



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 8, 2016

Third period lead slips away as Leafs lose again in close fashion

By Jonas Siegel
Canadian Press
March 8, 2016

TORONTO - The Maple Leafs keep losing, but not by much.

Toronto dropped its sixth straight game on Monday night, a 4-3 shootout loss to the Buffalo Sabres at the Air Canada Centre that marked their fifth consecutive one-goal defeat.

"It sucks," said Leo Komarov, who scored in the loss. "The last five games we've got a chance to win in every game and then when you keep losing it's (tough)."

The Leafs have lost 22 of their last 27 games (5-18-4) and remain last in the NHL with 53 points.

Monday's game was one they could have won. Toronto held a 3-1 lead entering the final period, but saw that melt away when Jack Eichel and Evander Kane scored less than four minutes apart.

The latter goal was the result of a failed handoff from Morgan Rielly to Nazem Kadri just out front of Garret Sparks in the Leafs net. Sam Reinhart picked the puck free and found Kane for the game-tying goal.

Reinhart then added the shootout winner.

"This was a game we were in total control of," Leafs coach Mike Babcock said. "I thought we had the puck more. I thought we did more good things. And we still found a way not to get the points we wanted. That part's disappointing. To give up the lead there, there was no reason to give up the lead."

The victory for Buffalo snapped a string of six straight shootout losses.

While continuing to lose, Toronto also keeps landing contributions from its youth.

Twenty-three-year-old rookie Zach Hyman scored his first NHL goal, pushing a second-effort attempt by Sabres goaltender Chad Johnson late in the middle period.

Babcock has been enthused by how hard Hyman, a Toronto area native, seems to play.

"I don't know how much he's ever going to score," Babcock said. "But he's going to be able to penalty kill and play a regular shift and play with good players and get them the puck back."

Twenty-two-year-old Nikita Soshnikov added his first career NHL assist against the Sabres. Soshnikov also mustered eight shot attempts and three hits in nearly 14 minutes.

He drew the ire of the Sabres Josh Gorges at one point for his rambunctious play.

"Every team is mad at him every night," Babcock said. "I like that a lot."

Soshnikov set up Komarov for the game's first goal, connecting just 25 seconds into the first period. The two broke in on an odd-man rush against Johnson with Soshnikov drawing in Sabres defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen before feeding Komarov, who tallied his 19th goal this season.

The marker snapped a seven-game goal drought for Komarov and was just his fourth goal in the past 26 games.

Soshnikov was forced to briefly exit the action shortly after. He tumbled into the boards after a collision with Sabres defenceman Jake McCabe, remaining down on the ice for a few brief moments before being helped to the Toronto dressing room.

He returned to finish the game.

Returning from a two-game absence (upper-body injury), Brad Boyes put the Leafs ahead 2-0 later in the opening frame when his passing attempt ricocheted off the McCabe's skate in front.

A member of the Sabres for parts of two seasons, Boyes has eight points in his last 11 games and eight goals this season.

Pysyk brought Buffalo to within one in the second period on a goal that had to be confirmed by video review. Sparks stopped the first Sabres attempt and then appeared to halt Pysyk's rebound with his goal-stick only to have the puck cross the line, if barely.

It was the first goal of the season for Pysyk and snapped a 40-game drought.

Hyman put the Leafs back up by two just over three minutes later, joining Soshnikov and William Nylander as rookies to score their first goal in the past week.

Buffalo fought back to tie it with two third-period goals, including the 20th from Eichel, who beat Kadri to the slot after serving a penalty for roughing. The mistake in coverage was later compounded by the error from Rielly.

"We've got lots of kids in the lineup," Babcock said. "But it wasn't our kids that made mistakes tonight."

The Leafs have been competitive in dropping six straight, though that seems of little consolation for the group despite mild expectations in a season marked by continued roster upheaval.

"We play well throughout the majority of the game," said Kadri. "But we have little lapses and allow them to get back in the game and then we can't seem to recover after."

Monday marked only the second meeting between the Sabres and Leafs this season. The two teams, which hadn't played since a late-October Sabres shootout win, meet two more times this month.

Milan Michalek made his Leafs debut, totalling one shot in nearly 13 minutes.

Rangers-Sabres Preview

By Kevin Chroust

AP

March 8, 2016

The New York Rangers' first game without Henrik Lundqvist was a pleasant surprise against the top team in hockey. The second might have had them saying enough is enough.

There's at least one more game separating their No. 1 goaltender from a return, and it's Tuesday night in Buffalo against a Sabres team seeking its first five-game point streak in nearly four years.

Lundqvist is expected to return from a neck injury this weekend - either Saturday in Detroit or Sunday at home against Pittsburgh - while Rick Nash is also nearing a return. He'll miss his 20th consecutive game with a bone bruise in his leg, but he's finally returned to practice on a no-contact basis.

"He is progressing very well," coach Alain Vigneault told the team's official website of Nash. "He was week to week, now he's day to day. He's got to get a couple practices in, get some contact, with the team. I do know that it looks very positive at this point."

They'll also be short at the blueline with Marc Staal out for a second straight game because of back spasms, and Dylan McIlrath will also skip the trip due to a knee injury.

McIlrath was injured in Sunday's 6-4 home loss to the New York Islanders as the Rangers (38-22-6) fell behind 3-0 in the opening five minutes. It followed Friday's 3-2 win in Washington. Regardless of personnel, all of their losses over a 7-4-1 span have come with the Rangers giving up at least four goals.

Nevertheless, they tied it midway through the third period before allowing a pair in the final minute and a half as the Islanders got within three points of the second-place Rangers with three games in hand.

"I'm not sure to be honest with you," Derek Stepan said of the Rangers' slow start. "Maybe the three (games) in four nights, but that's no excuse. I thought we really responded well after being down 3-0."

Antti Raanta figures to be back in goal having posted a 3.15 goals-against average over a 3-2-1 span as a starter.

The Rangers won the first meeting 6-3 at home on Jan. 25 - Nash's second game out of the lineup - and Derick Brassard picked up the slack with two goals and three assists. The center has four goals and eight assists in the last seven games in the series as part of eight straight Rangers' wins by a combined score of 32-11.

Buffalo (27-31-9) came from two goals down for Monday's 4-3 shootout win in Toronto, giving the Sabres at least a point in four straight games. They haven't made it five since a nine-game point streak in March 2012.

Evander Kane had a goal and an assist, and 11 of his 18 goals have come in the last 22 games. Jack Eichel has scored in three straight to reach 20 goals, making him the first Sabres rookie to reach that mark since Tyler Ennis in 2010-11.

"You're down two goals going into the third period. You get one back in the second, you're able to break the goalie and then they're able to get one and regain that two-goal lead," said Eichel, whose team had lost six straight overtime or shootout games.

"It's really big for us to be resilient in that third and play a simple game, be able to get two goals and force overtime and a shootout and see what happens. It's nice to win a shootout."

Chad Johnson faced the Maple Leafs, so Robin Lehner could be in goal. Over a 3-3-3 span, he's posted a 1.75 GAA.

Sabres victory follows rebuild blueprint

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 8, 2016

TORONTO – The Sabres' final three scoring plays Monday read like a rebuild blueprint:

- Jack Eichel scores in the third period to pull Buffalo within a goal.
- Evander Kane scores to tie it.
- Sam Reinhart scores the lone shootout goal to deliver a 4-3 victory over Toronto.

