund said. "We've been able to score on the power play, and hopefully we can keep doing that. Right now, our confidence in the PP is up. I don't know if we are doing anything special."

Devan Dubnyk added 22 saves and has allowed just five goals over the streak. He may be rested in favor of Darcy Kuemper, though, with the Wild beginning a back-to-back ending Sunday against rival St. Louis.

Kuemper is 1-3-1 with a 3.21 goals-against average over his past five outings and last started Feb. 26, registering 24 saves in a 3-2 loss at Washington.

Either will be facing one of the NHL's lowest scoring teams, though Buffalo (26-31-8) produced plenty of offense to support Robin Lehner's latest solid effort in Thursday's 6-3 win over Calgary.

Though 27th in the NHL with 153 goals, the Sabres have already matched their league-low total from last season. Their 60 points in coach Dan Bylsma's first season is their most since 2011-12.

"I think we can be better," said rookie center Jack Eichel, who recorded his 18th goal in the win. "It's really good to see that we've taken a step forward. ... But I don't think we should be satisfied with that."

Evander Kane had a goal and an assist and has scored 10 times in his last 20 games after recording eight in his first 34.

Lehner owns a 1.73 GAA and .947 save percentage through his past eight starts and had a 27-save shutout in his lone previous meeting with Minnesota, while with Ottawa on Jan. 14, 2014.

Linus Ullmark made 28 saves as the Sabres halted a four-game series skid with a 3-2 win at Minnesota on Jan. 12. The Wild had outscored Buffalo 19-5 over the previous four matchups and rolled 7-0 in last season's visit to First Niagara Center.

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville had three assists in that game and enters this one with 12 points (5 goals, 7 assists) over his last 10 outings.

Slumping Moulson steps up workouts for Sabres

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 5, 2016

Matt Moulson's season has been a disaster. He's a shell of the player he used to be.

Moulson and Sabres General Manager Tim Murray have differing reasons as to why.

Moulson, who heads into Saturday's home game against Minnesota with one goal in his last 52 games, says a lack of confidence has been his downfall. Murray says Moulson didn't work hard enough to keep up.

"I see a player that maybe has neglected some things in the last couple years as far as how workouts are changing, how we as an organization are changing with our young players and even our players on the team," Murray said Thursday during his weekly appearance on WGR 550-AM Radio. "He's sat up through some tough conversations. He's sat up and taken notice, and I would say in the last five to six weeks he has been our hardest-working guy after games in the gym.

"We have a plan. We don't expect to see results tomorrow. We've talked to his agent. We've talked to him. We've talked to our strength and conditioning staff. He doesn't miss an optional skate anymore. He doesn't miss a postgame workout anymore. So he's taking this real serious. He doesn't just want to go away.

"This is almost like coming off an injury where we've changed his daily routine, his workouts, his pregame, postgame, day off. He's bought into this like a young player. Bad habits creep in. Bad habits creep in in all walks of life. We've addressed it. He's addressed it. He's stepped up."

There's no denying Moulson has changed his habits lately. He's stopped being one of the first players off the ice following practice. He takes part in optional skates.

But Moulson denies the insinuation that he slacked off previously.

"I don't think my workout's changed very much," he said Friday in First Niagara Center. "I train extremely hard in the summers. I just think it was a case of I kind of lost my confidence and building that back up by the way I'm working. I don't think my workouts have really changed. I've taken my off-ice performances pretty seriously my entire life."

Informed of Murray's comment that Moulson neglected things in regards to workouts, the forward said: "OK." Asked if he neglected things, Moulson replied: "I don't know. There's always room for improvement, so maybe I decided to improve some things."

The improvements have yet to show up during games. Moulson, relegated to a fourth-line role, has just two shots in the last five outings. He skated only 6:53 Tuesday against Edmonton. He's been held without a goal in seven games, a slump that pales in comparison to the 44-game drought that preceded it.

The three-time 30-goal scorer has five goals in 64 games and 18 in his last 141.

