



Buffalo Sabres

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With another fine summer, Reinhart eager to work more magic for Sabres

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 23, 2016

It's easy to say, "Work hard and good things will happen." Anyone who's busted his hump yet fallen short of his goal knows it doesn't always come true.

It has for Sam Reinhart. The Buffalo forward put in extra work during the summer of 2015 with the goal of making the Sabres, and he skated on opening night. Then, nearly every day after practice, he spent additional time honing his skills and accepting advice. He grew into a 23-goal scorer.

After seeing hard work equal success, Reinhart doubled down and did even more this summer. He and the Sabres, who opened training camp Friday, hope the trend of positive results continues.

"I worked the hardest this summer that I ever have, and that's saying a lot with the summer I had before," Reinhart said. "The gains I had two summers ago were pretty substantial, and I knew the improvements that could be had over a summer. I obviously went back to work and had another good summer and feel great coming in. I'm looking forward to getting started."

Reinhart is one of the key reasons Buffalo may end its five-year playoff drought. He finished third in NHL rookie scoring despite just two goals in the opening 15 games. He grew into a potent threat, including four goals and 12 points in March, and taking another step will help the Sabres make up ground in the Atlantic Division.

"I still think there's a lot of growth for him and his game," coach Dan Bylsma said in HarborCenter. "I'd love to think it means the same kind of improvement we saw in him last year, even from when he came to camp through the first three months of the season and how much he improved in his game."

"Another good summer for him would lend to him being an even better player for us this season."

Reinhart learned during his nine-game tryout in 2014 that he needed to be stronger to jostle with NHLers and faster to avoid them. Listed at 186 pounds entering the 2014 Draft, the 20-year-old is up to 195 and has a more muscular frame.

"Two summers ago was the first summer that I power-skated," he said. "This summer, I power-skated even more and went into more depth with that. Off ice, I did pretty much the same program but obviously adapted it and went more intense with it. Just as you go, you learn how much bigger and faster the game is getting, and you have to adjust on the fly."

While his speed has increased, Reinhart's ability to slow the game down is what sets him apart. He takes an extra second to look at the ice, and he sees what's happening better than most. It was evident during Friday's intrasquad scrimmage, and it's been on display during the players' informal workouts this month.

"He just looks so much more confident with the puck," Buffalo defenseman Jake McCabe said. "The things he can do with the puck are just crazy. He can see a play develop way before it even comes to fruition. He's 10 steps ahead of the game."

"Just watching him make those plays and the passes he can make, it's going to be fun to watch him this year."

The Sabres opened camp without their top centers, Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly, so Reinhart skated in the middle. Eichel is coming back from the World Cup as soon as Saturday, and Reinhart is expected to slide back to right wing alongside his fellow No. 2 overall pick and new roommate.

Though Reinhart was drafted as a center, he has embraced the opportunity to play the wing. He gets more ice time as a No. 1 or 2 right winger than he would as the No. 3 center.

"You look at our depth at center, and I certainly feel comfortable," he said. "Obviously, I get a chance to play with some pretty good players and get in some more opportunities offensively.

"It works well for both the centerman and me when I play wing. The workload down low could be minimized a little bit. If someone gets caught, I can go down there and switch out. As you play with guys, you sort of learn their tendencies a little bit and work off each other."

Work is clearly one area where Reinhart has excelled. As he looks around the dressing room, he's eager to adding winning to his list.

"We're coming in here with a good mentality," Reinhart said. "Obviously, you look around and it's not going to be easy. We know what our goals are, and obviously we want to make the playoffs. We're going to continue to grow as a team."

Career twists have Nilsson in the right spot with the Sabres

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

September 23, 2016

When he took the ice for the first scrimmage of training camp, the name on his jersey was misspelled.

By the time the second 20-minute period was underway, Anders Nilsson had a new name plate, one spelled correctly.

With his name sorted out, it was time to look at his role. The Buffalo Sabres traded with the St. Louis Blues at the NHL draft to acquire the 26-year old. Buffalo was in desperate need of a steady, solid backup to a healthy Robin Lehner. And while few goaltenders would put that on their business cards, Nilsson doesn't really care what you call him, as long as he gets playing time and the opportunity to improve at his trade.

"I try not to think about it that much," Nilsson said about the back-up label after his group session and scrimmage in HarborCenter Friday. "I know Robin is a really, really good goalie and it's going to be a competition between him and me but he's obviously a great goalie. So it's going to be a battle but I can only focus on myself. Try to stop the puck and we'll see what happens after that."

Stop the puck. That's what Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said he expected of Nilsson. That's what he did in the scrimmage, getting a shut out for Team Blue, thanks in large part to his teammates who spotted him five goals in the two 20-minute periods of running time.

"It's tough to look at him and not see the size of him net," Bylsma said of the 6-foot-5, 229-pound goalie. "To play big, to play that big, and certainly he did in the scrimmage today, that's got to be the strength of his game. He's such a big body to be square and be in front of the shots. The expectation is that he stops the puck and he showed today he can do that."

Nilsson has shown that ability at various times in his hockey career, which has taken him to four NHL clubs and a season in Russia with Ak Bars Kazan of the KHL.

It was a potentially risky decision to leave North American pro hockey for a season in Russia, but Nilsson thought it was worth a try. He had played out his entry-level contract with the New York Islanders, spending most of his time with the organization's American Hockey League team in Bridgeport, Conn. He felt he was beyond that level and that in order to get better he needed to pick up and leave the continent.