It sounds like a fantastic night for the Sabres' top line. In reality, it was only a great 17 minutes. That might make it even more significant.

Buffalo's No. 1 unit had a forgettable two periods in Air Canada Centre. It gave up on goal on the opening shift just 25 seconds into the game. The Sabres' No. 2 overall draft picks spent 40 minutes looking at the back of Nikita Soshnikov, an undrafted, unknown Russian who was the best rookie on the ice by a mile.

But when the Sabres needed their marquee players to show up, they did. Eichel and Kane erased a two-goal deficit in the final 13 minutes, and Reinhart teamed with goaltender Chad Johnson to give Buffalo just its second shootout win in eight chances.

"It's really big for us to be resilient in that third," Eichel said. "It's great to see it. Every game's not going to be pretty. As a line it's not the start we wanted at all."

Eichel's adrenaline finally starting pumping with 5:21 gone in the third period when he and Maple Leafs forward Nazem Kadri got into scrum, with both players going to the box. Eichel was a different player when he came out.

"Yeah, a little riled up," the 19-year-old said. "It's a physical game, emotional, and I thought I needed to get a little more engaged."

Eichel became the youngest Sabres player ever to reach the 20-goal milestone, eclipsing by nine days the record set by Pierre Turgeon in 1988-89. Matt Moulson gave the puck to Eichel in the slot, and he ripped it home with 12:39 to play.

"It's nice that you can score your 20th with the guy that lets you live in his house with him assisting on it," Eichel said. "You always want to set yourself some goals. It's something that you want to get to and then see where that takes you."

"I've been the benefactor of a lot of great plays and being able to finish them off. It's a great feeling, and it's really a testament to the guys in the room."

Kane scored less than three minutes later after Reinhart stole the puck deep in the Toronto zone and set up his linemate for an easy tap-in. Suddenly, a rough night for the No. 1 line was no longer looking bad.

"Our group didn't play well, the top line included, for a good portion of the game," coach Dan Bylsma said. "I was real disappointed about the way we all played, including the top line, and I knew we needed more from them. They needed more from each other. It is good to see them step out in the third and come through for us."

After Leafs goalie Garret Sparks made a nice glove save on Eichel during the shootout, Reinhart found the net to complete the comeback for the team and the line.

"No real excuse for why we didn't come out strong for the first part of that game and really the majority of it," Reinhart said. "To win it the way we did in a shootout, where we haven't had success, was nice for us to do."

"It's a good feeling for us. It seems like it kind of shifts every night who's kind of producing. That's important. It happened to be us tonight even when we weren't at our best for the majority of the game. We were able to bear down and find a way to do it."

Eichel, Reinhart and Kane are cornerstones of the rebuild, so seeing them respond to adversity was important for the organization.

"They're so relied upon on this team to get goals," said Johnson, who made 30 saves and three more in the shootout. "I'm sure they feel pressure when they're not scoring. We have some top guys out with Ryan O'Reilly and Tyler Ennis, so that puts more pressure on them. For them to get goals and get confidence, it's awesome. They're so young, too, it kind of blows your mind how much impact they have on this team."

Lagging Leafs on road to becoming relevant again

Buffalo News

March 8, 2016

TORONTO – Snaking through the morass of morning traffic on the Queen Elizabeth Way and Lake Shore Boulevard, sports talk radio here is a must if you're coming for a Leafs or Blue Jays game. Monday was no different. My longtime cohort Jeff Blair, the former columnist of the Globe & Mail, had the mic as he normally does on The Fan 590, Canada's sports giant.

He spent the requisite amount talking about Jack Eichel, like we've heard in every town the Sabres have arrived in from coast to coast in two countries the last five months. Then he moved to the hometown team, the one in 30th place in the NHL that entered Monday's game on a five-game losing streak and a 1-8-1 slump over its last 10.

"The Leafs," Blair intoned with some dramatic effect, "have to have the happiest fan base in Canada."

His words just about prompted a slam of the brakes. (OK, the traffic actually did do that, but go with me here).

Given time to stop and think, it was easy to ponder. Montreal fell apart without Carey Price. Ottawa and Vancouver are mediocre. Calgary and Winnipeg are big disappointments. And Edmonton is, well, Edmonton. And that's even with Connor McDavid.

Then there's the Leafs. Blair is right. They have sages in charge in Brendan Shanahan, Lou Lamoriello and Mike Babcock. Young players on the rise like William Nylander, Nikita Soshnikov, Morgan Reilly and Jake Gardiner. Last year's No. 4 overall pick, center Mitch Marner, has 107 points in 51 games this year at London of the OHL. Their AHL farm team, the Toronto Marlies, have a league-leading 43-13-4 record with a roster that includes former Pittsburgh No. 1 pick Kasper Kapanen.

And what happens if the Leafs add Auston Matthews to all this?

The Leafs are definitely behind the Sabres on Rebuilding Road – or should it be Tank Terrace? – but they have a chance to close the gap fast. And all the snickers from the 716 aside, the Leafs finally finding their way and becoming relevant again would be good for the entire NHL.

As this season winds down, the Leafs are doing Tim Murray proud with the way they're "losing properly." After collapsing to a 4-3 shootout loss to the Sabres on Monday, they have lost 25 games this season by one goal – including the last five straight. They've dropped 11 of those in overtime or shootouts.

After going 13-8-5 in November and December, the Leafs are a very tanky 7-18-4 since the New Year, with plenty of trades helping ease the slide.

"It's easy to sag and feel sorry for yourself and be mentally soft," said Babcock. "Why don't we dig in a little harder? Is it one shift? Is it one faceoff that gets you over the top? I don't think anyone here has lost sight of the plan and where we're going. At the same time, when the game starts we're trying to win every single night. Don't ever kid yourself. We're playing our players that way, trying to find a way to get two points and feel good about ourselves."

There were 11 players in the Toronto lineup when they met the Sabres on Oct. 21 in First Niagara who weren't in it Monday night in Air Canada Centre, be it from a bunch of trades (notably Dion Phaneuf and James Reimer), injuries (Joffrey Lupul and James van Riemsdyk) or movement to and from the AHL.

Nonetheless, the Leafs were the better team Monday for 47 minutes. Leo Komarov burned the Sabres for a goal on a 2-on-1 after 25 seconds and Buffalo was as lackluster as it's been all season for much of this one. There was no excuse for such a no-show. Which team is tanking again?

You get the feeling the Leafs love to fast-forward the process, especially since the Sabres already have huge building blocks in Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen. But Lamoriello won't let that happen. This is going to be a deliberate approach.

"What I did with Lou all winter long was when he was getting carried away, I talked to him," Babcock said. "And when I was getting carried away, he talked to me."

Marner will be in the NHL next year but could get loaned to Team Canada for the World Junior Championships. If the Leafs lose the Matthews lottery and end up with one of the Finnish flash wingers, either Patrik Laine or Jesse Puljujarvi, there's a good chance they might stash them back in their home country for a year.

"It's important to go through this experience," said center Nazem Kadri. "What do they say? You've got to crawl before you can walk and you got to walk before you can run. It's something we've taken in stride. You have to feel out the process. There's been hard times but dealing with adversity can help take you over the top and help you achieve your goals."

Kadri, who made several foolish plays in the third period to help the Buffalo comeback, has received particular attention from Babcock. He's only 25 and has been widely known for being a party animal in Toronto. Sowing his wild oats won't fly anymore.