"Obviously, not the way I wanted it to go," the 32-year-old said. "You want to help your team win and contribute. You always want to do that. I think for anyone that likes scoring goals you want to have more of them."

The troubling part for the Sabres' organization is Moulson's contract situation. He's in the second season of a five-year, \$25 million deal, signed when Murray was well below the salary-cap floor. The numbers scream "buyout," but the financials would be tough to swallow for a team hoping to contend and spend to the cap in the coming years.

According to GeneralFanager.com, buying out Moulson in June would leave Buffalo with a cap hit of \$2.88 million for the next two seasons, \$3.88 million in 2018-19 and \$888,888 for the following three years.

Changes to the collective bargaining agreement in 2013 make merely sending player to the minors a less attractive option. If the Sabres sent Moulson to Rochester, he would still count \$4.15 million toward Buffalo's cap.

"The long-term goal is to have him better and able to produce starting next September in training camp, but it has started now," Murray said on the radio. "The extra work has started now. We know it won't pay off, like I say, tomorrow, but I fully expect he'll come back better next year.

"I don't expect to see a drastically different (player) but I expect to see a different, more competitive Matt Moulson next season."

Moulson, whose main contribution to the Sabres is housing and mentoring Jack Eichel, wants to remain in Buffalo.

"I love this city and this organization," Moulson said. "I'm obviously trying to put in the work to where I want to be. It wasn't going to happen overnight. I'm trying to build that back up.

"Some times are a little tougher than others."

Sabres notebook: Coaching change has recharged Wild

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 5, 2016

After replacing their coach in mid-February, the Minnesota Wild have won seven of 10 games to climb back into playoff position. In other words, they're right where they feel they're supposed to be.

"The team we have we expect to be in the playoffs," Wild forward Thomas Vanek said Friday.

Minnesota holds the final wild-card spot in the Western Conference heading into its game against Buffalo on Saturday afternoon. The Wild have regained their swagger since swapping coach Mike Yeo for John Torchetti on Feb. 13. They're 7-3 under Torchetti and have scored an NHL-best 37 goals during the run.

"They seem to be playing a little more free, a little more confident with the puck, a little more attacking with the puck and really to their strengths because that's the kind of team they are," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

The Wild opened the season 22-11-8 before a 1-11-2 slump that got Yeo fired.

"We had a great first half, then I can't point my finger at what happened, but we just fell apart," Vanek said in First Niagara Center. "Like I always say, this is a game of confidence. If you have 20 guys playing with no confidence, it's going to be tough to win games.

"They made a change, and once you make a change it always starts up at zero again. Everyone has a little bit more energy, and it's been a good transition for everyone."

Former Sabres captain Jason Pominville has five goals and 12 points during the 10-game run, bringing his season totals to 11 goals and 33 points in 65 games. Vanek has three goals and six points during the 10 games, lifting him to 18 goals and 39 points in 64 games.

Vanek needs two goals to reach 20 for the 11th straight season. He is one of just three active players with 20 or more goals in his first 10 seasons, sharing the honor with Jaromir Jagr and Alex Ovechkin.

"I would rather be at 30 than 20," Vanek said. "My role is score goals, produce points, make my linemates better. For most of the year I've done that. Tough stretch in there for a while, but we're getting better as a team."

...

Goaltender Robin Lehner will make his fourth straight start and head to Buffalo's crease for the 15th time in 20 games. He is 5-7-3 this season with a .931 save percentage and 2.33 goals-against average.

Chad Johnson will be used sparingly for the remainder of the year.

"We have 15 games this month, and we're looking at somewhere around a 10 and five, 11 and four split between the goaltenders," Bylsma said.

...

Vanek, who led the University of Minnesota to the 2003 NCAA hockey championship, keeps a close eye on the Golden Gophers. He likes what he sees from Sabres prospect Hudson Fasching, a junior who led the team with 19 goals and 34 points in 31 games heading into Friday's meeting with Michigan State.

