



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*January 7, 2017*

## **Jets ride high-octane offense into matinee vs. Sabres**

Associated Press

January 6, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Winnipeg Jets have gotten off to an explosive start to the new year, and they're looking to end a three-game road trip on a high note Saturday when they take on the Buffalo Sabres.

The two teams will meet in a matinee game at 1 p.m.

After ending 2016 with back-to-back losses, Winnipeg's offense has been electric in 2017. The Jets (19-19-3) picked up a 6-4 win over Tampa Bay on Tuesday and a 4-1 victory over Florida one day later.

"It feels really good. It's what we wanted to do on this road trip and we're off to a great start," center Bryan Little told the team's website. "We're getting rewarded offensively for playing the right way. We're not cheating for our chances, we're playing a simple game and we're taking advantage when we do get those chances."

The Jets have benefited from balanced scoring across their top lines. Little had two assists in the 4-1 victory over the Panthers. Nikolaj Ehlers has eight goals in his last eight games, while rookie sensation Patrik Laine has continued his outstanding campaign with five points (two goals, three assists) in the two-game win streak.

"It's been six games since we've been pretty close to the lineup that we thought we'd start the season with," Jets head coach Paul Maurice said. "In our last two, a lot of the little smaller pieces of chemistry, of cohesion have started coming together, little things like line changes, shift length, all of those details. And I haven't moved the lines around at all for a while so now they've spent time with each other and we'd like to continue that if possible."

Laine and Mark Scheifele are currently tied for the team lead in points with 36, while Ehlers is not far behind with 35 on the season. Connor Hellebuyck (.911 save percentage, 2.70 goals against average) will start for the fourth straight game.

The Sabres (14-15-9) are coming off a 4-3 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night. Despite having a one-goal lead on three separate occasions, the Sabres ultimately fell in overtime to Buffalo native Patrick Kane.

"It's just tough," said Sabres center Jack Eichel, who had one goal. "We get to these situations and we're not able to put a stamp on the game. That's why we find ourselves out of the playoffs and kind of far back. It's disappointing."

Buffalo has lost three of its last five games and seven of its last nine.

The Sabres did receive a boost from center Ryan O'Reilly against the Blackhawks. O'Reilly returned after missing four games following an appendectomy during the NHL's holiday break. O'Reilly had two assists, including a pretty helper on the power play to set up Eichel.

"You see the play he makes last night, he adds a whole new dynamic," Eichel said, according to the team's website. "(He's a) left shot on the other side, creative, makes a lot of good plays, he's strong with a puck so he's a huge piece for our power play."

## **Sabres find success on power play, frustration on penalty kill**

By Amy Moritz  
The Buffalo News  
January 6, 2017

The numbers, well, they are what they are.

While Friday morning had the Buffalo Sabres with the fifth-best power play in the National Hockey League, they had the worst penalty kill.

The special-teams statistics couldn't be much more divergent for the Sabres.

The power play is clicking at 22.6 percent with 28 goals. The penalty kill, however, is dead last, successful only 74.6 percent of the time, giving up a total of 29 goals while shorthanded 114 times.

"We're opportunistic on the power play," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "We're making good reads and getting goals at timely points of the game. The penalty kill, we went through some struggles but we've been better lately. Whether the statistics show that or not, we've been better but it's something we need to improve and if we improve that, it's going to lead to wins."

The season statistics give the big picture, but head coach Dan Bylsma takes a micro approach. It's looking at how those units are doing from game to game. In Thursday's 4-3 overtime loss to the Blackhawks in Chicago, special teams were good enough to win the Sabres a point. The Sabres went 2 for 3 on the power play and killed off both man-advantages for Chicago.

"We were a much better penalty-killing team early on in the season numbers-wise and it slipped away from us in a month's time period," Bylsma said. "We're getting back to being a better penalty-killing team but both those numbers are game-to-game statistics. The power play has to go out and get you a goal when you need it and your penalty kill has to step up and kill off a penalty."