"It's always a risk, but I felt for me I was kinda going in the same footsteps," Nilsson said. "I felt I needed an environment change to continue my development. I felt it was the right way to go for me. My goal before going to Russia was to come back to North America and that was always in the back of my head and I was fortunate to do that."

He played very well in Russia in the 2014-15 season, earning a spot on the KHL All-Star First Team with the best goals-against average in the playoffs (1.54) and the most shut outs (six).

That earned him a contract with the Edmonton Oilers where he had a strong first half and earned plenty of playing time. He was in 26 games for the Oilers with a 3.14 goals against average and a .901 save percentage. But he went into a slump after Christmas, was traded to St. Louis and well, here he is now in Buffalo.

His biggest asset these days?

"Definitely experience," Nilsson said. "Last year gave me a lot of experience so this year coming into the season I have a lot more experience than I had this time last year."

He also shares the goaltending competition with familiar faces Lehner and Linus Ullmark. Nilsson has played with all three for the Swedish National Team, playing with Lehner for the U-20 team and winning a bronze medal with Ullmark at the 2014 IIHF World Championships.

"I'm very excited to have Nilsson in here," Lehner said. "He's a very good guy. I've known him from before, too. He's a hard worker. He'll fit right well into this team and I think we'll push each other."

Schneider shines with hat trick in Sabres' opening scrimmage

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 23, 2016

Cole Schneider's last season ended with a dream coming true. This one started with a hat trick.

Schneider, the Williamsville native who made his NHL debut with the Sabres during the final two games last year, scored three times in the opening scrimmage of training camp to give his team a 5-0 victory.

"Hopefully, I save them for the year," he Friday said in HarborCenter.

Schneider had no problems scoring with the University of Connecticut or in the minor leagues, but he never got an NHL look until Buffalo summoned him for the penultimate game.

"It definitely made it feel better coming into camp," the 26-year-old said. "I was pretty happy at the end of last season that I got my first game at home in front of a bunch of friends and family. The goal is just get back here and play some more games at home."

Coach Dan Bylsma named Schneider as one his three stars of the scrimmage. Bylsma also picked defenseman Mac Bennett, who is signed to a minor-league contract with Rochester and skated alongside Zach Bogosian, plus the line of Sam Reinhart, Evander Kane and Alexander Nylander.

"The line showed some speed," Bylsma said. "The line showed some creativity."

The victorious Blue team had the advantage of being fresh while the Gold squad had just finished a 45-minute practice.

"They're tired out and they go against the fresh guys," Bylsma said. "I think you saw that at both ends of the rink."

Sabres Notebook: Roster spots open; Eichel coming back; Bylsma to meet with Kane

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 23, 2016

Starting training camp is always exciting for Dan Bylsma. What's different is the number of spots the Buffalo Sabres coach needs to fill.

"More than I'm probably accustomed to," Bylsma said Friday in HarborCenter. "It's not very often that you go into camp with a flat-out open spot. At the 13th forward position and at the seventh defenseman, there's a flat-out open spot for competition."

The Sabres are kicking off camp with three practice sessions and a scrimmage for three straight days, and the brass is looking hard at those two opening. Here are the 18 skaters who should have their tickets punched already:

Forwards (12) – Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo, Sam Reinhart, Evander Kane, Tyler Ennis, Brian Gionta, Johan Larsson, Marcus Foligno, Zemgus Girgensons, Nicolas Deslauriers and Matt Moulson.

Defense (6) – Rasmus Ristolainen, Zach Bogosian, Dmitry Kulikov, Josh Gorges, Jake McCabe and Cody Franson.

"That doesn't mean there's not competition for how those 12 that are on there and how those six that are on there are going to play," Bylsma said. "We have quite a bit of competition within our roster, whether it's two or three or four different possibilities. That's probably more than I'm accustomed to and more than I've had in the past."

As for the 13th forward spot, the list of candidates includes Justin Bailey, Cal O'Reilly, Evan Rodrigues, Hudson Fasching, William Carrier, Daniel Catenacci, Cole Schneider, Nicholas Baptiste and first-round pick Alexander Nylander.

The seventh defenseman may come from the group that includes Casey Nelson, Justin Falk, Taylor Fedun, Mac Bennett and Brendan Guhle.

"It's easy to see the defensemen that are in the top six, then there's a group of three or four," said Bylsma, who is already looking toward the start of the regular season. "We play a home game and then we go out west. We're definitely going to be having seven defensemen go out west."

Cole Schneider's last season ended with a dream coming true. This one started with a hat trick.

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Schneider had no problems scoring in college or the minor leagues, but he never got an NHL look until Buffalo summoned him for the penultimate game and season finale.

"It definitely made it feel better coming into camp," the 26-year-old said. "The goal is just get back here and play some more games at home."

Bylsma named Schneider as one his three stars of the scrimmage. The coach also picked Bennett, who is signed to a minor-league contract with Rochester and skated alongside Bogosian, plus the line of Reinhart, Kane and Nylander.

The Sabres opened without World Cup participants Eichel, O'Reilly, Ristolainen and Kulikov, though Eichel was expected to arrive in town at some point Friday.

"We'll see him back at the rink the next couple days and have a conversation about when he'll get back on the ice," Bylsma said. "We do not have him scheduled for the first two exhibition games."

O'Reilly (Canada) and Kulikov (Russia) are meeting in a semifinal Saturday. The loser is done and free to head to Buffalo, but the winner won't join the Sabres until the first week of October.