"He's a good player," Vanek said. "He kind of reminds me of myself when I was back in college. He's good around the net, good on the power play. He'll be a good player for this organization."

The Sabres hope to sign Fasching when his season ends. They can also send him to Rochester on an amateur tryout.

...

Sabres assistant coach Dave Barr underwent foot surgery this week after being injured while running. He has been replaced on the bench by fellow assistant Dan Lambert, who normally watches from the press box. There is no timetable for Barr's return.

"He's going to be laid (up) with a cast for a while," Bylsma said.

...

Forward Nicolas Deslauriers is known to dance in the Sabres' dressing room. Bylsma has long had the nickname "Disco Dan."

"I have not seen him dance," Bylsma said. "They haven't seen me dance, either."

Wild go for fourth straight win, visit Sabres

By Dan Myers

NHL.com

March 5, 2016

WILD (30-25-10) at SABRES (26-31-8)

TV: 1 p.m. ET; FS-N, MSG-B, BELL TV, NHL.TV

Season series: Brian Gionta had a goal and an assist to help the Buffalo Sabres to a 3-2 win against the Minnesota Wild at Xcel Energy Center on Jan. 12. Ryan Suter had a goal and an assist for Minnesota.

Wild team scope: Forward Jason Zucker was activated off injured reserve and is expected to play for the first time since missing six games after sustaining a concussion against the Chicago Blackhawks on Feb. 21. Interim coach John Torchetti said Zucker could slot back onto a line with Mikael Granlund and Thomas Vanek, the same line he was on before getting hurt. "We'll see what happens," Torchetti told the Wild's website. "I like the speed, and it brings another asset to our team. Getting [Jonas] Brodin back, getting Zach [Parise] back a couple of games ago, it just keeps improving our team speed, and will make us play a faster game." Minnesota will try for its fourth consecutive victory, which would match a season long. It would be the second such streak since Torchetti took over for Mike Yeo on Feb. 13.

Sabres team scope: Gionta did not practice on Friday but is expected to play. The 37-year old has eight goals and 23 points in 62 games but coach Dan Bylsma said his absence at practice was simply a maintenance day. The Sabres worked Johan Larsson into Gionta's spot on the team's top power-play unit, something Bylsma said could be a change regardless of Gionta's status. "We have used Larsson in that spot before," Bylsma told the Sabres website, "so we worked him there [Friday] in the absence of Brian. But not necessarily just because of that." Goaltender Robin Lehner will start. Lehner ended a personal four-game losing streak by making 26 saves in a 6-3 win against the Calgary Flames on Thursday.

Sabres' Eichel finding his way as a top prospect with prodigious expectations

By Marty Klinkenberg

Toronto Globe & Mail

March 5, 2016

Jack Eichel had the spotlight stolen from him before he stepped on the ice on Tuesday night. The Sabres' talented young centre watched from the bench as Edmonton's Connor McDavid swiped a puck from one of Eichel's teammates and deposited it into the net 22 seconds into the game. As the sport's most-heralded rookie in a generation celebrated, the kid who was picked second stifled a grimace and stared straight ahead.

A little more than two hours later, Eichel sat at his dressing stall trying to compose himself. In overtime, the 19-year-old had barely missed a spectacular, spinning shot. The game ended seconds later, when McDavid flipped a backhand through the legs of Buffalo goalie Robin Lehner to end a brilliant rush.

"There were eight guys on the ice," Eichel eventually said, biting off words. "It's a team game."

It is hard to be Jack Eichel. By any measure, the NHL's second draft pick is having an outstanding season. Heading into the weekend, he has 18 goals and 24 assists, and will make his first visit to Toronto on Monday, when the Sabres play the Maple Leafs. Nary a disappointing word can be uttered about him at this point, other than to say that he is not Connor McDavid. That is his challenge now, and may forever be.