"It's a work in progress and if Nazem was right here, I'd say the same thing to him," said a smiling Babcock. "The big thing for him and for all kids is you've got figure out what a pro is. I think when you start getting paid, you think you're a pro. To me, that has nothing to do with it. ..."

"It's not what comes out of your mouth. It's what you do every day. That's how you live and that's what guys are watching. If you say all the right things and you're living wrong, no one is listening to you."

More sage advice. The Leafs are behind the Sabres. But you should be concerned the gap might not be as wide as you think.

Sabres notebook: Sabres coach brimming with winning attitude

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 8, 2016

TORONTO – Knowing when the season will end is a new experience for Dan Bylsma. He doesn't like it.

Bylsma made the playoffs during all six of his seasons coaching the Pittsburgh Penguins. His debut season in Buffalo will end after 82 regular-season games. There are only 15 remaining, starting with Tuesday's home game against the New York Rangers.

"It's not something I'm real comfortable with," said Bylsma, who admitted the year has been an emotional roller coaster. "I probably have been more exuberant and more emotional probably both ways, winning and losing. It takes a toll on you not winning hockey games and not having success. At the same time, the wins that we've had and some of the good that we've had has felt better, been better points for me personally."

The Sabres improved to 27-31-9 after a 4-3 victory over Toronto in Monday's game. Bylsma knew he wasn't inheriting a potential Stanley Cup winner this season, but the lessons in losing have still been tough.

"You know you're developing a process with your team, trying to build expectations to win and win every night," he said. "That's a process that we've been in since Day One, and that's one we have to learn how to play the right way. We have to learn and develop that attitude in our team. That's one I think we've been real close to a lot, but it's one we're still in the process of developing. That's been hard. There's no question about that."

The Sabres entered Monday's schedule 14 points out a playoff spot. They'd be closer with even marginal success in the shootout. They are 2-6, a record Bylsma laments.

"We're looking at the lack of success in that department, and it could really mean five, six more wins for this hockey team," the coach said. "Whether the shootout is a skills competition or another part of the game, it would mean a significant amount more success for us in the win column if we'd been able to execute and have success in the shootout, and that for me is difficult."

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The Rangers arrived in Buffalo as a depleted bunch. Goaltender Henrik Lundqvist (neck), forward Rick Nash (leg) and defensemen Marc Staal (back spasms) and Dylan McIlrath (knee) will miss the game against the Sabres. New York has called up rookie blue-liner Brady Skjei, who has appeared in three games this season.

Lundqvist suffered his injury Thursday after a collision with teammate Ryan McDonagh. After the referee failed to stop play, the goaltender angrily knocked the net over to earn a penalty for delay of game.

"When I realized the puck is in our end, I was not really ready to play. That was the truth," Lundqvist told reporters Monday in New York. "I don't know how I came up with the conclusion to move the net, but that's what came up in my head, and I'm not going to apologize for it because I was just not in a position where I could play the game.

"I needed a whistle. If the ref's not going to give me one, I'm going to deal with it my way. Could I have done it differently? Absolutely. But at the same time, it was a really tough hit where I was not really thinking straight, I think. But I got the whistle."

...

Sabres center Jack Eichel is familiar with media microphones, but he was taken aback by the large contingent waiting for him to debut in the Centre of the Hockey Universe.

"So this is Toronto, huh?" Eichel said in Air Canada Centre. "Wow."

He'll quickly get used to it. The Sabres play in Toronto again March 19 and host the Maple Leafs on March 31.

"It's a good stretch for us with a lot of games this month with three against our rival," Eichel said. "You want to come out on the better end."

Toronto goaltender Garret Sparks, an Illinois native, was eager to face Eichel.

"It's pretty exciting being an American-born hockey player and getting to go up against one of the best guys the country has produced in a while," Sparks said. "I've seen a lot of him, me and my roommate watching him closely, so it's a pretty cool experience to be going against him."

Quick hits: Sabres 4, Maple Leafs 3 (SO)

By John Vogl
Buffalo News
March 8, 2016

TORONTO – The Sabres are looking for things to build upon, things that will help them in future years. One trait jumps out.

They rarely quit.

Down by two goals with 13 minutes to play Monday night, the Sabres scored twice to tie Toronto, 3-3. Sam Reinhart completed the comeback by scoring in the shootout to deliver a 4-3 victory.

The Sabres have won six games when trailing after two periods. Only Los Angeles and Ottawa (seven each) have more third-period comebacks this season. Buffalo forced overtime in three other games.

Buffalo won in Air Canada Centre for the first time since Jan. 21, 2013, snapping a six-game losing streak in Toronto. The home team had won the previous 12 games in the rivalry.

Sabres goaltender Chad Johnson, starting for just the second time in 10 games, turned aside 30 shots. The Leafs' Garret Sparks made 24 saves.

Milestone for Eichel: Sabres rookie Jack Eichel scored with 12:39 to play to reach the 20-goal mark. Matt Moulson pushed the puck to Eichel in the slot, and the center ripped home a shot to pull the Sabres within 3-2. The last Sabres rookie to score 20 goals was Tyler Ennis in 2010-11.

Kane stays close: Evander Kane stayed within one goal of Eichel's team-high total when he tied the game with 9:19 to play. Sam Reinhart stole the puck deep in the Toronto zone and quickly passed across the ice to Kane, who was alone for a tap-in to make it 3-3. Kane has 19 goals.

Post: Toronto's Nazem Kadri tripped Eichel during overtime, giving the Sabres a four-on-three power play. The quartet of Eichel, Kane, Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen kept the puck in the Leafs' zone for nearly the entire two minutes but couldn't find the net. Eichel rang a slap shot off the post for Buffalo's best chance.

Quick start for Leafs: Toronto needed just 25 seconds to take a 1-0 lead. The Sabres allowed Nikita Soshnikov to carry the puck from center ice to the doorstep. Buffalo also failed to pick up Leo Komarov, and the forward easily tapped in Soshnikov's pass before fans had even settled into their seats.

No kill: The Sabres allowed a power-play goal for the third straight game as the Leafs took a 2-0 lead with 8:55 left in the first. Buffalo escaped a 27-second five-on-three chance for Toronto, but it couldn't kill second penalty. Brady Boyes slid a pass to Brooks Laich at the top of the crease, but the puck hit the skate of Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe before it got there and caromed into the net.

No power: The Sabres went 0 for 3 on the power play during the first period, and they're still searching for their first five-on-three goal. They had a two-man advantage for 42 seconds but couldn't connect.

Long time coming: After more than a year without a goal, Sabres defenseman Mark Pysyk rejoined the scoring ranks with 3:36 left in the second to make it 2-1. He needed video review to make it official. Pysyk kicked the puck at the net during a rush, then fired the rebound. Sparks got his stick on the shot, and the puck settled near the goal line. The netminder inadvertently pushed the puck over the line with his blocker.

Pysyk, whose previous goal was in Columbus on Feb. 24, 2015, ended his drought at 40 games.

Back down by two: The Sabres couldn't build on Pysyk's goal and trudged to the dressing room down by two after allowing a goal with 18.2 seconds left in the middle period. Johnson stopped a shot from the slot and turned aside Zach Hyman's rebound chance. Hyman got another whack and buried it for his first NHL goal. The crowd went wild for the Toronto native.

Turning up the shots: The Sabres had just eight shots through 28 minutes. They took 10 in the final 12 minutes of the second period.

