



Buffalo Sabres

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With new confidence, Moulson has located his old scoring touch

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

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Last season was the worst production of Matt Moulson's professional career. The forward scored just eight goals in 81 games and connected on the power play, what had been his specialty, only twice.

His confidence was low. He needed more goals. But to get more goals he had to find ways to create confidence without that momentary adrenaline that comes from the flash of the red light and the goal horn. So he went to work over the summer, specifically working on his skating.

And 19 games into the new season, Moulson is back in his groove.

He has seven goals in those 19 games, one fewer than all of last season. His six power-play tallies have him tied for most in the NHL with Montreal's Shea Weber.

"I think just developing that confidence in myself again and working to get that back," Moulson said of the difference between last season and this season. He took an optional morning skate in KeyBank Center Tuesday afternoon as the Sabres prepared to host the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday. "I'm getting some opportunities this year to play in some good offensive situations. I just have to convert into goals.

"I think over the summer I wanted to put in the work to get the confidence and not so much just rely on goals to get confidence. Obviously that helps anyone. I'd be lying if I didn't say that. I think just knowing you put in the work and working on my game. Getting confidence from that, creating your own confidence without necessarily scoring goals but knowing that you feel good physical and mentally as well."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has noticed the difference in Moulson's game, particularly in his skating.

"There's a lot of situations that he's in right now that he was in last year and I think he's just playing much stronger and much better in those situations," Bylsma said. "There's a difference to the way he practices and performs in practice, he's skating better. I think he's most definitely skating better. It's allowing him to be good in the areas where he's been good at it. He has six power play goals and minus the rush play in Edmonton they've all been where Matt Moulson is good and can be good for us and needs to be good for us."

On Monday, he scored Buffalo's third power play goal in typical Moulson fashion. Hanging out in the high slot, he followed the play, found a seam in the defense, took a strong stride toward the net and cashed in a pass from Kyle Okposo.

It was Moulson's 59th career power play goal.

"Obviously he's a really smart player and good on the power play. He's been on the power play his whole career," said Okposo who is part of the Sabres first power-play unit with Moulson. "I think he's really worked on his game. He worked on it this summer and worked on his skating a lot and you can definitely see the improvements – just little plays and things he's able to do out there. Obviously putting the puck in the net is a big part of his game and he's doing that right now."

Sam Reinhart noted Moulson "puts himself in a spot where he's going to get the puck and he's going to have a good opportunity to score and he has been. He's just so smart and we've been able to find him."

The top power-play unit, which lately has included Rasmus Ristolainen and Taylor Fedun along with Moulson, Okposo and Reinhart, has been a bright spot for the Sabres, now winners in their last two games.

On Tuesday, the Sabres had the seventh-best power play in the NHL, clicking at 22.2 percent. Their power play at home ranks fifth with a 25 percent success rate (eight goals in 32 attempts).

"I feel like we've just got a good understanding," Okposo said of his power play unit. "When things aren't going well we're able to adjust. We talk it out and communication is huge on that. I think between power plays we're always looking to get better and looking to see what was there, what wasn't there and I think that's just been good for our success."

That mysterious "sixth sense" that often happens on a power play really just comes down to good, old-fashioned communication.

"The penalty kill is going to make adjustments all the time from what you're doing," Moulson said. "You have to be pro-active in talking about things and making sure you're talking out situations because they happen so quickly. Having that sixth sense of knowing where that guy is going to be, a lot of that comes from talking and telling the guy where you're going to be. Things can happen quick out there and you can catch them out of position and get chances."

Sabres Notebook: Foligno takes a beating, keeps on hitting

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

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Marcus Foligno has taken a beating the last two games.

He normally throws his weight around, but lately he's been on the receiving end of some nasty hits.

Saturday against Pittsburgh, he was cross-checked into the end boards by Brian Dumoulin, drawing a power play. Foligno then sprawled out with two seconds remaining in regulation to block a shot by Carl Hagelin, sending the game to overtime. The Sabres went on to win, 2-1, in a shootout.