Earlier this week in Buffalo, Eichel was clearly the best player on the ice – with one exception. Most nights, the Boston University standout will be better than anyone else. Tuesday was not one of them. It is a hard truth in sports. As great as Bill Russell was, he still wasn't as good as Wilt Chamberlain.

It is not a dilemma for Eichel alone. It is one he shares with other members of what has turned out to be a good incoming class. With a lot of help from Patrick Kane, Chicago's Artemi Panarin is running away with the rookie scoring race.

At times, Arizona's Max Domi and Detroit's Dylan Larkin have played wonderfully, and for one short stretch, Calgary's Sam Bennett became a one-man wrecking crew. But beyond their own cities, is there a hullabaloo about any of them?

Even in a season abbreviated by injury, that sense of excitement, and the appetite for highlight-reel goals, is what McDavid brings that others don't. In his first game after a three-month layoff, he skated through the Columbus Blue Jackets until they became dizzy. In his first game against his hometown Maple Leafs, he scored a career-high five points. In his first meeting with Eichel, the Oilers' No. 1 draft pick scored his fastest goal and first overtime game-winner.

The way the two baby-faced teenagers are linked through the draft is what makes it difficult for Eichel. It is a position of circumstance rather than choice. Unless he becomes his day's Marcel Dionne to McDavid's Guy Lafleur, it is a bond that will be hard to escape.

In Buffalo, fans adore him the same way the Edmonton faithful loves McDavid. Eichel has quickly become the face of the franchise, and has not disappointed with the way he has played. He scored his first career NHL goal on opening night, has been consistent throughout and has 28 points over the past 30 games. His offensive surge, however, has been overshadowed by McDavid's return from a broken clavicle. He has 20 points in 16 games.

Even the most passionate Sabres fans see Eichel as the runner-up in the draft-lottery sweepstakes. If they didn't before, it became clearer this week. As a crowd of more than 19,000 people jeered, McDavid torched them twice, the first time before many of them had even found their seats. Seconds after the opening faceoff, McDavid stripped the puck from Zach Bogosian, then broke to the net and accepted an easy pass from Jordan Eberle. As McDavid shifted gears, the confused Lehner lost his balance as he tried to block one side of the net and then the other. McDavid flicked a backhand into the opposite corner; for him, it was as easy as breathing.

"McDavid is already a top player in the NHL," Matt Licata III said earlier as he had dinner at (716) Food and Sport, a block from First Niagara Center. "He is better than Eichel."

And he is Eichel's fan.

A student on March break from Seton Hall, Licata attended the game with his dad, Matt Jr., who has been following the Sabres since their inaugural season in 1970. Father and son both wore identical No. 15 jerseys with Eichel's name stitched across the back.

Last season, Matt Jr. suspected the Sabres were not always playing their hardest in hope of increasing their chances of drafting McDavid. The rookie sensation grew up across the border in southern Ontario, and played in the Ontario Hockey League for three seasons with Erie, about two hours down Interstate 90.

"The tank was on," Matt Jr. says.

They have no complaints about Eichel; nor does anyone else. It is more a resignation over an opportunity lost than resentment that the Sabres got the second choice. Maybe they will have better luck this summer, when the next great prospect, the American forward Auston Matthews, enters the draft. Matt III is 18 and shares a birthday with Matthews.

"I'm so ripe for the Sabres to get better," young Matt says.

Quaffing beers and downing wings at the Anchor Bar, Kyle Patryka exchanged banter with Oilers fans about whose rookie was better.

"The guys went one-two and I don't think you lose with either of them," Patryka, who drove three hours from Utica, N.Y., with his dad, Adam, says. "Instead of being first and second, I would say it was more like they were 1A and 1B."

"It doesn't really matter," a fellow wearing an Edmonton jersey, shouts from across the bar. He calls himself Nemo – just Nemo – and flew in from Vancouver the day before. "Both teams are lousy."

They aren't very good, now, but with McDavid and Eichel there is promise for the future.