Ristolainen is an unsigned restricted free agent and isn't expected to report until he has a contract. Buffalo will skate from 9-11:25 a.m. and 12:50-2 p.m. Saturday and Sunday in HarborCenter.

Kane said Thursday he has not talked with team officials about his legal situation, but Bylsma said he has talked with the forward. There will be another talk.

"Yes, there will be a conversation about the expectations from Evander both on and off the ice," Bylsma said. "I think Evander's eager to get here and put it behind him, so to speak, and get to the business of playing hockey."

Fresh off Calder Cup, Falk aiming for job with Sabres

By Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

September 23, 2016

BUFFALO — There are those who believe everything happens for a reason, that beyond the present moment of frustration or disappointment, there is a greater purpose to be fulfilled or enjoyed.

Justin Falk, who starts training camp intent on earning a job on defense with the Buffalo Sabres, quite likely will tell you that's true. Especially after last season.

The veteran defenseman believed he had shown the Columbus Blue Jackets he deserved to stay in the NHL, that he didn't necessarily deserve to be placed on waivers in late February and subsequently assigned to the American Hockey League's Lake Erie Monsters.

It's funny how life works, though. Some 3½ months later, Falk was saying thank you to the Blue Jackets by hoisting the Calder Cup in front of more than 19,000 fans at Quicken Loans Arena in downtown Cleveland.

The Monsters steamrolled their way to the Cup by sweeping three of the four series, bringing a hockey championship to Cleveland for the first time since 1964.

"They showed what a hockey city that place can be," Falk said. "There's nothing in the American League like 19 and a half thousand people in Quicken Loans Arena wearing white T-shirts and waving white towels. It was a hockey fever.

"That championship, I definitely wouldn't trade it for a few more NHL games. Championship teams are rare. They're memories you'll have forever."

Don't worry about any championship hangovers now that he's in the Sabres organization. Fatherhood kept Falk grounded while Cleveland partied, first with the Monsters and then a week later with the NBA's Cleveland Cavaliers (who own the Monsters).

"When the Cavs won, they offered to fly everyone (on the hockey team) back to Cleveland and pay for the hotel rooms for the parade," said the 6-foot-5, 224-pound Falk, who turns 28 on Oct. 11. "They even put a Lake Erie Monsters float in the parade."

With a 2-year-old daughter (Presley) and a son on the way, Falk respectfully declined. Summer is family time. His wife, Karissa, gave birth to Nixon Falk on Aug. 9.

More life changes came on July 1 when he signed a two-way NHL/AHL contract with the Sabres. He had assessed the depth chart — as well as the proximity of the Rochester Americans — and decided the Sabres were a good fit.

With two young children, he'd prefer not to be too far away. Now in his ninth pro season, and with a two-way contract, he knows he'll be a depth player on the blue line.

"I tend to go back and forth a lot (between the NHL and AHL) and that's something you have to take into consideration," Falk said.

Ninth-year veteran Justin Falk has played for the Wild, Ninth-year veteran Justin Falk has played for the Wild, Rangers and Blue Jackets during his career, and hopes to wear a Buffalo Sabres sweater this season. (Photo: Russell LaBounty-USA TODAY Sports)

But while the top six spots on the depth chart are chiseled in stone (Rasmus Ristolainen, Zach Bogosian, Jake McCabe, Cody Franson, Dmitry Kulikov and Josh Gorges), the seventh spot will go to whoever is most impressive in camp.

"It's easy to see the six defensemen in the top six," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Friday during the first day of practice sessions. "At the 13th forward and the seven D, there's a flat-out open spot for competition."

Falk and Taylor Fedun, another July free-agent signee, figure to be given the longest look.

Falk has played 171 NHL games with the Minnesota Wild, New York Rangers and Blue Jackets (2 goals, 21 assists, 23 points and 151 penalty minutes). He was with Columbus for 24 games last season (4 assists) and played 32 with Lake Erie (2-7-9), plus another 17 in the playoffs (4 assists).

A native of tiny Snowflake, Manitoba — "Very small, like six kids in a grade," he said — he now makes his home in Winkler, Manitoba (population about 11,000). He started the drive to Buffalo last Saturday but stopped in Cleveland on Sunday night and skated with some of his former teammates on Monday.

There will always be that Calder Cup bond. The Monsters had a solid veteran corps with Falk, Ryan Craig, Steve Eminger and Jaime Sifers. Falk said the veterans had a sense around Christmas that there was potential to make a real run at the Calder Cup.

"But kept it to ourselves," Falk said. "We wanted the young guys to just go out and play and not really let them know how good they were, until they were ready to realize it."

Sabres hit the ice for training camp

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

September 23, 2016

For the first time since April, the Buffalo Sabres are back on the ice for organized practice as the second day of training camp got underway from the HarborCenter.

"Training camp is a unique time where we have the next 12 days planned out with practices and meetings and video," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said following the second session of practice Friday morning. "When the season starts, you're reacting to the game, you're reacting the different schedule, but right now we have planned out these 12 days to a tee for every detail. It's exciting for me as a coach to sit, waiting for this day for a month or two. You're waiting around for the 22nd, 23rd to roll around to get on the ice, and at the beginning it's an exciting time to get them on the ice and put them through the paces."

This year's training camp is expected to have some story lines leading up to the start of the 2016-17 season on Thursday October 13 against the Montréal Canadiens at the KeyBank Center. Which young rookies will stand out and have a shot at the National Hockey League with the Sabres? Can the Sabres get a contract done for Rasmus Ristolainen done in time? Who is healthy? And who is ready to take the next step in their development as a player in the NHL?