"They are keys in every game. ... That's really got to be the focus from both special teams, that it's game to game and it's got to be that for your team."

While the penalty kill has been incrementally getting better thanks to, as defenseman Jake McCabe sees it, more aggressive play, the power play has been a bright spot, generating opportunities and offense most of the season.

"I think it's just, when we win battles we have success," Ryan O'Reilly said. "You've got one extra guy out there and as much as you want to run plays, it's just winning battles. If you outwork them, you're going to get chances. For the most part on the power play this year, that's been our staple. We just make the reads and let the instincts take over. When you can do that you have success."

Success also seems to follow when O'Reilly is on the power play. He adds a dimension to the first unit, playing with Jack Eichel and Rasmus Ristolainen, creating opportunities. He set up both power play goals on Thursday after missing four games.

"It's great to have him back," Eichel said. "He's such an important part. First of all, I think power plays start in the faceoff circle and he's one of the best in the league. It's nice when you have him out here. He snaps them back pretty hard."

The Sabres set up with a 1-3-1 power play with Ristolainen at the blue line and Eichel and O'Reilly along the boards.

"You feel like he's the quarterback, the distributor of the puck, even though he's not on the top," Bylsma said of O'Reilly. "He adds that for us. It's much different when he's not there."

## **Ennis practicing; Carrier still sick**

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

January 6, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres are back home after a three game road trip in which the Sabres captured three of a possible six points. Buffalo is coming off a 2-1 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday night at the United Center in Chicago, Illinois.

Buffalo stepped onto the ice for practice on Friday afternoon at the KeyBank Center in Downtown Buffalo with Tyler Ennis skating with the team once again. Ennis has been out of the lineup since early November after undergoing surgery for a sports hernia. While head coach Dan Bylsma did not give a certain timeline for his return, he says that Ennis should be practicing with the team more often.

"He has done some skating back here," Bylsma said following practice. "He skated this morning on his own and then joined us for what's essentially a morning skate type of practice at 1 o'clock. We should be seeing him in practice now going forward."

So far in just 12 games this season, Ennis has a goal and an assist with 29 shots on goal and a minus-6 rating.

The Sabres had nearly everyone on the ice for practice on Friday with the exception of forward William Carrier and defenseman Dmitry Kulikov. Carrier missed practice due to a battle with the flu which has kept him out of the lineup in the past two games in New York and Chicago.

Bylsma said that Carrier was "well under the weather", which may be a bad sign for his game status tomorrow.

No further update was given on the status of Kulikov after practice as he continues to remain day-to-day with a lower back injury.

The Sabres will face the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday afternoon at the KeyBank Center. Buffalo will not have a morning skate tomorrow with a 1 p.m. faceoff. Pre-game coverage on WGR starts at noon with Brian Koziol and Paul Hamilton.

## **Sabres goalie Anders Nilsson impressive in limited action**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 7, 2017

BUFFALO – Dan Bylsma’s knowledge of Anders Nilsson was limited before the Sabres acquired the goalie in July. Sure, the team did its due diligence on the Swede. But the coach mostly knew about the backup from watching him years ago.

“I saw him as a younger goalie in the Islanders organization playing against him,” Bylsma said Friday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon’s tilt against the Winnipeg Jets at KeyBank Center. “I don’t know if he’s changed since then.”

Nilsson, in fact, has changed *a lot* over the years.

“Night and day,” said Nilsson, who has started the last two games, a win and an overtime loss.

Five years ago, the 6-foot-6, 229-pound Nilsson was a raw youngster shuttling between the AHL and New York. By 2014, with his progress stalling – “I kind of didn’t develop the way I wanted to,” he said – Nilsson jetted to the KHL, where he played 58 total games for Ak Bars Kazan.

“If I didn’t have a good year that year, I wouldn’t have been able to come back,” Nilsson said. “I developed a lot as a goalie that year. That year has definitely helped me a lot in my development. I don’t think I would’ve been here if I didn’t make that step.”

That stellar Russian campaign – his 1.71 goals-against average led the league – changed his career.