The day after the overtime loss to the Oilers, Eichel sits in the dressing room and talks quietly about hockey and his life. He is quiet and polite, and far more at ease than the day before, when he was dragged into a news conference to talk about his first head-to-head meeting with McDavid. For the most part, each of the young players left the impression that they saw this first game as insignificant, a fleeting moment in what will hopefully be long careers.

"I don't hate talking about Connor McDavid," Eichel says. "I just try not to focus on him. I really feel it's more important for me to focus on myself. There was a lot of interest in the game [Tuesday night], but I think that will probably cool down."

"It was the first meeting between us and everybody made a big deal out of it, and rightfully so. But hopefully the next time, that part will get a little less attention."

A kid from the suburbs of Boston, Eichel started skating at three years old, pushing a crate around the ice. At four, he started playing hockey in a neighbouring town because he was too young to play in his own. McDavid started the same way.

From the time he was in kindergarten through eighth grade, Eichel's father would come and pick him up at lunch time each Friday. "He'd sign me out of class so we could go somewhere and play hockey together," Eichel says. "It's one of the best memories I have."

He always thought he was an above-average player as he was growing up, but didn't really know how good he truly was. "I thought I was good, but it was in such a small pond, I wasn't sure what I would find when I went beyond there."

By the time he was in Grade 8, he began getting offers to play for colleges, and ended up scoring 71 points in 40 games in his only season at Boston University. The Terriers lost to Providence College last spring in the NCAA championship.

After that, he began preparing for his professional career, which has been a smashing success so far. He lives with Matt Moulson, a 32-year-old teammate, and Moulson's wife, Alicia. Alicia is a twin whose sister, Jaclyn, is married to Jonathan Quick, the goalie for the Los Angeles Kings.

In his rare free time, Eichel says he likes to get out, and especially loves to shop.

"You have to try to enjoy your time away from the rinks to get your mind off hockey," he says. "I try not to be too microscopic. If you did that, I think you would go insane. I like to do things that are normal. I really enjoy clothes, and I am into the whole style thing."

He is a lifelong New England football fan and, more than that, a follower of the Patriots' future Hall-of-Fame quarterback Tom Brady. He torments teammates by figuring out a way to work Brady into every conversation.

"He's my favourite athlete, and always will be," Eichel says.

Fans here have been wonderful to him, even if he is the other guy.

"I find it nice to get recognized," he says. "Buffalo is a great hockey city. People really go out of their way to make you feel welcome, and I greatly appreciate that."

In Buffalo, the No. 2 pick has found a home as No. 1.

Sabres' Matt Moulson buying into new work plan

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 5, 2016

BUFFALO – At this point, five goals and 64 games into Sabres winger Matt Moulson's miserable season, all the work he's putting in and the revamped training regimen he has been following is about seeing results next season.

Yes, according to general manager Tim Murray, who ripped Moulson on the radio Thursday, and coach Dan Bylsma, the three-time 30-goal scorer is still in the Sabres' plans. They talk about the veteran, 31, returning for the third season of his five-year, \$25 million contract.

"A guy you look to to bring some offense and bring some offensive zone into this team," Bylsma said this afternoon inside the First Niagara Center. "Yes, I look for and expect it to be there come next season."

Speaking on WGR, Murray said Moulson "has neglected some things in the last couple years as far as how workouts are changing, how we as an organization are changing with our young players and even our players on the team."

The team has challenged Moulson.

"He's sat up through some tough conversations he's sat up and taken notice, and I would say in the last five to six weeks he has been our hardest-working guy after games in the gym," Murray said. "We have a plan. We don't expect to see results tomorrow. We've talked to his agent. We've talked to him. We've talked to our strength and conditioning staff. He doesn't miss an optional skate anymore. He doesn't miss a postgame workout anymore. So he's taking this real serious. He doesn't just want to go away."

When asked about Murray's comments, Moulson said his season has not gone the "I wanted it to go." He has one goal in his last 52 games since Nov. 1.