Monday against Calgary he was the recipient of an illegal check to the head from Matthew Tkachuk.

"I've been getting a little more than I'd like to," Foligno said Tuesday morning as a number of the Buffalo Sabres took an optional practice in KeyBank Center. "I'd rather be giving than receiving on that side of things but that's part of the game. You're going to go through bumps and bruises. It's lot of big guys in this league.

"For myself, there are some dangerous areas out there on the ice and the corners and things like that you have to get into. You know that if you're doing that job it's going to help linemates around you. But at the same time, you're going to take some bumps and bruises. It is what is. We walked away with two wins and I'll keep taking a beating if we keep winning."

Those "bumps and bruises" felt a little better, too after he scored on the backhand early in the third period to quell a Calgary comeback as the Sabres earned a 4-2 win, their second in a row after a six-game slide.

"With all the grinding and the stuff we've been going through these last couple of weeks, it's good to score," Foligno said.

Foligno now has four goals and six points in 19 games. He scored 10 with 23 points in 75 games last season.

Detroit comes into town on a four-game losing streak and in the basement of the Atlantic Division – one point below the Buffalo Sabres. The Red Wings are just 2-7-1 in their last 10 games.

Monday, Red Wings coach Jeff Blashill told reporters in Detroit that the team will focus on shooting more. After firing at least 30 shots in six of the first 14 games, the Red Wings have failed to hit 30 shots on goal for five straight games.

"I don't think there is any doubt we've got to have more of a shot mentality," Blashill told reporters on Monday. "We're not doing a good enough job. I think we're passing up shots when we have opportunities to shoot and just create chaos off that."

The One Buffalo Community Blood Drive will be held Tuesday, Nov. 29 from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. in the Lexus Club at KeyBank Center. The drive is held by Untys, the leading organ procurement organization in the United States. Each person who makes a donation will receive a custom One Buffalo scarf. Bills and Sabres alumni, Billy Buffalo and Sabretooth will make appearances at the event, supported by Pegula Sports and Entertainment. Complimentary parking will be available in the HarborCenter ramp.

Donors can make an appointment by calling (716) 512-7940 or visiting www.unyts.org/TeamUnyts. Walk-ins are also welcome. Donors must be at least 17 years of age and bring photo identification. Sixteen-year-olds may donate with parental consent.

The annual "Turkeys for Tickets" drive netted 2,369 turkeys on Monday. The annual event sponsored by the Sabres, Tops Friendly Markets and Entercom Buffalo collects turkeys for the Buffalo City Mission and Food Bank of Western New York.

Sabres' Johan Larsson, aka 'Grumpy Larry,' frustrating opponents

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – The scouting report on Johan Larsson, the tenacious center Sabres coach Dan Bylsma often charges with shadowing the opposition's top forwards, is short and straightforward.

"He's grumpy, miserable, hard guy to play against," Bylsma said Tuesday after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt against the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center.

Wait, the quiet Larsson, an affable, well-liked teammate known as "Larry," is *grumpy*? How often does that word appear in scouting reports?

"They call him 'Grumpy Larry' for a reason," Bylsma explained. "He's a hard guy to play against. He plays a gritty game and he bites at your heels and he's got a lot of terror in him. That's how he plays. He's embraced that role and he's playing it very well for us."

Sabres winger Marcus Foligno, Larsson's linemate most of the last year, said: "He's very responsible in his defensive zone. He's physical. He doesn't back down from anybody. That can frustrate a lot of people."

Larsson, 24, usually pivots a checking line beside Foligno and captain Brian Gionta, a trio that quickly became the Sabres' steadiest last winter.

With top center Ryan O'Reilly injured and Sidney Crosby in town Saturday, Bylsma promoted Larsson to the No. 1 line to help stymie the Pittsburgh Penguins superstar. The Swede mostly held hockey's biggest talent in check all night – he skated a season-high 22 minutes, 26 seconds – as the Sabres' 2-1 shootout win ended a six-game losing streak.