Eventful two shifts: After getting the assist on his first shift, Soshnikov was helped to the trainer's room following his second. The rookie tried to hit Johan Larsson near the boards, but the Sabres center sidestepped the attempt. Soshnikov fell awkwardly into the boards, banging his head in the process. He returned later in the period and attempted six shots through 40 minutes.

Counting the house: The Leafs announced a crowd of 18,950.

Next: The Sabres will play for the second consecutive night Tuesday when the New York Rangers visit First Niagara Center. Buffalo is 5-5-1 on the second game of back-to-backs.

Maple Leafs following Buffalo Sabres' tank model

By Mike Zeisberger
Buffalo News
March 8, 2016

TORONTO - We've said it before and we'll say it again - in hockey circles, the term "T-A-N-K" is a four-letter word.

Consider this explanation from an executive of an Atlantic Conference team.

"To term it what people term it I feel is unfair from the standpoint that this is what has been done in all sports for a long time," the exec explained. "When you are rebuilding, you try to accrue picks.

"We're doing what we feel is right to do in a rebuild and that is to get better in the future. Our time is not today. We're doing what many teams in the past have done to get better. It's not a quick fix."

If you had to guess, those comments sound like they could be coming from Maple Leafs president Brendan Shanahan, GM Lou Lamoriello and/or coach Mike Babcock, who has been quite outspoken in the past month when it comes to his dislike for the T-word.

Truth be told, those quotes actually came during an interview with Buffalo GM Tim Murray back on March 11, 2015, almost a year to the day his Sabres were in Toronto Monday night.

Some 362 days ago, Murray was quite defensive of the blueprint that featured his ripping apart of the Sabres roster with the long-term goal of reconstructing the foundation, primarily through resources compiled through the draft.

Keep in mind that, at that time, a quick scan of the Maple Leafs lineup still featured marquee names such as Phil Kessel, Dion Phaneuf and, to a lesser extent, Roman Polak and James Reimer.

Now, 12 months later, members of that same Sabres management group - the one that had been widely criticized for allegedly tanking - could sit in the press box at the ACC, point at the home bench and say: "How is that different from what we did?"

Truth of the matter is, it isn't.

In the end, the Leafs have followed the same path forged by Murray and the Sabres two years ago. As a result, Kessel, Phaneuf, Polak and Reimer are gone, all having been part of deals that landed Toronto a cache of prospects and/or draft picks in return.

Instead of Phil The Thrill and Captain Dion, the Leafs now boast William Nylander, Nikita Soshnikov and Garret Sparks. And, 15 weeks from now, when teams congregate at First Niagara Center - home of the Sabres - for the 2016 entry draft, the Leafs will have 12 picks at their disposal.

Whether you disagree in principle with the means being used by the likes of the Sabres and Leafs to restock their respective talent pools, Murray is right on the mark when he says this is not a new concept, whether the skeptics like it or not.

The NHL could argue that it implemented a draft lottery in an attempt to dissuade teams from tanking, ... er, from using all means possible to finish 30th, thereby automatically getting the first overall draft pick. Right or wrong, that format has cost the Sabres the past two seasons. Buffalo finished in the basement each time.

In 2014, Florida leapfrogged the Sabres in the lottery, allowing the Panthers to snap up highly-coveted Barrie Colts defenceman Aaron Ekblad. One year later, the Edmonton Oilers played the role of spoilers by moving up in the process in order to land the hockey jewel of this generation, Connor McDavid.

While Murray obviously wasn't pleased with the system, the Sabres certainly landed a pair of blue-chip prospects from the past two drafts in Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel. Entering Monday night's game against the Leafs, Eichel led the Sabres in goals (19) while Reinhart was right behind him (18), an endorsement of the optimism surrounding the Buffalo franchise these days.

Leafs fans certainly have visions of a blue-and-white clad Auston Matthews dancing in their heads, but the odds of the basement-dwelling team winning the lottery have been whittled down to 20%. And, as Sabres backers can attest, there are no guarantees under this format, no matter how low a team goes in the standings.

Nevertheless, in this salary-cap world, this is the gameplan that rebuilding teams continue to adopt. The Sabres prescribed to this line of thinking the previous two seasons. And, in 2015-16, the Leafs are following in their footsteps.

Even first-year Sabres bench boss Dan Bylsma admits this might be the path now.

Said Bylsma: "Is getting a Connor McDavid a good thing? A Jack Eichel? Or, if you look at this draft, an Auston Matthews or a (Jesse) Puljujarvi? Those are players any team would add to its roster tomorrow."

As such, when Bylsma sees what the Leafs are doing right now, it understandably serves as a reminder of what his Sabres did recently.

"It's similar," he admitted. "It looks similar."

That's because it is.

Just don't tell either team it's a "tank" - even if that's what the optics suggest.

The race to bottom leaves you a long way from the top: Feschuk

By Dave Feschuk

Toronto Star

March 8, 2016

Jack Eichel pulled on a Buffalo Sabres ball cap and dutifully took his place in the middle of a game-day media scrum in the centre of the hockey universe.

“So, he said, “this is Toronto.”

Yes, this is it — sort of. Eichel’s Air Canada Centre debut wasn’t exactly a showcase for the GTA’s claim as the NHL’s rarity of an unconditionally rabid market. The waning days of this burn-it-to-the-ground season have featured home games with plenty of pricey seats left unfilled, and Monday night was no exception.

Fair enough. There are only two must-see rookies in this league. You must see Chicago’s Artemi Panarin, partly because he’s really good but mostly because he plays on a line with Patrick Kane. And then there’s Connor McDavid, who missed his only potential appearance on Bay Street back in November. If you came to see Eichel, after all, you might have spent most of the proceedings wondering if Buffalo’s No. 15 had made the trip in both body and spirit.

After an underwhelming opening two periods, mind you, Eichel finally found the space to score his 20th goal of the season in a third-period comeback that keyed Buffalo’s 4-3 shootout win.

It was one night, one performance in a season in which Eichel has been, at age 19, awfully impressive. But on Monday, Toronto boasted a few rookies who, for much of the night, begged your notice more forcefully than the much-hyped Sabre.

Zach Hyman, for instance, showed dirty-area grit in scoring his first NHL goal, a tap-in of his own second-period rebound. The euphoric moment — “a dream come true” for a beaming hometown son who grew up cheering for the team he’s been energizing since his arrival five games ago — came in the midst of another tireless night for the University of Michigan grad.

“Work ethic is not an issue with that kid,” raved Leafs veteran Nazem Kadri.

Fellow rookie Nikita Soshnikov, meanwhile, set up the Leo Komarov goal that made it 1-0 on a beautifully poised pass through the slot. And William Nylander’s burst of second-period speed created a two-on-one that got a rise out of the assemblage.

But for all the promise on display from both teams, Buffalo’s presence — and the Leafs will see the Sabres twice more before the month is out — was a good opportunity for a cautionary conversation of sorts. A year ago, after all, it was the Sabres who finished last in the league and won the best odds in the McEichel sweepstakes. Yet for all their diligent tanking, they ended up with the second-best option. And nearly a year later, they’re no longer in last place; they came into Monday in fifth-last.

Maybe the Sabres’ future is bright. But they’ll need more pieces before anyone can say for sure. In a four-line league, success never comes down to one draft, one tank, one player. And when you engage in a race to the bottom, you end up a long way from the top.