“It was huge,” he said. “It was a really good year for me. ... I felt I needed an environment change. (The) KHL was the best option.”

Nilsson, 26, has become Buffalo’s best option in net some nights. He’s 6-3-4 with a 2.47 goals-against average and a .926 save percentage, which ranked eighth entering Friday’s games, in 13 appearances.

Meanwhile, No. 1 goalie Robin Lehner is 8-12-5 with a 2.51 goals-against average and a .921 save percentage in 26 games. Since Nov. 29, Nilsson has four wins and Lehner has three.

Lehner’s overall goal support, according to Buffalo Sabres Stats, a Twitter account, is slightly higher than Nilsson’s (2.20 a game versus 2.17).

It can be argued Nilsson, who was acquired from the St. Louis Blues for a fifth-round pick, is the last-place team’s biggest surprise this season.

Nilsson stopped 24 shots in Tuesday’s 4-1 road win in New York, a game the Sabres limited the Rangers to only seven scoring chances, Bylsma said. With Lehner a little banged up, Nilsson started again Thursday, stopping 39 shots in the Sabres’ 4-3 overtime road loss to the Chicago Blackhawks.

While Nilsson allowed the tying goal with 2:04 left in regulation and the winner 56 seconds into overtime, he made 19 saves in the first period, keeping his club afloat.

“He really kept us in the game in the first period,” Bylsma said. “They had a lot of scoring chances in the first period, some golden ones. He was excellent and strong.”

Sabres center Ryan O’Reilly added: “He stood on his head.”

So will Bylsma tab Nilsson, who started three straight games in late October, again this afternoon? He wouldn’t say Friday.

But given the Sabres’ commitment to Lehner – they traded a first-round pick for him and clearly want him to be their No. 1 – and his 37-save performance in a 3-1 win Oct. 30 in Winnipeg, Nilsson might sit again.

“He’s been excellent whether he’s been playing or he’s not been playing,” Bylsma said of Nilsson. “He’s been ready to play well every time he’s stepped in there.”

Nilsson's habits and professionalism have impressed Bylsma all season. Mention his name to Bylsma, and he inevitably talks about Nilsson's work ethic.

"In practice, there's never an easy drill," O'Reilly said. "He's always competitive."

Nilsson usually showcases a competitive but calm style. Over the years, he has learned to utilize his massive frame to his advantage. That might be his biggest area of growth.

"I calmed my game down a little bit and tried to read the play more, trying to take advantage of my size and play a little bigger," Nilsson said. "Usually when I get scored on, it's because I have too much movement, I open up holes. I've been trying to pace myself and calm myself down."

## **Jack Eichel knows Sabres lost precious point**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
January 6, 2017

BUFFALO – Considering the Sabres earned three out of four points against two NHL heavyweights, the New York Rangers and Chicago Blackhawks, their short road trip was successful, right?

Well, not entirely, according to center Jack Eichel. Yes, they soundly beat the Rangers 4-1 on Tuesday. But they blew a late lead in Thursday's 4-3 loss, allowing the tying goal with 2:04 left before Patrick Kane scored 56 seconds into overtime.

Eichel doesn't care the Sabres almost beat one of the NHL's best clubs.

"I think that's the problem, you're satisfied with three points, that's not good enough," he said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. "You have a chance to get four points, you should've gotten four. For us to sit here and say, 'Oh, we played two of the best teams in the league. We got three out of four.' Well, no, that's not good enough. We should've beat them. That's all it comes down to."

He added: "We kind of pissed away a point. They all add up at the end of the year."

Eichel, despite scoring a goal and playing a career-high 23 minutes, 30 seconds, didn't start overtime and never got on the ice. Why?

"I had a combination of players I wanted to have together," said Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, who started forwards Evander Kane and Ryan O'Reilly.

With 37 points, the Sabres still rank last in the Atlantic Division. They host the Winnipeg Jets on Saturday afternoon.