For defenseman Jake McCabe, he is about to enter his second full season in the league in Buffalo. McCabe has been through a couple of camps, and has learned a lot from his experiences over the years.

"If you put more pressure on yourself, I don't think it does you any good," McCabe said following his practice session on Friday morning. "My first training camp I was hoping to make the Sabres, but I knew I was probably going to end up in Rochester. I honestly probably played better in my first camp than I did last year, knowing that I had a good shot to make the Sabres. Looking at that aspect, I think I put too much pressure on myself last camp. You just want to go out there and play your game and have confidence in yourself."

Last season he played in 77 games, and scored four goals to go along with 10 assists. This is his third training camp with the Sabres, and this time around he is comfortable with his role on this team.

"I know what to expect this year," McCabe said. "I know where I'm at with being a regular NHL player. I want to continue to try to make strides and become a better player each and every day. We got the team in place to make a playoff push and that's our expectation. I think going into this camp, we're really chomping at the bit to get at it and improve every day."

Another defenseman who is returning for his full second season with the Sabres is Cody Franson. Last season, Franson played in 59 games with four goals and 17 points before an upper-body injury in February ended his season. At first, it was diagnosed as a concussion, but the injury was much more complicated than that.

"It was more of a vestibular thing than anything," Franson said following practice. "My rehab basically consisted of trying to retrain the muscles in my left eye to speed back up to where my right was going. Every time I turned, I would get light-headed because my left eye was tracking a little slower than the right. It was a very odd injury, tough to rehab, but I had a good group of people working on me and I was able to get a good handle on it throughout the course of the summer. I'm feeling good now."

"It's not like a knee that you sprained an MCL or a shoulder that you hurt. You can't just go in there and battle through some pain and feel your rehab process working. With this it was a lot of tracking drills and

stuff with eye goggles on, trying to work on deception and things like that. Until you actually got the goggles on, you couldn't really feel your eye muscles really doing much. It was frustrating."

Franson was able to get back to the ice in July, and has since been working to get leaner and faster for the upcoming season. Even Bylsma has noticed the change in Franson's size and condition.

"He needed to have a good summer, he needed to get clear and get fresh, and then have a good summer working out" Bylsma said. "I don't know if you can see it, but he came back with a little bit of a different body composition. He's a little leaner, I think he's moving better, and that's a result of the summer he had. Now that has to translate to his play on the ice."

In addition to Franson and McCabe returning on the blue line, Buffalo's defensive depth is looking pretty good with Zach Bogosian, Josh Gorges, newcomer Dmitry Kulikov, and the likely return of Ristolainen once he is signed to a new contract. Where the Sabres have a battle for openings is the seventh defenseman in the lineup, in addition to the 13th forward spot that will be up for grabs.

"It's not very often that you go into camp with a flat-out open spot. At the 13th forward position and the seventh defenseman, there's a flat-out open spot for competition," Bylsma said. "It doesn't mean there's not competition for how those 12 forwards and six defensemen that are on the lineup play. We have quite a bit competition within our roster. Whether it's two or three or four different possibilities, it's probably more than I'm accustomed to and more than I've had in the past."

"I think it's easy to see the six defensemen in the top-six, and then there's a group of three or four [guys] who are competing for that seventh position on the team. We play a home game, and then go out west, and we're definitely going to have seven defensemen to go out west."

Up front, Evander Kane was back on the ice and played on a line with Sam Reinhart and rookie Alex Nylander in the scrimmage. Kane is still the subject of a criminal case from an incident at a Buffalo nightclub in June, where he faces four counts of non-criminal harassment, one count of criminal trespass, and one count of disorderly conduct.

Kane said on Monday that his focus is set on hockey, and that he has not had any talks with management or ownership about his offseason troubles. Bylsma said that he has had a talk with Kane before training camp, but nothing formal has been said about his off ice behavior.

"We talked about four, five days ago, but there will be a conversation about the expectations from Evander both on and off the ice," Bylsma said. "I think Evander's eager to get here, put it behind him so to speak, and get to the business of playing hockey."

As for Eichel, he was on his way back to Buffalo on Friday after Team North America was eliminated from the World Cup of Hockey on Thursday. Bylsma said he has talked to Eichel, and will evaluate when he will get back to the ice with the team. As of right now, Eichel is not scheduled to play in the first two preseason games of the season.

Buffalo will play its first two preseason games on Monday against the Minnesota Wild at Pegula Ice Arena at Penn State, and on Tuesday against the Ottawa Senators at the KeyBank Center.

O'Reilly and Kulikov will square off against each other in the semifinals on Sunday afternoon at 1 p.m. on ESPN.

Practice on Saturday starts with the first session at 9 a.m. from the HarborCenter. The team will then have its second scrimmage of camp at 9:50 a.m. at the KeyBank Rink at HarborCenter. All sessions and scrimmages are free and open to the public.

Concussion recovery gave Sabres' Tyler Ennis new appreciation

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 23, 2016

BUFFALO – In the more than three months Tyler Ennis spent recovering from a concussion last season, the Sabres' longest-tenured player learned he needed to approach what he calls a "pretty special job" differently.

"It makes you really not only appreciate what you got, but want to do better the next time," Ennis said Thursday inside KeyBank Center after veterans reported to training camp for physicals.

That's probably one reason why Ennis, who's generously listed at 5-foot-9, spent the summer packing some noticeable muscle onto his 156-pound frame.

"All I did was bicep curls and bench press, so I'm ready to go," Ennis joked. "No. It was a good summer of training."