That’s the scary bit for Maple Leafs fans. There are hockey folks who’ll tell you the core of Buffalo’s young talent — the likes of Eichel, 20-year-old centreman Sam Reinhart and 21-year-old defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen — is currently superior to that of the Maple Leafs. And even given that, the Sabres seem a long leap away from scaring anyone.

"They're set up for success there for a long period of time," Leafs coach Mike Babcock was saying of the Sabres before the game. "Obviously getting Eichel, to me it's a real positive for the organization. He looks like he's a real player in the making. All those things set them up for success over time."

Exactly how much time is anyone's guess. But certainly there are plenty of reasons to like Eichel's upside. Garret Sparks, before he made 24 stops on 27 shots in the loss, couldn't help but wave his national flag extolling Eichel's importance.

"It's pretty exciting, being an American-born hockey player and getting to go up against one of the best guys the country's produced in a while," said Sparks, who is from the Chicago area.

Connor Carrick, the Maple Leafs defenceman acquired in the Daniel Winnik trade with Washington, played on the U.S. world-junior squad with Eichel a couple of years back and was struck by his then-teammate's unshakeable assuredness.

"He certainly has that mentality, 'I might try this move. It didn't work the first time, but the next two are going to,'" Carrick said. "He has that persistence through his game. And that's important. Especially as a scorer. You've got to be stubborn."

Stubborn's important. But youth is youth.

Kadri, for one, offered a critique of Eichel, with whom he tangled more than once: "He's a good player. I think he has a hard time in his own end, but he's definitely special with the puck."

Indeed, as more and more NHL teams peg teenagers as centrepiece performers, there's a reason teenagers don't generally hoist Stanley Cups.

"You're relying on young men to carry a huge weight on their shoulders. And sometimes that can be a lot to handle for a young guy," said Carlo Colaiacovo, 33, the ex-Leafs defenceman now playing for the Sabres.

Colaiacovo, for his part, figures the Sabres have mixed in enough veterans — guys like Brian Gionta and David Legwand — to be "ready to take the next step" and become a playoff contender.

And as for his once-beloved Leafs? Colaiacovo smiled.

"You'd like to think they're finally starting to do the right things, too," he said.

"Starting" is the word, precisely.

Sabres' Evander Kane putting distractions behind him

By Curtis Rush

Toronto Star

March 8, 2016

Evander Kane steps on the ice at the pre-game skate on Monday at the Air Canada Centre, and it's like his energy is low.

For the first few minutes, the 6-foot-2 Buffalo Sabres forward takes long, slow strides while his teammates whip around him, and it's only in rare moments that he quickens his pace.

Then comes a faceoff drill. He's up against rookie sensation Jack Eichel. Kane suddenly ramps up the intensity and dominates his teammate.

Later in the dressing room, he brags about his faceoff skills.

"I win draws all the time," Kane says. "I was 6-0 last game. That was the only positive."

He's mostly business, answering questions with a stoic expression. Certain things are off limits. When you ask about what he and assistant coach Dan Lambert were talking about when he stepped onto the ice, Kane won't go there.

"Nothing I can share," he says.

Ask about Mara Teigen, the model girlfriend he publicly wooed back last year by renting a billboard in Los Angeles to declare his love, he puts up another roadblock.

"I'm not going to get into my personal life," Kane says.

Kane, who says "you grow up pretty quick" in a sport where you leave home as a teenager, is understandably guarded. Few NHL players have had to try to grow up in the wake of so many controversies.

Kane was traded from Winnipeg after he reportedly showed up late for a team meeting and not in proper attire.

He was investigated in an alleged sexual-assault incident in late December in Buffalo. While the investigation is ongoing, Kane has denied any wrongdoing.

And he was fined for showing up late for a practice in Buffalo after going to Toronto for the NBA all-star game in February.

Former Maple Leaf Carlo Colaiacovo was among those didn't know what the Sabres were getting. The 24-year-old Kane scored 30 goals in Winnipeg four years ago, but has been inconsistent since, slowed by injuries and followed by the off-ice incidents

"Obviously, there was a lot of speculation when he first came in," Colaiacovo says. "You hear all the things about his life away from hockey, but getting to know the guy has been outstanding. I really got a different perception him. He loves being around his teammates. He's a young kid. It's a process of growing up. And I think he's in the mature stages of doing that right now.

"He's had his incidents and it's been addressed both on and off the ice. He's a guy who's taken ownership. By doing that, he's starting to gain the respect of his teammates. His commitment to the game has definitely changed over the last couple of months."

Kane was the first person on the ice Sunday at an optional practice to work on his shooting.

Having missed 10 games to injury early in the season, he went into Monday night's game with 18 goals and 10 assists in 55 games.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma says it is possible that Kane can return to being a 30-goal scorer and he has talked to him about getting to the net more.

Kane is getting the opportunities.

"They just haven't been going in for me," he says.

Fizzling rivalry between Leafs and Sabres has become all about the tank

By James Mirtle
Toronto Globe & Mail
March 8, 2016

It's an awkward subject for Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma to broach, given recent history that he wasn't a part of.

Buffalo has, to put it charitably, been very bad the last two seasons – quite likely the worst team of the NHL's salary-cap era. The Sabres followed up a 52-point year in 2013-14 with only 54 last season and nearly set some futility records in doing so.

(To put that in perspective, even the lowly, last-place Toronto Maple Leafs are on pace for 67 points this season.)

All that losing, as is now often the case in this league, was by design. The Sabres pulled their roster apart, turning a bad team into a terrible one in order to rebuild with high picks, which worked wonderfully in landing Sam Reinhart and Jack Eichel in the last two drafts.

Bylsma, meanwhile, was airlifted in to help them finally try to win, the same way Mike Babcock was hired in Toronto and Todd McLellan in Edmonton.

Yet all of their teams remain in the league's basement.

"Where we've come from – where we were at – is over for sure," Bylsma said. "We're not a team any longer that wants to be, needs to be, is looking at being, at the bottom. We're starting to put pieces in place where we need to prove we can win hockey games."

That road up from the basement hasn't come easy. Even after rallying to beat the Leafs 4-3 in a shootout on Monday, the Sabres are guaranteed a fifth straight playoff miss and highly unlikely to even get to 80 points in a league where it usually takes 95 to make the postseason.

Monday's win was only their sixth in the last 16 games, a slide that's been typical of their season.

The kids have been all right – with Reinhart (two assists) and Eichel (one goal) both having big nights against the Leafs and Rasmus Ristolainen logging 28 minutes on defence – but many of their veterans have underperformed. The Sabres are a team lacking adequate depth; they need more offence and more defence and aren't particularly well-stocked in the American Hockey League.

The problem in the NHL is that tearing a roster down can be easy, but building it back up is difficult, as there's often little talent available in free agency and even the brightest stars usually take time to develop. The Sabres are also coming from so far back that even a 20-point improvement in the standings doesn't get them close to the postseason.

Becoming a contender is still a ways off.

But there's likely something instructive in Buffalo's struggles for Leafs management, who will be hoping their team makes similar progress next season. There's also reason in there for the rivalry to grow.

Not only did the Leafs steal Babcock away in controversial fashion last spring before the Sabres settled on Bylsma, but these teams also both went through the same scorched-earth reconstruction in roughly the same time period. The question of who "tanked" the best, and which management team put it back together correctly, will be a focal point of debate for years to come.