"It takes the best out of you," Larsson said about facing the opposition's best. "You focus every time they're out there. You know they're dangerous. So it kind of brings my game to the top, too, so I like it."

In Monday's 4-2 win against Calgary, Larsson scored the go-ahead power-play goal and also went head-to-head with top Flames forwards Mikael Backlund and Sean Monahan.

"He had the same kind of grumpy demeanor and sniping at Backlund and Monahan," Bylsma said. "I think he cherishes and relishes ... going against the top guys and being a hard guy to play against, getting in their way, getting in their face, getting in their shorts."

Barely a year ago, Larsson couldn't get into his own uniform. He had thrived during his brief run as the Sabres' No. 1 center at the end of 2014-15, scoring five goals and 14 points in the final 19 games. But he struggled early last year as he tried to adjust to a lesser role under Bylsma, who scratched him three times before November ended.

Larsson finally scored his first goal Dec. 14, his 28th appearance. By the wintertime, Larsson began developing into a sturdy and clutch two-way presence. Incredibly, seven of his last 13 goals have been game-winning scores.

"Starting at about the 35-game mark, the 40-game mark he grew into the role and the player he can be and is being for us right now," Bylsma said.

What helped Larsson morph from a fringe player into a reliable presence?

"Coach had a little bit of confidence in you and my confidence grows a little bit," Larsson said. "It's just mostly opportunity. Opportunity's there and that helps me."

Sabres newcomer Kyle Okposo said he didn't know much about Larsson, his new linemate, before coming to Buffalo this season.

"He's one of those guys you don't really noticed him too much when you're on the other team," Okposo said. "But when you're playing with him, you realize how good he is and how many little plays he makes.

"Just thinking about it last year, I didn't get a whole lot of chances when we were playing Buffalo, and he's probably a big reason why."

Larsson's run on the top line could end tonight. O'Reilly, out the last five games with an oblique injury, skated in the Sabres' optional practice Tuesday and could return.

If that happens, Larsson might go back between Foligno and Gionta, a place he feels comfortable.

"I'm really confident," Larsson said. "We've played with each other for a lot of games. I think we play really well together. We know each other's game."

Sabres' Dan Bylsma not worried about Rasmus Ristolainen's offense

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 22, 2016

BUFFALO – Twelve Sabres, including six defensemen, have zero goals this season, so Rasmus Ristolainen is hardly alone in his offensive struggles.

Still, Ristolainen 22, scored nine goals and 41 points last season, a breakout campaign that helped him earn a six-year, \$32.4 million contract.

As the Sabres' top defenseman, the Finn is expected to score goals. Right now, he has nine assists and 39 shots in 19 games.

Is Sabres coach Dan Bylsma concerned Ristolainen hasn't scored yet?

"If you look back to last year as well, how did the goals come?" Bylsma asked this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. "He had three in one game (Dec. 10). They tend to come in bunches. He hasn't had one at this point in time when I expected him to, yes. But I don't see a reason why not.

"He's had the opportunities and chances to get the puck on net for goal opportunities that I think he needs to have to have gotten goals. So I'm not too concerned whether it's one or two or zero at this point."

Bylsma, however, is concerned about Ristolainen's sticks. Ristolainen has broken so many recently at key times Bylsma briefly took him off the power play in Monday's 4-2 win against Calgary until he changed sticks.

"He hasn't completed a lot of the key opportunities, shots on net with a complete stick," Bylsma said. "I think maybe a few of those opportunities, a goal opportunity that he may have at this point in time."

Did Bylsma tell Ristolainen to change sticks?

"It was just a game decision," Ristolainen said.

Ristolainen eventually switched back to the sticks he used last season.

"Right now, I don't really know what I'm going to go with or anything about the sticks," he said. "I think about today and let's see tomorrow."

In other news, center Ryan O'Reilly, out the last five games, skated in the team's optional practice today and could play Wednesday against Detroit. O'Reilly took faceoffs and participated in battle drills.

"I thought he shot the puck particularly well today, if that's any indication," Bylsma said.

O'Reilly has said playing against the Red Wings is "doable." He is officially day-to-day.