Who will start in goal? Bylsma wouldn't say. Anders Nilsson started the last two games, although Robin Lehner made 37 saves in the Sabres' 3-1 win Oct. 30 in Winnipeg.

In other news, winger William Carrier (flu) missed today's practice.

Meanwhile, winger Tyler Ennis, out since having groin surgery Nov. 10, practiced with his teammates again today. Ennis practiced last week and has been skating on his own. The veteran has no time frame for a return, Bylsma said.

## Preview: Jets at Sabres

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

January 6, 2017

JETS (19-19-3) at SABRES (14-15-9)

1 p.m. ET; MSG-B, TSN3, NHL.TV

### Jets team scope

The Winnipeg Jets have won two straight games and six of the past nine. A key reason for the success is the line of Mark Scheifele, Nikolaj Ehlers and rookie Patrik Laine, each with a three-game point streak. Ehlers has a three-game goal streak and four points during that stretch, and has 11 points, including eight goals, in the past eight games. Laine has two goals and four assists, and Scheifele has two goals and two assists. "When they're going really well, they're virtually unstoppable," captain Blake Wheeler said. "That puck seems to be on a string. They don't need many opportunities, they seem to make the other team pay for the opportunities they do generate, and they play with a lot of speed. That's kind of what we're going through with our whole team. If we can get those guys clicking like that all the time, the rest seems to fall in order." Defenseman Jacob Trouba has a five-game point streak (one goal, six assists, which includes a shorthanded assist). "[Trouba's] play tells you he deserves some power-play time now," coach Paul Maurice said. "He's played exceptionally well. That game in Florida (a 4-1 win against the Florida Panthers on Wednesday), he was outstanding." Goalie Connor Hellebuyck will start.

### Sabres team scope

The Buffalo Sabres are looking to bounce back after a 4-3 overtime loss to the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday when they blew a 3-2 lead late in the third period. Even though the Sabres got three out of four points on a two-game road trip against the Blackhawks and New York Rangers, they're not satisfied with that. "I think that's the problem here," center Jack Eichel said. "You're satisfied with three points; it's not good enough. You have a chance to get four and you should've gotten four. For us to sit here and go, 'Oh, we played two of the best teams in the League and we got three out of four,' well, no, that's not good enough. We had them on the ropes; we should've beat them for four points. That's all it comes down to." Sam Reinhart has two goals and seven assists in the past eight games; he moved back to center after Johan Larsson was injured Dec. 31 against the Boston Bruins and Ryan O'Reilly missed four games after an appendectomy. "I think his battle level has increased, his play down low, his support of the puck and breaking pucks out; we're asking our centermen to be down low in that battle position but also to be the guy breaking the puck out," coach Dan Bylsma said. "I thought [Reinhart's] done a much better job of that, he's done a good job of that. I think with Jack and Sam and Ryan down the middle, it just spreads out your players a little bit more in your lineup." Bylsma did not say which goalie would start. Anders Nilsson started the past two games with Robin Lehner the backup.

### Jets projected lineup

Nikolaj Ehlers -- Mark Scheifele -- Patrik Laine

Mathieu Perreault -- Bryan Little -- Blake Wheeler

Shawn Matthias -- Adam Lowry -- Joel Armia

Nic Petan -- Andrew Copp -- Drew Stafford

Josh Morrissey -- Dustin Byfuglien

Toby Enstrom -- Jacob Trouba

Ben Chiarot -- Paul Postma



Connor Hellebuyck

Michael Hutchinson

Scratched: Chris Thorburn, Mark Stuart

Injured: Tyler Myers (lower body), Marko Dano (lower body)

Sabres projected lineup

Marcus Foligno -- Jack Eichel -- Kyle Okposo

Evander Kane -- Sam Reinhart -- Justin Bailey

Zemgus Girgensons -- Ryan O'Reilly -- Brian Gionta

Nicolas Deslauriers -- Derek Grant -- Matt Moulson

Jake McCabe -- Rasmus Ristolainen

Zach Bogosian -- Cody Franson

Josh Gorges -- Taylor Fedun

Robin Lehner

Anders Nilsson

Scratched: Justin Falk

Injured: William Carrier (illness), Dmitry Kulikov (lower back), Johan Larsson (wrist, elbow), Tyler Ennis (groin), Cody McCormick (blood clots)

Status report

Carrier did not practice Friday. He missed the game Thursday with an illness. ... Kulikov did not skate Thursday. He hasn't played since Dec. 27 because of a flare up of an injury he sustained during preseason.