"[Sabres GM] Tim Murray is a real good scout and doesn't mind making a deal," said Babcock, who remains a villain of sorts among Sabres fans due to what they believe was a direct snub of their city. "[Terry] Pegula is as good an owner as you can have. Obviously getting Eichel is a real positive for their organization. He looks like he's a real player in the making. All those things set them up for success over time."

"We know that process started in September," Bylsma said of ending the rebuild talk. "That started with some of the players who we've gotten. That's [the team] we know we're still building into."

The hope in Buffalo had been that success would come quicker than this. Murray landed centre Ryan O'Reilly and netminder Robin Lehner in two nice off-season deals, and while both have played well, they haven't had enough support.

This team still has too many minutes and too many dollars allotted to veterans left over from the disaster years, which shows how tough it can be to turn over an entire roster. The good news is that Murray has cap space to work with this summer, and he can look add more "right-now" pieces if he chooses.

The Leafs aren't there yet so they'll be playing from behind.

But this is a rivalry that is desperate for the boost that climbing the standings would bring. The Sabres and Leafs haven't had good teams in the same year going way back to at least 2001, which was Dominik Hasek's last season in Buffalo and Curtis Joseph's heyday in Toronto.

Fifteen years later, the reality is there's still a long, long way to go before either team can crawl out of the abyss that they've created and get back to being a contender.

The Sabres won this night in Toronto thanks to Reinhart's shootout winner – and they have a head start – but it's anyone's guess which team starts scaring those on top first.

Take note Toronto Maple Leafs fans: Buffalo Sabres show rebuilding from the ground up is not a quick fix

By Michael Traikos

National Post

March 8, 2016

TORONTO — Matt Moulson and Ryan O'Reilly can't score. The power play is a mess. And the fifth-worst team in the NHL, which has lost far too many players to injury, is also losing far too many one-goal games.

A lot of this and more were true about the Buffalo Sabres a year ago, but a year ago no one cared because the Sabres were supposed to be terrible. But after finishing with the worst record the last two seasons, the honeymoon is officially over.

The Sabres are now being scrutinized. And according to first-year head coach Dan Bylsma, who was the topic of a recent column that asked, "How much of this responsibility lies with the coach," it is not necessarily a bad thing.

"We're not a team any longer that wants to be, needs to be, is looking at the bottom," Bylsma said before Monday night's game against the last-place Toronto Maple Leafs. "We're starting to put pieces in place where we need to prove that we can win hockey games."

Expectations have changed significantly in Buffalo. The Sabres, who drafted Jack Eichel with the No. 2 pick last summer and added O'Reilly, Evander Kane and goaltender Robin Lehner via trades, now have a lineup that should be competing for something other than another lottery pick.

Most expected the Sabres would climb out of the cellar and join the fringes of the playoff hunt. That they haven't is another reminder that rebuilding rarely goes according to plan. Heading into Monday's game, the Sabres were 26-31-9, good for 61 points in 66 games. Last season at the 66-game mark, the Sabres were 19-42-5, worth 43 points.

"I can tell you that there's not going to be one guy that's satisfied until we start winning consistently," Sabres rookie forward Sam Reinhart said. "We knew it was going to be a process. It takes a while to learn how to win in this league. The top teams only get better and better as the year goes on. It gets tough. I'm pretty confident that we're getting better at that and learning how to win.

"It's coming. It's just not coming fast enough."

The Edmonton Oilers have been on this endless road to nowhere for years now. Even the Florida Panthers, who finally figured things out this year, needed four drafts over six years in which they selected third overall or better.

For the Leafs, the Sabres offer a glimpse of what next year could look like.

Eichel, who turned 19 in the first month of the season, is second in rookie scoring with 19 goals and 44 points. Reinhart, now 20, is 10th with 18 goals and 30 points in his first full NHL season. Lehner, still only 24 despite playing parts of five seasons with the Ottawa Senators, missed the first three months of the season with a sprained ankle but has a .931 save percentage since returning in January. But the Sabres, who have not made the playoffs in 2011, are still another year or two away from being where they need to be.

"It's a young team and there's a lot of new guys," Lehner said. "We're obviously not happy with ourselves, but it's a lot better than it was before. We're in every game. It takes some time. It takes some time for sure."

Right now in Toronto, the team is getting a free pass from fans, who understand the team following a plan to stockpile the organization with draft picks and prospects. That's the easy part. The hard part is what comes next.

It is easy to accept losing when you are dealing with a lineup of mostly minor-leaguers. But what happens next year when William Nylander and Mitch Marner and maybe Auston Matthews are playing for the Leafs? Will fans understand that growing pains are part of the process? Will head coach Mike Babcock be allowed another year or two of finishing at the bottom?

It is a reasonable thing to expect, especially when you consider the amount of turnover that will likely occur in the off-season. And yet, as Bylsma and the Sabres have found out, expectations can change in a hurry.

"We are not where we want to be," Sabres general manager Tim Murray told Buffalo radio station WGR-AM last week. "There's lots of analytics and different kinds of numbers that say we are better and could be better. And these are excuses and nobody wants to hear them.

"But there's lots of good things happening. So we're better, we're closer to where we want to be, but we're not there yet."

In other words, it takes time. More time than some people might realize.

Top talent rallies Sabres past Leafs

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 8, 2016

TORONTO – Call it whatever you want – a tank, a deep rebuild – the Maple Leafs gutted their roster recently, leaving coach Mike Babcock a team filled with unknown neophytes to mold into NHL talent.

The Buffalo Sabres, meanwhile, have already endured what the Leafs are just beginning: a total overhaul. The Sabres are, theoretically, two years ahead of Toronto.

At this stage, they should exploit a reeling club dressing six rookies. The Sabres did Monday, although it took them more than 40 minutes to get going against the league's worst club.

Down 3-1 entering the third period, the Sabres roared back, getting goals from rookie Jack Eichel, his 20th, at 7:28 and Evander Kane at 10:41.

Then rookie Sam Reinhart scored the shootout's only goal, securing the Sabres' 4-3 win, their first triumph in the one-on-one competition since beating the Leafs on Oct. 21 and just their second all season.

"It says a lot about our team that we stuck with it," Eichel said. "You're down two goals going into the third period. ... It's really big for us to be resilient enough, play a simple game."

Eichel, Kane and Reinhart – the Sabres' top line – performed terribly early on, getting scored on just 25 seconds into the contest. Eichel turned the puck over his next shift, creating a breakaway goalie Chad Johnson stopped.

"Every game's not going to be pretty," Eichel said. "I think as a line it's not the start we wanted at all."

Still, the trio got it back.

"We needed it," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said about his No. 1 line's contributions. "Our whole team was not really solid tonight and a step behind – a step behind their speed, a step behind their skill tonight. We salvaged by coming out and getting those goals and those guys stepping up the way they need to for us."

Eichel's the first Sabres rookie with 20 goals since Tyler Ennis in 2010-11. Kane has 19 goals. Reinhart, who had two assists, used the same slick moves in Saturday's afternoon's 3-2 shootout loss to Minnesota, but the puck hit the post after beating the goalie.

"It was the exact same thing," Reinhart said. "It was nice to see it go in."

The Sabres have been awful in the shootout, losing six and frittering away precious points.

"It's nice to win a shootout," a smiling Eichel said.

For a while, it looked like the Leafs, who have lost six straight games and 10 of the last 11, would run the Sabres out of the Air Canada Centre.

After Leo Komarov opened the scoring, former Sabre Brad Boyes followed at 11:05 on the power play.