Sabres go for 3rd in row vs. Red Wings

The Associated Press

November 22, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The offensively challenged Buffalo Sabres finally found their scoring touch on Monday night. They'll look to do so again against the Detroit Red Wings on Wednesday in order to pick up their second three-game win streak of the season.

The rare offensive burst from the lowest-scoring team in the NHL came thanks to a lack of discipline by the Calgary Flames on Monday. The Sabres scored three power-play goals in a span of 1:41 in the second period on their way to a 4-2 victory. The Sabres had not scored more than two goals in any of their previous 10 games.

"I could tell we were just champing at the bit for the floodgates to open, and that second period was huge for us," said Sabres defenseman Tyler Fedun, who had two assists. "Everybody was able to take a bit of a deep breath when we started to score some goals."

Kyle Okposo, Johan Larsson, Matt Moulson and Marcus Foligno all scored for Buffalo in the victory.

"It's a lot of goals in a short amount of time for our team," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said. "It was a couple of great plays on all three of the power-play goals to get us goals and much-needed goals."

The Sabres (7-8-4) could get some additional help on offense as well in time for the game against the Red Wings. Center Ryan O'Reilly participated in an optional skate on Tuesday and is getting closer to returning to action. The Sabres expected O'Reilly to return sometime this week.

"We tested him a couple different ways with some faceoffs and battle drills there," Bylsma said, according to the Sabres' team website. "I thought he shot the puck particularly well, if that's any indication. I thought he looked pretty good out there."

Goaltending has been strong in recent games for the Sabres. Robin Lehner has a save percentage of .920 on the season and backup Anders Nilsson has been a pleasant surprise. In five games, Nilsson has a save percentage of .951. He made 46 saves in a 2-1 shootout win over Pittsburgh on Saturday.

Buffalo will have a good chance to keep its win streak alive against the struggling Red Wings (8-10-1). The Red Wings have lost four in a row and nine of their past 11 games after starting the year with a solid 6-2 start.

"Guys are sick of the way things are going," center Dylan Larkin said Tuesday, according to the Detroit Free Press. "If you want to make a change, it starts with looking in the mirror and seeing what you have to do to help the team."

"We've got to realize where we put ourselves. The good thing is it is still early, but we have to stop the bleeding. The other good thing is we know we can put a streak together, we have done it before this year. But we have got to realize we have to start playing here soon, or it is going to be too late."

Each of Detroit's last three losses have come by one goal. Like the Sabres, Detroit's biggest problem is scoring. Through 19 games, the Red Wings were 24th in the league in scoring (2.32 goals per game).

Sabres' Ristolainen doesn't know if he'll change sticks for good

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

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Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- I promise I wasn't planning on doing another piece on Rasmus Ristolainen breaking sticks, but it came to a head during Monday's game.

The Sabres were on the power play and Ristolainen once again snapped his twig trying to take a one-timer. I would estimate it was happening on about 80 percent of his one-timers and he's just been lucky it hasn't gone the other way for a goal.

When the next power play came up for Buffalo, Dan Bylsma benched Ristolainen for Cal O'Reilly. After that happened, the two had an animated exchange at the bench. When power play number three came up, Ristolainen was back on the ice using a Bauer stick from last season. The defenseman said, "It was just a game-time decision."

Even though he's comfortable with the sticks he's been using, you would think he'd be anxious to change away from something that breaks all the time. Ristolainen said, "I really don't know what I'm going to go with or anything about the sticks. I'm going to think about it today and let's see tomorrow."

Tuesday was an optional skate and Ristolainen decided not to go as he rested some minor aches and pains.

Buffalo scored four goals against Calgary including three on the power play. Ristolainen said, "Of course it's a little relief when you get more goals than one or two. Special teams are a huge part and if we want to win like good teams, they score power play goals when they get a chance."

Before the current two game winning streak, Bylsma said his team was giving up way too many chances. Ristolainen said he's seen improvement, but they aren't there yet, "There still a lot of things we need to improve, we didn't start too well, they had a lot of odd man rushes, but yes, I think it's slowly getting better."