Who's hot

Eichel has four goals and two assists during a five-game point streak. ... Kane has eight goals in the past 13 games. ... Little needs one point for 400 in the NHL; he has played 631 games.

## **Tonight's Game**

By Jeff Hamilton

Winnipeg Free Press

January 7, 2017

Jets Game day strip:

Today: JETS @ SABRES

KeyBank Center, noon

TV: TSN3

Radio: TSN 1290

>> ABOUT THE SABRES

The Sabres are coming off a hard-fought battle with the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday in a game that needed more than three periods to decide a winner. Despite Buffalo having three separate leads, they eventually lost, 4-3, with Patrick Kane scoring 56 seconds into the extra period to clinch the win for Chicago. Buffalo still earned a point in the loss and now sit at 14-15-9 on the year.

Buffalo averages the third fewest goals per game (2.21) in the NHL, but can hurt you on the power play. Of the Sabres' 84 goals on the year, 28 – or exactly one third – have come on the man advantage. Buffalo is ranked fifth in the league on the power play with a 22.6 per cent success rate, behind only the New York Rangers, Anaheim Ducks, Tampa Bay Lightning and Columbus Blue Jackets.

It should be a sturdy test for the Jets penalty kill units, a group that ranks near the bottom of the league, at 26th, and has allowed five power play goals against in the last four games.

Kyle Okposo, who signed a seven-year, US\$42-million deal with the Sabres as a free agent, leads Buffalo with 12 goals and 15 assists for 27 points in 36 games. Robin Lehner has been steady in net for Buffalo this year. Though he only has eight wins in 26 starts (8-12-5), he boasts a 2.51 goals-against average and .921 save percentage.

### **BUFFALO SABRES**

31 Anders Nilsson

40 Robin Lehner

4 Josh Gorges, D

6 Cody Franson, D

9 Evander Kane, RW

12 Brian Gionta, RW

15 Jack Eichel, C

21 Kyle Okposo, RW

22 Johan Larsson, C

23 Sam Reinhart, C

26 Matt Moulson, LW

27 Derek Grant, C

28 Zemgus Girgensons, C

29 Jake McCabe, D

38 Taylor Fedun, D

41 Justin Falk, D

44 Nicolas Deslauriers, LW

47 Zach Bogosian, D

48 William Carrier, LW

55 Rasmus Ristolainen

56 Justin Bailey

77 Dmitry Kulikov

82 Marcus Foligno

Head coach: Dan Bylsma

Assistant coaches: Terry Murray, Bob Woods, Tom Ward

Goaltending coach: Andrew Allen

#### WINNIPEG JETS

34 Michael Hutchinson G

37 Connor Hellebuyck G

4 Paul Postma D

5 Mark Stuart D

7 Ben Chiarot D

8 Jacob Trouba D

12 Drew Stafford RW

17 Adam Lowry C

18 Bryan Little C

19 Nic Petan LW

22 Chris Thorburn RW

26 Blake Wheeler RW "C"

27 Nikolaj Ehlers RW

29 Patrik Laine RW

33 Dustin Byfuglien D "A"

39 Toby Enstrom D

40 Joel Armia RW

44 Josh Morrissey D

55 Mark Scheifele C "A"

56 Marko Dano C

85 Mathieu Perreault C

Head coach: Paul Maurice

Assistant Coaches: Charlie Huddy, Jamie Kompon, Todd Woodcroft

Goaltending coach: Wade Flaherty

— Jeff Hamilton

Up Next:

FLAMES @ JETS

Monday, Jan. 9, 7 p.m.