Kidding aside, the season-ending concussion Ennis suffered Dec. 30 – he endured two head injuries in two months – changed the shifty winger. As Ennis, 26, watched from afar, the Sabres started winning without him. He also saw the new regime's philosophies in action.

Ennis, a Sabre since late 2009-10, realized he had to adjust his habits. General manager Tim Murray said after last season Ennis had learned he needed to start practicing with a purpose.

"I enjoy being out there, but there's things you can do to make sure your body's feeling good before every practice, you're taking every drill," Ennis said. "You're trying to get better before every drill. In the past, I probably was just enjoying being on the ice and skating and shooting around rather than maybe focusing on things that I could improve on and get better out of practice."

A productive Ennis would be vital to the Sabres as they try to end their five-year playoff drought. At his best, Ennis is one of the NHL's slickest forwards, often creating highlight-reel plays.

"He's a special player," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "I mean, he's got some talent you don't see every day. You look at him, the couple years I've played with him, he's got arms, he's got a back. He's put on some muscle.

"He's put some time in this offseason. ... I think he's really understanding what it takes to be a professional. We expect big things out of him this year. I'm sure he expects big things out of himself."

Following consecutive 20-goal campaigns, Ennis had big expectations for himself last season. But instead of busting out, he mustered only three goals and 11 points in 23 games. Ennis, who loves to freewheel, was often a non-factor in new coach Dan Bylsma's rigid system.

Ennis hasn't scored a goal since Oct. 27, a 14-game drought.

"I was inconsistent and it wasn't obviously as good as it should have been," he said. "I'm ready to go. I'm in better shape. I excited. I'm enthusiastic."

Ennis, like his other teammates who spoke Thursday, is also enthusiastic about the Sabres' playoff chances.

"Our mindset now is playoffs, and that's looking to compete and be a real threat," Ennis said. "We're growing ... but we did a great job toward the end of the year of finding our identity and we added some great pieces."

He added: "We're ready to become a really solid playoff team that's growing and isn't rebuilding anymore."

Clearly, the Sabres, who finished last season 20-14-7, feel comfortable after playing a full season under Bylsma.

"There's no new system," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "There's no new style of play. Everybody knows what's expected of them. So that's where coming out of camp, we want to kind of pick up where we left off the second half of last year."

Ennis missed so much time it almost feels like the Sabres added a new player. With Ennis and recent signee Kyle Okposo, the Sabres could potentially have an extra 50 goals in the lineup.

"It's one of those years, the moves we made, how we finished last year, things like that add up to the excitement of going into this year," Gionta said. "I've said it before, I said it every training camp, you come in and you expect or want to make the playoffs. I think if we don't this year, it's a disappointment for us."

Notes: Sabres goalie Robin Lehner, who recently said his ankle is 100 percent following surgery in late March, has officially been cleared, he said. ... The Sabres have their first on-ice sessions of camp today inside HarborCenter. ... Former Sabres defenseman Tyson Strachan, who signed an AHL contract with the Rochester Americans last week, has also been invited to NHL camp.

Concussion recovery gave Sabres' Tyler Ennis new appreciation

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 23, 2016

BUFFALO – Expect Sabres center Jack Eichel, who just finished a three-game stint at the World Cup, to join his teammates at training camp this weekend.

Eichel, 19, will return to Buffalo today. The second-year star scored one goal and two points before Team North America was eliminated.

"We'll see him back at the rink the next couple of days and have a conversation about when he'll get back on the ice," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said this afternoon.

Eichel won't play in the Sabres' first two exhibition games Monday and Tuesday.

Some other quick notes from the first day of camp:

– Bylsma said more roster spots are open this camp "than I'm probably accustomed to."

"It's not often you go into camp with a flat-out open spot," he said. "At the 13th forward position and at the seventh defenseman is flat-out open spot, a competition there. That doesn't mean there's not competition (among the) 12 that are on there and the six that are on there. We have quite a bit of competition within our roster, whether it's two or three or four possibilities."

– Bylsma said while he hasn't had a formal sit-down chat with winger Evander Kane, they will have one soon. Bylsma spoke to Kane, who was charged following a June incident at a downtown bar, last week. "Yes, there will be a conversation about the expectations for Evander both on and off the ice," he said. "But I think Evander's eager to get here and put it behind him."

– Taylor Fedun, a defenseman likely ticketed for the AHL, recently returned from an undisclosed injury and started skating. He could join his teammates in about a week, Bylsma said.

Concussion recovery gave Sabres' Tyler Ennis new appreciation

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 23, 2016

BUFFALO – Off-ice incidents like the one at a local bar that resulted in Evander Kane being arrested and charged “happen to athletes or people in a position such as myself,” the Sabres winger said Thursday.

“Those are things you just have to deal with, kind of come with the territory,” Kane said inside KeyBank Center after veterans reported to training camp for physicals. “In saying that, you have to be a little bit more aware and kind of put yourself on a higher pedestal than you think you are.”

Kane was charged with one misdemeanor count of criminal trespass and four counts of non-criminal harassment in connection with an incident at a downtown bar June 24, just hours before the Sabres hosted the NHL Draft. His next court appearance is Oct. 31.

Three women allege Kane grabbed them by the arms, hair or neck, according to Buffalo police.

The room felt a bit tense Thursday as a guarded Kane answered questions for about eight minutes. While his teammates talked about their excitement for the upcoming season, Kane mostly offered short replies or deflected the question when he was asked about his turbulent summer.