"I think I've just been putting in a lot of work on and off the ice and get myself to where I want to be," Moulson said.

Moulson said he's "trying to build confidence" through his workouts. His regimen, he said, doesn't "change very much."

"I train extremely hard in the summers," he said.

Murray said Moulson, who's housing rookie Jack Eichel this season, has "been 100 percent in."

"The long-term goal is to have him better and able to produce starting next September in training camp, but it has started now," Murray said. "The extra work has started now. We know it won't pay off, like I say, tomorrow, but I fully expect he'll come back better next year. This is almost like coming off an injury where we've changed his daily routine, his workouts, his pregame, postgame, day off.

"He's bought into this like a young player. Bad habits creep in. Bad habits creep in in all walks of life. We've addressed it. He's addressed it. He's stepped up, and ... I don't expect to see a drastically different but I expect to see a different, more competitive Matt Moulson next season."

Bylsma said Moulson has been "diligent about that work."

"He's been extremely hard off the ice mostly," he said. "We don't get the big opportunity to do it on the ice all the time. He's been doing that off the ice, and that's a process that's going to take longer than sooner but one I know he's committed to doing."

In other news, Bylsma said captain Brian Gionta had a maintenance day today. Goalie Robin Lehner will start Saturday afternoon against Minnesota.

Bylsma, who has been under the weather, stayed off the ice today. Meanwhile, assistant coach Dave Barr recently hurt himself jogging and won't be on the bench for a bit after undergoing surgery, Bylsma said. Assistant coach Dan Lambert moved down from the press box Thursday to replace him.

Fun-loving Nick Deslauriers popular with Sabres teammates

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 5, 2016

BUFFALO – It's only playful fighting, of course. Sometimes Nick Deslauriers and Marcus Foligno scrap on the ice after practice. Other times the Sabres wingers tussle for positioning on the bus.

"That's normal," a smiling Foligno said Friday. "We do that quite a bit. He annoys me quite a bit. I annoy him quite a bit. We go hand-in-hand."

Their constant jousting earned them the nickname "Bash Brothers" from their teammates, Foligno said.

"We're always just hitting each other," he said after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against the Minnesota Wild inside the First Niagara Center.

If Deslauriers, 25, had his way, he would "square off a little bit more" with Foligno, he said.

"I think it's just we're almost like two brothers," he said.

The Sabres, a young team with five 30-something veterans, pride themselves on being a close-knit group. No one, players will say, is more popular than the energetic Deslauriers, who seems to have a smile permanently etched on his face.

"He's always buzzing, always buzzing," Foligno said about his close friend.

To Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, Deslauriers' personality is "infectious."

"Just kind of a high-energy, kind of good ... fun-loving demeanor," he said. "He's a guy I think everyone wants to be around."

On a team that has done *a lot* of losing recently, the levity Deslauriers provides at the appropriate moments helps ease the pressures of the NHL's daily grind.

"I like to goof around and just lighten up the mood, and when it's time to think hockey a little bit more and just pump up the guys, I think I just try to bring another side of me," Deslauriers said.

Foligno believes "you got to have that in the dressing room."

"You got to find sparks and have fun," he said. "Sometimes it's stressful in here, but you got to find the lighter side."

Sometimes that lighter side comes out when Deslauriers dances. Yes, the man teammates affectionately call "D-Lo" has been known to bust a move.

"He's got some unbelievable dance moves," Foligno said.

Foligno even dances occasionally, too.

"I think he thinks I'm a good dancer," Deslauriers said. "I never took some lessons. He's a pretty good dancer, too. He's not smooth, he's stiff. It's funny."

Has Bylsma, who earned the nickname "Disco Dan" by occasionally dancing, ever seen Deslauriers dance?

"I have not seen him dance," he said. "But they haven't seen me dance, either."

Foligno said he hasn't seen Deslauriers have a bad day.