TV: TSN3

Radio: TSN 1290

## **O'Reilly's return adds new dynamic to power play**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

January 6, 2017

Ryan O'Reilly is many things for the Buffalo Sabres, a fact made evident in most of the games he plays but perhaps even more so in his return to the lineup on Thursday. He's their most reliable forward in the defensive zone and in the faceoff circle in addition to being counted on as one of their top scorers.

His presence in Chicago was also a perfect example of what he means to the Buffalo power play, which ranks fifth in the League at 22.6 percent after a 2-for-3 outing against the Blackhawks. O'Reilly earned the primary assist on both goals, giving him 12 power-play points in 28 games this season. Of the 32 NHL players who rank ahead of him in that category, 30 have played 35 games of more.

Dan Bylsma outlined exactly what O'Reilly means to Buffalo's top unit following practice at KeyBank Center on Friday.

"We have a 1-3-1 power play, we have [Rasmus Ristolainen] in the middle of the ice and Jack [Eichel] and Ryan on the flanks," the Sabres coach said. "You feel like he's the quarterback, the distributor of the puck even though he's not on the top. He adds that for us. Distribution of the puck, it's much different when he's not there."

Patience, decisiveness and creativity are among the virtues that make O'Reilly an asset with the extra man. All three of those qualities factored into his assist on Eichel's goal in the third period, when he looked more like a point guard than a quarterback as he skated in toward the net and then sent a no-look pass across the ice to set up Eichel's one-time shot.

We've seen that passing acumen from O'Reilly many times with the man advantage this season, often with Eichel on the receiving end. Watch this pass from the third period of Buffalo's home loss to Carolina on Dec. 22, when O'Reilly faked a drop-back pass before feeding Eichel for a one-time opportunity that was stopped by Cam Ward.

"First of all I think the power play starts in the faceoff circle, and he's one of the best in the League," Eichel said. "You see the play he makes last night, he adds a whole new dynamic. [He's a] left shot on the other side, creative, makes a lot of good plays, he's strong with a puck so he's a huge piece for our power play. He'd be a huge piece for any power play."

It's not always a flashy, highlight-reel pass that shows O'Reilly's effectiveness. Look at the one power play that the Sabres didn't score on in Chicago, when the top unit kept the puck in the offensive zone for the final 1:20. O'Reilly touched the puck seven times after carrying it into the zone on that possession, cycling zone like the second hand on a clock.

In that 1:20 span alone, O'Reilly saved the puck at the blue line in the top left corner, fielded a rebound below the left half way and made an immediate pass to Kyle Okposo in the high slot, caught a pass on the right doorstep and fed the puck across the crease to Sam Reinhart, and drew the defense in toward him above the right circle to free Eichel at the point.

The top unit ended up being out on the ice for the entirety of the two-minute power play.

"I was trying to control Ryan's minutes a little bit and that power play was in zone for 1:45," Bylsma said. "Almost the duration of time they were in zone largely because of his puck control and his puck distribution."

Friday's practice

Tyler Ennis skated again with the team but there is still no timetable for his return to the lineup, according to Bylsma. Ennis has missed 26 games since undergoing groin surgery on Nov. 10.

William Carrier, who did not play in Chicago on Thursday, was absent from practice and remains under the weather. Here's how the lines looked in his absence:

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 12 Brian Gionta  
82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo  
9 Evander Kane - 23 Sam Reinhart - 56 Justin Bailey  
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 27 Derek Grant - 26 Matt Moulson  
63 Tyler Ennis

Defensemen: 29 Jake McCabe, 55 Rasmus Ristolainen, 47 Zach Bogosian, 6 Cody Franson, 4 Josh Gorges, 38 Taylor Fedun, 41 Justin Falk

40 Robin Lehner  
31 Anders Nilsson

Bylsma did not announce his goalie for the team's home game against Winnipeg on Saturday afternoon. That game begins at 1 p.m., with the Tops Pregame Show kicking off coverage on MSG-B and 12:30. You can also listen live on WGR 550.