“I’m not going to say too much,” Kane said. “I’m here, I’m in camp.”

Kane, 25, said he has “always felt” he needs to walk the straight and narrow line.

Kane’s dealing with his second off-ice legal incident since joining the Sabres last year. In December, he was under investigation for an alleged sex offense at a downtown hotel. He was cleared of wrongdoing in March. He recently launched a countersuit to that woman’s lawsuit.

The Sabres also benched Kane for a game in February after he documented his partying at the NBA All-Star Game on social media and missed practice the next day.

Kane said he has “been focusing on hockey all summer.”

“I haven’t really put any thought or emphasis on the other stuff,” he said. “I’ve just kind of narrowed my focus and focused on hockey and my training.”

Kane believes he’s “maturing just as everybody else is” as he gets older.

“I think every day you mature as a person,” he said. “As a player, that’s kind of a product of your work ethic, to your craft. It’s something I’ve done my entire life and have continued to do throughout the summer.”

Sabres captain Brian Gionta said he hopes Kane “wants to stay a little more low profile around things.”

Kane arrived with baggage from the Winnipeg Jets, who traded him after his teammates reportedly threw his tracksuit in the shower.

The Sabres offered Kane a fresh start. Does he feel like he has already blown it?

“No, I mean, for me, I’m just focused on this season,” he said.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma and general manager Tim Murray were clearly irked with Kane when they spoke to the media in July. Murray said he planned to sit down and talk to Kane about his behavior.

Kane, however, said he hasn't spoken to management. He said the NHL hasn't talked to him, either.

Does Kane think he needs to represent the Sabres logo better?

"I think I do it pretty well on the ice," he said. "I give everything I have on the ice. I think off the ice, like I said, these things unfortunately happen more often than not. They're only becoming more and more relevant every day if you look around the other sports. For me, it's just trying to stay out of that kind of stuff and picking my spots better."

When camp opened a year ago, Kane boldly said he wanted to score 40 or 50 goals. He finished with 20. He wouldn't set a goal for this season.

5 Sabres training camp observations: Day 1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 23, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Friday the Buffalo Sabres opened training camp at HARBORCENTER and just about 45 minutes into day the Sabres already had a scrimmage.

Here's 5 observations from Day 1:

1) Robin Lehner looks quick... really quick.

- By now, most fans know that Lehner lost a significant amount of weight in the offseason, and today, you could tell. After practice, even Lehner's teammates were talking about it. Defenseman Jake McCabe said his hard work stood out and he's confident Lehner will show just how good he is. In the scrimmage Lehner struggled at times, making a bad turnover behind the net that lead to a goal, but he didn't let in any "softies". Lehner said Thursday that he expects to be better this year and redeem himself after a disappointing 2015 season.

2) Lehner who?

- When practice started new Sabres goaltender Anders Nilsson's jersey read: "Nillson 31". A misspelled jersey wasn't a great way to start the day off — but things only got better for Nilsson. In Friday's scrimmage Nilsson didn't let in a goal and made some really tough saves look routine. After practice, the 26-year-old goalie said it felt good to be back on the ice and that all he can focus on is being his best and continuing to get better -- regardless of how many games he plays.

3) McCabe ready to take the next step

- Last season Jake McCabe came to training camp worried about making the Sabres roster. This year, the 21-year-old defenseman knows he'll be an every night starter — so his focus has shifted from making the team to taking the next step as a team: Making the playoffs. McCabe says this roster is talented enough to do just that and training camp is when that all starts. Expect big minutes from McCabe this year, he's a rising star.

4) Cole Schneider: Day 1 MVP

- During the scrimmage Team Blue scored four goals. Western New York-native Cole Schneider had three of them. After practice he joked with reporters that his performance Friday was the only reason we wanted to talk with him. To be fair, he's not wrong. Regardless, he stood out Friday, with two of his goals coming off deflections from right in front of the net. The Sabres, as a team, need to score more of those goals from the top down. They aren't the prettiest, but they look the same on the scoreboard... I know, I went there. After practice Sabres Coach Dan Bylsma said that Schneider was easily one the Sabres best forwards during the scrimmage.

5) Fun forward combinations

- Most believe that Evander Kane, Sam Reinhart, Kyle Okposo and Tyler Ennis will be four of the Sabres top-six forwards when the season starts next month. If Friday is any indication, those people would be correct. During the scrimmage, Kane and Reinhart looked comfortable together -- especially in the first period. They were centered for most of the day by Sabres first round pick Alex Nylander. The line was able to cycle the puck at will and physically dominate the gold team, especially early on. Bylsma said that can be expected when one group (Gold team) already had a 45 minute skate before the scrimmage. Kane scored the first goal of the day on a pass from Reinhart, but the goal was more of a mistake from

Lehner behind the net than anything else. Bylsma said after practice the Kane, Nylander, Reinhart combination was the best line of the day. In the second and final period, the gold team showed flashes of high quality play but wasn't able to get anything going. Aside from what seemed like an incredibly long shift from Ennis, the Ennis, Larsson, Okposo line generated some good chances.

The Sabres are back on the ice for Day 2 of Sabres Training camp on Saturday.

Tyler Ennis says Sabres can 'be a real threat'

NHL

September 23, 2016

Buffalo Sabres center Tyler Ennis said he believes the Sabres are done rebuilding and are focused on ending a five-year Stanley Cup Playoff drought.