"He's always smiling, always up to something," he said. "It's good to have those type of guys in the room. It kind of lightens things up. When things are going wrong, you got to keep it light, you got to not worry about too many things."

Where does Deslauriers' energetic nature come from? He said he hails from "a family of energy."

"I think I'm just born with energy," said Deslauriers, who made his NHL debut March 7, 2014 after the Sabres acquired him from Los Angeles.

His parents, Penny and Stephane, own a moving company in Quebec, and taught him if you want to be successful, you must "do it the way you want it," he said.

"I need to do something every time," Deslauriers said. "Sometimes when people don't have energy, I take their energy and I feed off it."

The Sabres feed off plenty of Deslauriers' rugged on-ice exploits. He's their most frequent and fiercest fighter. Just two years into the league, opponents already seem to shy away from him.

Foligno said the 6-foot-1, 212-pound Deslauriers might be the team's best all-around athlete. He can pick up a football and throw a perfect spiral or almost do the splits.

"For how big he is, you don't think he'd be able to do that stuff," Foligno said.

Deslauriers enjoyed one of his best games in months Thursday, skating on the third line beside center Cal O'Reilly and Zemgus Girgensons in the Sabres' 6-3 win against Calgary.

Since the Sabres traded winger Jamie McGinn to Anaheim on Monday, Deslauriers, whose 152 hits top the Sabres, could see more action.

"I think Nick has been real physical, our most physical forward of late and (I) wanted to give him the opportunity to do it on a line there with Cal and Zemgus," Bylsma said.

In the second period, Deslauriers utilized his heavy shot – it might be the team's most underrated – to score his fourth goal and first since Oct. 30. He celebrated by pumping his arm wildly and howling.

"You look at the celebration he had, I mean, that's just the type of person he is," Foligno said. "He's energetic. That's an emotional celebration. He's just having fun."

Huron County's O'Reilly brothers switch places in the NHL

By Sean Gregory
Seaforth Huron Espositor
March 5, 2016

A twisted chain of events has one brother sidelined resulting in the eldest filling the void as former Seaforth Stars, Cal and Ryan O'Reilly trade places.

About two weeks ago Ryan, the leading scorer for the Buffalo Sabres with 17 goals and 32 assists sustained a lower-back injury during the team's 4-0 steam roll victory over the Columbus Blue Jackets. It's expected that the NHL All-Star will be off the ice for three to four weeks from the time of the initial misfortune. One brother's loss is another brother's gain as O'Reilly received a call from the Sabres organization that he would be filling in for Ryan. At the time he was in the AHL for the Rochester Americans- the Sabres farm team.

"They told me they needed another player, so I would be going up. That's just the way it worked out," explained O'Reilly about taking his younger brother Ryan's spot.

This advancement is the third time O'Reilly's been asked to step in, a procedure he calls a 'back and forth' escapade, a change of location he admitted to enjoying since the Americans and Sabres are less than an hour drive in distance from one another. To make the stay more cozy when his fiancé decides to visit he has the choice to either bunk at his brother's home or indulge in a hotel that's fully paid for courtesy of the Sabres. Meanwhile, the 29-year-old, 190-pound center is adjusting quite well to the fact that he has not played in the NHL since the 2011-2012 season when he wore a Pittsburgh Penguins jersey. In the first six games with the Sabres the Huron County native had one goal and an assist. If O'Reilly can prove to the organization he has what it takes to play in the big league, the short-term employment may turn permanent.

"To keep my spot, I need to play with confidence that's the biggest thing, show them I belong," O'Reilly told the *Expositor* during a phone conversation March 3.

With no more than 20 games left in the standard 82 games of an NHL season, O'Reilly said he's living in the moment playing in Buffalo and is optimistic about his brother's return.

"I see him every day, he's doing good, he's getting closer. I'm not sure when he'll be back, he will definitely be back before the end of the season," stated O'Reilly in a recent interview.