Sabres defenseman Mark Pysyk's first goal this season made it 2-1 16:43 into the second period, but Zach Hyman restored the Leafs' two-goal lead before the period ended.

Eichel played feisty all night, waging some battles with Nazem Kadri. He scored shortly after leaving the penalty box for roughing Kadri.

"Yeah, a little riled up," Eichel said about his play. "That's a physical game. It's emotional. I thought I needed to get a little more engaged. Kadri plays a tough game. So we were going at it a lot there."

Eichel converted a nifty feed from Matt Moulson, the veteran he's living with this season.

"It shows his hockey IQ, his hockey sense," Eichel said. "He leaves it for me in a great area where I can just touch it to the net. It's nice that you score your 20th with the guy that lets you live in his house."

Reinhart fed Kane for the tying goal.

The Sabres, who host the New York Rangers tonight, are 15-14-4 on the road. They had lost six straight games to the Leafs here. The home team had won 12 straight meetings between the rivals.

Sabres' Evander Kane possesses shoot-first mentality

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 8, 2016

TORONTO – By now, 56 games into Evander Kane's Buffalo Sabres tenure, most observers know what will happen when the former 30-goal scorer zooms down the wing.

Instead of cutting to the net and skating to the so-called "dirty area," Kane often just shoots the puck.

Modern NHL goalies – so large, well-trained and armored – usually swallow it up easily.

Kane began Monday's 4-3 shootout win over the Maple Leafs with the ninth-most shots in the NHL, a team-high 228 (4.1 a game). The next-closest teammate, center Jack Eichel, had 197 shots in 66 appearances.

Why does Kane, 24, shoot so much?

"If you don't shoot, you can't score," he said. "It's kind of the mentality I have behind it. If they don't go in, they can create havoc, opportunities for other guys. Usually, 90 percent of time, shooting the puck's the right play."

But is it? While Kane's 18 goals rank second with rookie Sam Reinhart behind Eichel's 19, the Sabres didn't give up a bundle to the Winnipeg Jets last year to have him score 20 or 25 times.

They expect the seven-year veteran, who scored 30 goals in 2011-12, to hit and surpass the prestigious mark again.

"We've talked to Evander about where he gets his goals from, where he can get his goals from," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "I think if Evander's going to move into the 30-goal range, 30-35, he's going to have to get on the inside."

Bylsma said Kane, who has a 7.9 shooting percentage, needs to score about seven goals from the inside.

So does Kane shoot too much from the wing?

"No, I think you got to find different ways to get your shot off," he said. "Obviously, scoring positions, they're hard to get in this league. That's why you don't see a lot of guys really getting to 30 goals nowadays. It's hard to score. You got to shoot when you have time and space. I've scored from all areas of the ice."

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Dan Catenacci's welcome-to-the-NHL-moment came Feb. 9, when during his second game, the Sabres rookie spotted Florida Panthers star Jaromir Jagr, a 44-year-old legend.

"I was kind of in awe," said Catenacci, a native of nearby Newmarket.

Before Catenacci's father, Maurice, ended his European career in the 1990s, he also played against Jagr.

"It's pretty cool for me and my dad to both play against a legend," Catenacci said. "I think that was a pretty special moment."

Seven games into his NHL career, Catenacci said his nerves have disappeared. Having been awarded a spot on the fourth line last week, the 22-year-old winger, who was born in Jagr's third NHL season, knows he has a special opportunity.

"It's time to show something," Catenacci said. "There's no more excuses for nerves."

Of course, Catenacci had a good excuse if he felt a few more jitters Monday. Having grown up about 35 miles away, around 20 or 30 family members and friends watched him up close inside the Air Canada Centre. Catenacci also played a preseason game here Sept. 25.

"A lot of excitement," he said. "Obviously, it helped playing preseason here in front of my family and friends. I think coming to the rink was a little familiar."

So far, Catenacci has zero NHL points. The 2011 third-round pick had nine goals and 20 points in 41 AHL games before his second recall.

The 5-foot-9, 191-pound Catenacci could stick around for the final month if he impresses the Sabres.

"I think he's got to play with some speed, some grit, some bite to his game," Bylsma said. "He's got to be an effective agitator with those assets, with the speed, grit ability. He has some skill in his game. He's shown at the American League level (he can) get points, have skill.

"But I really think with that speed, that aggressiveness, that hitting, with the physical play, that's where he needs to be every night."

xxx

Monday was only the Sabres' second meeting this season against the rebuilding Leafs and the first since Oct. 21. The fierce rivals now play three times over a 25-day stretch.

Since Eichel hadn't played in Toronto yet, almost 20 reporters were waiting for the 19-year-old rookie following the morning skate.

When Eichel spotted the crowd in the hallway, he said, "This is Toronto, huh?"

xxx

The New York Rangers, who play the Sabres in Buffalo tonight, will be without No. 1 goalie Henrik Lundqvist (neck), winger Rick Nash (bone bruise) and defenseman Marc Staal (back).

Sabres Rally for 4-3 Shootout Win in Toronto

By Dan Cave

WGR 550

March 8, 2016

Jack Eichel and Evander Kane scored in the 3rd period and Sam Reinhart provided the only shootout goal in the Sabres' 4-3 win over the Maple Leafs on Monday. Reinhart also had two assists on the evening. Chad Johnson stopped 30 of 33 shots in net while Garret Sparks stopped 24 for Toronto.

Scoring

- Leo Komarov opened the scoring just 25 seconds into the game, completing a 2-on-1 break with Nikita Soshnikov.
- Former Sabre Brad Boyes made it 2-0 later in the 1st, bouncing a power play pass off Jake McCabe's skate and into the net.
- Buffalo got on the board at 16:23 of the 2nd period on Mark Pysyk's 1st goal of the season. The original call on the ice was no goal, but a review showed the puck trickling under Sparks and over the line.
- The Leafs got their two-goal lead back in the final minute of the 2nd on Zach Hyman's first career NHL goal.
- Eichel made it 3-2 at 7:28 of the final frame, stepping on to the ice after a penalty and ripping a Matt Moulson pass by Sparks for his 20th of the season.
- Kane tied it up a little over three minutes later with his 19th. Reinhart got the play started, picking off Morgan Rielly next to the Toronto net and feeding a wide-open Kane for the tap-in.

Game Notes

- Eichel's 20th goal of the season came 10 years to the day Thomas Vanek reached the 20 mark as a rookie.
- Eichel is now alone in 2nd place behind Artemi Panarin (24) among rookie goalscoring leaders.
- Per Elias Sports Bureau (and Sabres PR), Eichel (19 years, 131 days) passes Pierre Turgeon (19 years, 140 days) as the youngest Sabre to reach 20 goals.
- The last Sabres rookie to score 20 in a season was Tyler Ennis in 2010-11.
- The shootout win marked Buffalo's first since 10/21/15 against Toronto.
- Johan Larsson led all Sabres forwards with 22:26 of ice time.

What's Next

The Sabres come right back home to face the New York Rangers at First Niagara Center on Tuesday. Hear it on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network at 7 p.m.

Sabres rally for win against Maple Leafs

By Mike Brophy

NHL.com

March 8, 2016

TORONTO -- Sam Reinhart set up the tying goal in the third period and scored the only goal in the shootout to give the Buffalo Sabres a 4-3 win over Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre on Monday.