"Our mindset now is playoffs," Ennis told the Buffalo News on Thursday. "We're a team that's looking to compete and be a real threat. We're growing. We did a great job toward the end of the year last year of really kind of finding our identity. We added some great pieces, and now it's coming together. We're ready to really become a solid playoff team that's growing and isn't a team that's rebuilding anymore."

Ennis, 26, was part of Stanley Cup Playoff teams his first two seasons in Buffalo, 2009-10 and 2010-11, but the Sabres have not qualified for the playoffs since. They have finished either in last place or second-to-last in their division each of the past four seasons and had the fewest points in the NHL in consecutive seasons, 2013-14 (52) and 2014-15 (54).

Buffalo had 81 points last season, a 27-point improvement from the previous season, and deepened its roster this season, acquiring veteran defenseman Dmitry Kulikov from the Florida Panthers on June 25 and signing right wing Kyle Okposo to a seven-year contract reportedly worth \$42 million on July 1.

After consecutive 20-goal, 40-point seasons, Ennis missed most of last season with a concussion. He had three goals and eight assists in 23 games.

Sabres Take The Ice For First Day Of Practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

September 23, 2016

Much like when they opened camp a year ago, the Sabres were treated to high-tempo, fast-paced practices along with a scrimmage on Friday. But unlike a year ago, when many of the players were unfamiliar with each other and all were unfamiliar with coach Dan Bylsma, there was little they didn't expect.

"I know a lot of us, even the younger guys that just did the prospects tournament and everything, were all familiar with the drills so that's kind of why it can be high-tempo," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "We know what we're doing out there so let's get in the corners, get the pucks going, let's get after it."

Friday was broken into three practice groups for three spate sessions with a scrimmage between the first two, which means there's a lot to cover. So let's get to it:

Examining the lines at camp

It's important not to make too much out of the lines on the first day of camp, particularly when the team's top two centers were both absent for the World Cup of Hockey. But by looking at the initial lines on Friday, it's fair to assume they might provide some insight as to what we might see going forward.

One question to begin camp, for example, was who Kyle Okposo would play with to begin the season. He played opposite Tyler Ennis on Friday with Johan Larsson as their center, and it's easy to imagine Ryan O'Reilly sliding into that center role once he returns from the World Cup.

Sam Reinhart, meanwhile, centered a line with Evander Kane and Alexander Nylander. Kane and Reinhart had success as linemates with Jack Eichel as their center late last season, so perhaps that's a clue that their line will stick together.

So much can change by the time the season starts, of course, but it will be interesting to watch how the lines differ once O'Reilly and Eichel join their teammates.

Speaking of Eichel ...

While O'Reilly and Team Canada are still contention at the World Cup, Eichel will be back sooner after Team North America was eliminated from the tournament on Thursday. Bylsma said Eichel returned to Buffalo on Friday and that he and the team will meet Saturday to discuss when he will join practice. All that said, Bylsma also said that Eichel will not play in the first two preseason games.

It makes sense why the team would give Eichel some time off after playing six competitive games at the World Cup. Even if he waits until the third game for his first preseason action, which would be next Thursday against Toronto, that would still leave him with up to five chances to play with his teammates prior to the regular season.

Somebody owes Cole Schneider hats

Schneider had quite the start to his first camp in Buffalo, scoring three times in a 5-0 win for his team at the scrimmage on Friday. Sadly, he wasn't adorned with hats, which might have had something to do with the fact that two of his goals were deflections and thus incredibly hard to see, but it was a strong start nonetheless for a player competing to make the Sabres' roster.

Bylsma said Friday that the competition for the 13th forward spot is wide open, and Schneider figures to be one of the candidates for the job. The 26-year-old Williamsville, N.Y. native spent three seasons as one of the top scorers in the AHL for Binghamton before being traded to Rochester and making his NHL debut at the end of last season.

Cal O'Reilly and Derek Grant might also be veteran candidates for the open forward spot, or the Sabres could go with one of many prospects in the NHL. You can also keep your eye on the battle for the role of seventh defenseman, which Bylsma said is also wide open this preseason.

Join us at HarborCenter

The practices continue at HarborCenter throughout the weekend, and all are open to the public. The first sessions on both Saturday and Sunday will begin at 9 a.m., with a scrimmage to follow at 9:50 a.m. Find the full schedule for the weekend in Friday's Sharpen Up.

Franson Looks To Rebound From "Scary" Injury

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

September 23, 2016

Looking at Cody Franson as he skated during the first day of on-ice work at training camp for the Sabres, you can see a few obvious differences from a year ago. He's leaner and stronger, for example, which is the product of a summer spent working to become faster and more explosive.

There's also the number on his back, which has changed from 46 to 6. He took 46 last season having few other options after signing late in the summer. There were no tears shed when he had the opportunity to leave that number behind and switch to the one he wore while coming up in junior hockey.

"It went along with probably the worst year of my career," Franson said following practice on Friday. "When 6 became available, it was an easy choice."

That's a harsh self-evaluation for Franson, but it's easy to see where he's coming from. His first season in Buffalo started out fine, but eventually he was split between struggling to adapt to a new role and then trying to come back from an injury he knew little about.

Franson averaged over 18 minutes of ice time in each of the previous three seasons prior to joining the Sabres. He enjoyed those same minutes in the first few months of last season, skating over 20 minutes regularly into November. Once Zach Bogosian returned from injury, however, decisions had to be made.

"There was a battle for that power-play position and time and there was also a battle for ice time," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "I think he started the season with a full complement, about 18 minutes and some power play time, and as guys came back, he moved into a different position on our team and I think that's kind of what happened."

Playing a lesser role proved to be a difficult adjustment.