Deslauriers happy to contribute on offense

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 5, 2016

By the time the last game of October ended for the Buffalo Sabres, Nicolas Deslauriers had shown a knack for finishing. He'd scored in that game, a home win over Philadelphia, and had also scored the night before, giving him three for the month.

It didn't hurt that he was playing on Buffalo's top line with Ryan O'Reilly as his centerman.

"I had a completely different role in the beginning," Deslauriers said. "I didn't change my game, I was bringing the physicality, but I had more chances. Especially when you play on the fourth line with [David Legwand] and whoever else is there, it's more of chip-and-grind and get momentum."

On Thursday night, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma asked Deslauriers to bring that physicality to the team's third line alongside Cal O'Reilly and Zemgus Girgensons. That line had gotten trapped in the defensive zone at time in their previous outing, and Deslauriers' presence was a potential remedy.

What Bylsma wasn't searching for was Deslauriers' long-awaited fourth goal of the season. But that's what he got.

Deslauriers' marker was imperative to the momentum of the game for Buffalo, coming just 1:12 after the Sabres and Flames had exchanged goals in a span of 15 seconds.

"It was good," he said. "Obviously I'm not a goal scorer, but when I have those chances I just need to capitalize. It's been a while since I've gotten that good look and I think it was just the kind of shot that I've taken in practice.

"It felt awesome to see that one go in, let's hope I can get a couple more the rest of the season."

Deslauriers makes his impact in ways other than providing offense. He's relentless on the forecheck, he's as popular a guy as exists in the dressing room, and he now leads the team with 152 hits despite missing an entire month of the season with a foot injury.

But even with all of that said, he realizes the aid it provides the team when secondary scorers such as him and Marcus Foligno find the back of the net as they did last night, a need that's been amplified by the injury to Ryan O'Reilly and the trade of Jamie McGinn.

"It's a relief for our primary scorers," he said. "Take in all of the NHL, obviously you have some premier players that score almost every game but you need those third, fourth lines to pitch in. Last game was a high-scoring game but it felt good to see everyone pitch in there."

AMERKS TO MAKE THEIR DEBUTS ON FRIDAY

Forwards Cole Schneider and Eric O'Dell lead a group of four players that will make their debuts for the Rochester Americans on Friday night after being acquired from the Ottawa Senators organization in exchange for forwards Philip Varone and Jason Akeson and defenseman Jerome Leduc.

"I think what we have done is exchanged some very high-quality players for high quality-players," Amerks coach Randy Cunneynworth told Amerks.com. "We'll insert them just as they were before, that's exactly what we want."

Schneider, a native of Williamsville, NY, and O'Dell become Rochester's two leading scorers with 42 and 37 points, respectively. Fans in Buffalo can watch them make their debuts against the Springfield Falcons on Time Warner Sports Channel 87.

FRIDAY'S PRACTICE

Sabres captain Brian Gionta was absent after scoring two assists in 15:41 on Thursday, but Bylsma said it was nothing more than a maintenance day. In his absence, Johan Larsson practiced with Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Rasmus Ristolainen and Cal O'Reilly.

"We have used Larsson in that spot before and so we worked him there today in the absence of Brian but not necessarily just because of that," Bylsma said.

Defenseman Cody Franson remained absent with a neck injury.

WILD UP NEXT

The Sabres conclude their three-game homestand on Saturday afternoon against a Minnesota Wild team that's changed a bit since losing to Buffalo by a score of 3-2 on Jan. 12. Minnesota is 7-0-3 in 10 games since dismissing coach Mike Yeo and has won three straight.

"It really falls on the heels of their goal scoring, something they weren't able to do earlier on this season," Bylsma said. "Since the coaching change they've had a couple of series of goals where they've scored goals, won those games, and when they have not they haven't had success.

"... They seem to be playing more free, a little more confident with the puck, a little more attacking with the puck and really to their strengths because that's the kind of team they are."

Robin Lehner will make his fourth consecutive start in net for Buffalo on Saturday. Coverage 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.