So is it possible for them to be more consistent scoring goals after just one decent offensive game? Ristolainen said, "I hope so, I hope last night helped us and every time you get more than one or two goals, it gives you a better chance to win, but when you play good defense, then you get better offense."

Ristolainen has played 19 games and still doesn't have a goal. His head coach isn't really shocked by that, "He hasn't completed a lot of the key opportunities, shots on net with a complete stick, but if you look back to last year as well, he had three in one game and they tend to come in bunches."

"He doesn't have one up to this point, would I have expected him to, yes, but I don't see a reason as to why not, so I'm not too concerned if it's one or zero at this point."

Ryan O'Reilly was one of the players that did skate on Tuesday. He did some hard battle drills and Bylsma said it went well, "We tested him a couple of different ways with some faceoffs and some battle drills there and I thought he shot the puck particularly well today if that's any indication, but I thought he looked pretty good out there today."

The players that are the closest to coming back are O'Reilly, Dmitry Kulikov and Jack Eichel. Bylsma gave some hope to Sabres fans that it could be soon, "Us having a full roster isn't something that's going to happen for a long time. Two weeks ago it wasn't going to happen for quite a long time, but now we have the possibility of looking at some guys returning in the next week to 10 days and the light is at the end of the tunnel for getting some players back."

Eichel skating, O'Reilly returns to practice

By Matt Bove

WKBW

November 22, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - There's no timetable on the return of forward Jack Eichel, but on Tuesday he was back on the ice at KeyBank Center, at least in a limited fashion. Eichel was in full pads, skating with two Sabres coaches, working on a battle drill in front of a net.

From the moment Eichel went down, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma has not given a timetable on a possible return. Bylsma has said that Eichel's next step is returning to practice with teammates -- but won't say when that will happen.

Eichel, of course, is one of many injuries the Sabres have been dealing with since before the regular season started, but things might finally be turning around.

"Us having a full roster isn't something that's going to happen for a long time," Bylsma said. "Now, we have the possibility of looking at some guys returning in the next week or ten days and there's kind of light at the end of the tunnel for getting some players back."

One of those players is likely forward Ryan O'Reilly, who skated Tuesday morning. O'Reilly has missed the Sabres last five games after aggravating an oblique injury.

"It's a key time for us without them as well," Bylsma added. "We have to keep clawing and scratching to get wins and figure out our identity as a team without those players and then when we get them back we should be at a higher level as a team."

O'Reilly's status for Wednesday's game is uncertain but earlier in the week the 25-year-old forward told

Reinhart adjusting well to playing center

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

November 22, 2016

The three-goal outburst for the Sabres in the second period against Calgary on Monday night proved to be a sigh of relief not only for a team that had been struggling to score as a whole, but for individual players who have been expected to carry the weight in the absence of Ryan O'Reilly and Jack Eichel. Kyle Okposo, for example, had gone seven games without a goal before finally breaking through against the Flames.

To that end, Sam Reinhart was no exception. His two-assist performance Monday was a departure from a seven-game stretch in which he only tallied one point, but that drought wasn't for a lack of opportunities. Reinhart had created multiple scoring chances in front of the net both against Tampa Bay on Thursday and Pittsburgh on Saturday that simply weren't finding their way in.

Reinhart knew he was doing the right things offensively in those games, and the fact the puck finally found its way in was a bit of validation.

"I don't think I felt much different," Reinhart said. "Obviously a couple go in but I think I've been creating chances as it is. I'm not reviewing that game any different than I have been, I've been feeling pretty confident and feeling like I've been playing well."

His assists on Monday were evidence of his passing ability. His first came on the power play, when he split two defenders with a pass from the low circle to find Okposo in the slot. Then, with the Sabres in desperate need of a goal in the third period, it was Reinhart who won a battle along the boards, deked around a defender and made a perfect pass to free up Marcus Foligno alone at the net-front.

Foligno has played two games with Reinhart as his centerman, and that passing ability - not only the ability to make the pass, but the knowledge of where to place it - is what's stood out the most.