In the shootout, Reinhart cruised in, lifted his stick over the puck causing Toronto goalie Garret Sparks to move forward exposing his five-hole. Reinhart slid the puck under his pads for the winner.

"That was my second career attempt and they both came in our last two games," Reinhart said. "I did the same thing against Minnesota (3-2 loss on Saturday) and I hit the post. I'm comfortable coming in that way."

Buffalo (27-31-9) overcame two two-goal deficits including a 3-1 deficit in the third period.

Reinhart was pleased with the comeback victory, but not pleased with the Sabres overall effort.

"We weren't at our best at the start," Reinhart said. "There's no real excuse for that, but we were able to find a way to win in the end."

Toronto (21-33-11) has lost six in a row. Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock said his young players performed well, but a few veterans made costly mistakes. Defenseman Morgan Reilly and center Nazem Kadri muffed plays that resulted in Buffalo goals in the third period.

"This was a game we were in total control of," Babcock said. "I thought we had the puck more, we did more good things and we still found a way to not get the points we wanted. That is disappointing. ...We have lots of kids in the lineup, but it wasn't our kids that made mistakes tonight. It was two guys that we count on big-time and in the third period they cost us, not the kids."

Leo Komarov gave the Maple Leafs a 1-0 lead with his team-leading 19th goal of the season 25 seconds into the game. Komarov escaped the coverage of Buffalo defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and snapped home a perfectly placed backhand pass from rookie right wing Nikita Soshnikov past Sabres goalie Chad Johnson.

Soshnikov was injured at 2:58 when he attempted to check Buffalo's Johan Larsson near center. Soshnikov lost his balance and crashed into the boards hitting his head. He was able to leave the ice under his own power and after undergoing concussion protocol, returned to the bench late in the first period.

Brad Boyes made it 2-0 Maple Leafs with his eighth goal of the season at 11:05. With Buffalo's Brian Gionta off for tripping, Boyes attempted a pass to Brooks Laich standing in front of the Sabres net. The puck bounced off Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe's skate and slid past Johnson.

The Sabres made it 2-1 at 16:24 of the second period when defenseman Mark Pysyk directed a shot to the Toronto net that Sparks stopped. Sparks accidentally pushed the puck over the goal line with his trapper. The play was reviewed and it was ruled the puck went entirely over the line. It was Pysyk's first goal of the season.

Less than a minute later, Maple Leafs center Zach Hyman scored his first NHL goal to make it 3-1. Playing in his fifth NHL game, Hyman drove hard to the net with the puck. His first shot was stopped by Johnson, but Hyman stabbed the rebound in.

Jack Eichel pulled the Sabres to within one when he stepped out of the penalty box after serving a roughing minor, skated to the net and slipped a shot past Sparks at 7:28. It was Eichel's 20th goal of the season.

Eichel, Reinhart fuel comeback in shootout win over Maple Leafs

By Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

March 8, 2016

TORONTO – They weren't wearing masks, but the Toronto Maple Leafs looked like anything but a team that had just undergone a tremendous fire sale at the deadline when they jumped out to a 3-1 lead against the Buffalo Sabres on Monday night.

They would've gotten away with it, too, if it weren't for those meddling kids.

Buffalo's under-25 players fueled a third-period comeback that ended with the Sabres' first shootout victory since October by a score 4-3. Mark Pysyk, Jack Eichel and Evander Kane each scored in regulation for Buffalo while Sam Reinhart scored the only goal in the shootout.

"We needed it," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Our whole team was not real solid tonight with the puck and a step behind their speed, a step behind their skill tonight. We salvaged it by coming out and getting those goals and those guys stepping up the way they need to for us."

The Sabres allowed a quick goal for the second straight game when Leo Komarov opened the scoring on a 2-on-1 rush for the Maple Leafs just 25 seconds into the contest. Brad Boyes banked a power-play goal in off the skate of Jake McCabe later in the period to emerge from the first with a 2-0 lead.

Pysyk scored his first goal of the season to cut the deficit in the second, tapping in his own rebound after a feed to the slot from Kane. But Buffalo allowed Zach Hyman to cut in behind the defense and score on a rebound to regain the two-goal edge for Toronto with just 18.2 seconds remaining in the period.

The trio of Eichel, Reinhart and Kane brought the Sabres back in the third. Eichel scored coming out of the penalty box 7:28 into the period and then Reinhart and Kane connected for the game-tying goal 3:13 later.

Reinhart stripped the puck from Toronto's Morgan Rielly near the net and fed it across to a wide-open Kane, who tapped it into a wide-open cage.

"It just kind of found my tape," Reinhart said. "Obviously Kaner put himself in good position to get open and make it an easy play for me."

After both teams exchanged chances in the overtime period – Eichel shot a potential game-winner from the slot that rung off the post – Reinhart scored on the Sabres second shot in the shootout. Chad Johnson, who made 30 saves for his 15th win – stopped two attempts and the third went wide.

The Sabres were 0-6 in shootouts since winning their first of the season, which also came against the Maple Leafs on Oct. 21. Reinhart's goal was a bit vindicating for the rookie, who nearly scored a shootout goal against Minnesota on Saturday but saw his shot deflect off of the post.

"Yeah, it was the exact thing," Reinhart said. "It was nice to see it go in."

EICHEL, AGAIN

Nazem Kadri might have made a mistake when he mixed it up with Eichel near the Sabres bench in the third period. Both players went to the box – Kadri for cross-checking and Eichel for roughing – but it was Eichel who raced out and scored a goal immediately upon the penalty's conclusion.

"A little riled up," Eichel said of how he felt coming out of the box. "I thought I needed to get a little more engaged, you know Kadri plays a tough game so we were going at it a bit there but I think that's part of hockey."

The play began with Cal O'Reilly winning a battle along the wall. He got the puck to Matt Moulson, who tapped it into the slot where an oncoming Eichel jetted in and fired a wrist shot for his third goal in as many games and the 20th of his rookie season.

Eichel was particularly happy that Moulson was able to earn the point on the play.

"Puck came right to him and it shows his hockey IQ, his hockey sense," Eichel said. "He just leaves it for me in a great area where I can just touch it into the net, and it's nice that you score your 20th with the guy who lets you live in his house assisting on it."

As for the beef with Kadri, it didn't end there. Kadri wound up in the box again for tripping Eichel in overtime and again later when Zach Bogosian shoved him into the boards that started a scrum resulting in roughing penalties to Kadri, Bogosian, Kane and Leo Komarov.

"It's a really good feeling," Eichel said. "We have a really good group in this room and everyone has each other's back, that's what's important."

By scoring his 20th goal 131 days after his 19th birthday, Eichel became the youngest Sabre ever to score 20 in a season. Pierre Turgeon, the previous record holder, was nine days older when he scored his 20th on Jan. 15, 1989 according to Elias Sports Bureau.

COACH REED IN THE HOUSE

In true One Buffalo spirit, the Sabres had a special guest cross the border to watch their game against the Maple Leafs. Ed Reed, the former All-Pro Safety who was recently hired as an assistant defensive backs coach for the Buffalo Bills, continued to embrace his new home by making the trip.

UP NEXT

The Sabres will cross the border back to Buffalo, where they host the New York Rangers on Tuesday night. It will be the second game between the two teams; the Rangers took the first meeting at Madison Square Garden by a score of 6-3 in January.

Coverage on Tuesday begins at 6:30 p.m. with Topps Sabres Gamenight on MSG-B and Bell TV. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.