"I think just the way he's a heads up player, always looking to kind to dish the puck," Foligno said. "He's a really, really smart player where he comes through laying pucks into soft areas for us to skate onto so yeah, I think he's just a heads-up player. He kind of has that hockey sense where he knows guys are around him or even behind him so for my job and [Brian] Gionta's job it's just to get open and obviously create as much space as we can for him."

Where Reinhart does believe he has improved in recent games at the center position is in the defensive zone, which in turn has led to more opportunities on offense. Against Pittsburgh on Saturday, Reinhart was matched up defensively with Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin in a tight game and rose to the occasion. His boxing out of Crosby on the play below likely prevented a game-tying goal.

"There's no question these last two games have been his best at center," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "The game against Pittsburgh, he was out there against Crosby and Malkin but Crosby in particular in the third period. I thought it was his best game of battling and playing defensively. He was stuck up against Crosby a couple of times and out-battled him."

"I thought it was his best couple games at center and last night, at least for the first half of the game, he was one the positive side of winning faceoffs and helped us out in that regard. I don't want to use the word, but I think he's really kind of looked comfortable and settled in playing the center position there."

It remains to be seen how Reinhart will be used once O'Reilly and Eichel return. The Sabres are hopeful for O'Reilly to join the lineup later this week, perhaps even against Detroit on Wednesday, and Bylsma has said that Eichel's rehabilitation from a high-ankle sprain has been progressing well. Reinhart played well last season primarily on the wing, first with O'Reilly and then with Eichel. Even if he does return to playing that position, his last two games are evidence of his ability to provide depth at center going forward.

O'Reilly "looks good" at practice

Only a handful of players took the ice for an optional skate on Tuesday, but O'Reilly was once again one of them as he continues to work his way back from an oblique injury. O'Reilly said Monday that he hopes to return to the lineup against the Red Wings on Wednesday, and his skating session appeared to be a positive step in that direction.

"We tested him a couple different ways with some faceoffs and battle drills there," Bylsma said. "I thought he shot the puck particularly well if that's any indication. I thought he looked pretty good out there today."

Foligno keeps scoring when it counts

Foligno has four goals this season, and three of them have been scored in response shortly after a goal was scored by a Sabres' opponent. That was the case Monday, when he squeezed a backhand shot beneath the pad of Flames goalie Brian Elliott to restore Buffalo's two-goal lead in the third period.

Not even two minutes prior, Calgary had scored to make it a one-goal game with 19:38 still left to play.

"It stung a little bit," he said. "But we knew we had to keep going and keep pushing and obviously getting that fourth goal was huge, quickly after their goal too. It kind of took the momentum out of their sails and it slowed down the game a little bit more and settled us down a lot."

Foligno scored in a similar situation in the third period of Buffalo's game in Calgary on Oct. 18. In that game, the Flames tied the goal early in the third period thanks to a turnover by Foligno off a referee's skate in the defensive zone. Foligno came out on his next shift and sniped a goal to regain the lead.

"I think maturity's one thing," Foligno said. "I think not getting down on a bad play or when you're not having momentum going your way or puck luck in that sense, staying with it staying the course getting a little bit ticked off to get some revenge on the bad play that was a mistake that happened."

Meanwhile, it's been a tough couple of games for Foligno physically. He left the game for concussion protocol after taking a hard hit in the boards on Saturday, but returned to the ice. Then he left again in the final seconds of regulation when he blocked a hard shot from point-blank range to prevent Pittsburgh from getting the puck to the net in a tie game.

On Monday, Foligno was hit in the head by Matthew Tkachuk on a play that sent Tkachuk to box with a minor penalty.

"It is what it is," he said. "We walked away with two wins and I'll keep taking a beaten if we keep winning."

Going for three

The Sabres will look to close their homestand with a third-straight win when they host the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center on Wednesday night. Individual tickets and Family Packs are still available.

Coverage begins at 6:30 p.m. with the TOPS Sabres Pregame Show on MSG-B, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7 p.m.