"We changed personnel on the power play and some roles changed around," Franson said. "When Bogo came back, I had to adapt to a different role and I struggled with it last year, trying to play in that lower-minute range."

His season took a turn for the worse during a February game in Columbus, when he was hit hard into the boards from behind by Scott Hartnell. He didn't know it at the time, but his season was over. The only problem was that he didn't know exactly what was wrong with him.

Originally, he said, he was diagnosed with a concussion. But he was suspicious of that diagnosis because light wasn't bothering him; he could look into the sun and feel fine. What hurt him was quickly turning his head or changing direction, which would leave him feeling lightheaded.

As it turned out, Franson wasn't concussed at all. His ailment was vestibular, or a balance disorder, which was the product of his left eye tracking slower than his right.

"The scariest part about it was, it's not like a knee that you've sprained, an MCL or a shoulder," he said. "You can't just battle through some pain and feel your rehab process working. With this, it was a lot of tracking drills and stuff with eye goggles on, trying to work with deception and things like that."

While most rehab includes physical drills to get the body back in order, Franson spent his rehab tracking a tennis ball as it moved around him and completing other similar tracking drills. Eventually, visual

therapy was able to provide him with statistical data that showed evidence of his improvement and helped ease his uncertainty.

Now, he's back and ready for a fresh start. Like his teammates, he's excited about the addition of Dmitry Kulikov to the defense and the left-right balance it will provide. He's also embracing the competition for minutes, which is evident in how he spent his summer.

"I'm taking camp very seriously, trying to reestablish myself in this lineup and make it tough for the coaches to not play me," he said.

It's only one day, but his coach has already taken notice of the work he put in.

"I don't know if you can see it but he came back with a little bit different body composition," Bylsma said. "He's a little leaner, I think he's moving better, and that's a result of the summer he had and it's got to translate into his play on the ice."

Lighter Lehner out to pull his weight with Sabres

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 24, 2016

Robin Lehner knows he might be the key to the season. He's aware some people don't think he has what it takes. He's heard the whispers that he was too out of shape to stay healthy in net.

None of those things have changed him inside. Outside, the Buffalo Sabres goaltender is an entirely different person.

"I didn't recognize him when he first came in," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "You do the old double take."

The second look reveals a stunning transformation. The formerly hefty goaltender is a svelte fighting machine who dropped 20 (30? 40?) pounds through a summer of mixed martial arts training that has him ready to punch the Sabres' playoff ticket.

"I've got to go out and perform," Lehner said. "That's what I expect out of myself. That's what I expect out of my teammates. That's what they expect out of me. It's a result-based game, and we've got to go out and perform this year."

Lehner is a no-nonsense guy on the ice, so he wanted to eliminate any distractions when he heads to the crease. Therefore, the extra weight is gone. No one will be able to say he wasn't prepared to stop pucks, remain healthy or be Buffalo's No. 1 guy.

"I just take a lot of question marks out of my game," he said. "No one can blame something on that."

Lehner wasn't in the best shape when last season began, nor could he be. A February concussion robbed him of five months of his life. He started his Buffalo career listed at 245 pounds, and he also had a lot weighing on his mind.

"Going back to that concussion, that concussion that rocked everything, it does a lot to your mind," he said. "I'm usually a calm and confident guy, but that concussion does a lot to you. Going away from that now for quite some time, I'm just excited to be healthy and to be ready to go."

With his mind back, the 6-foot-4 goalie went to work on his body.

"I've played very good periods of times with the heavy weight and light weight," he said. "I was pretty heavy when I won the Calder Cup" with Binghamton in 2011. "I just think consistency-wise and playing as many games as I can this season and perform every day, this is a good thing. I do feel a lot faster out there. We'll see where it goes."

While it remains to be seen where it goes on the ice, his weight loss certainly made a statement in the dressing room.

"He's made a huge commitment to be at his best and be better both physically and mentally this year in the net," coach Dan Bylsma said Saturday.

"He looks like a new guy," defenseman Jake McCabe said in HarborCenter. "You can just tell when he's around he's just really driven and focused and dialed in. He wants to win so bad and prove to everyone that he's a really good goaltender, which he is."

Though Lehner didn't play often during his first season with the Sabres because of ankle injuries, he played well. His .924 save percentage in 21 games would have ranked sixth in the NHL had he appeared enough to qualify.

"I know I'm a good goaltender," Lehner said. "I'm just excited for the opportunity for the season, just going and do my best.

"I know what I can do. I'm not eager to prove anyone wrong or right. Me and the people that are around me and close to me, we know what I can do. I don't have any need to prove it to anyone else."

Lehner may not feel the need to prove anything, but he knows people want him to prove something. He's never played more 36 games in an NHL season, and it's time for the 25-year-old to establish himself as a workhorse. He's also entering a contract year and will be a restricted free agent after the season.

"There's a lot of pressure on me, and that's fine," Lehner said. "It's a big year for me personally, but I think it's another big year for our team. It's a season where we can start putting our mark in and do everything we can to try and make the playoffs and take our first step.

"I expect us all to step up a few more steps, every single one of us in the locker room. I've got to have a good year. Every single one of us has got to be better than last year because obviously we're not happy with where we ended up. It's a team game. We need something from everyone."

Sabres Notebook: Moulson has a lot to prove; scrimmage results; shorter Muse stands tall

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 24, 2016

Matt Moulson knows nearly no one believes in him as a hockey player. In fact, the Buffalo Sabres forward counted his allies on one hand.

"I have my trainer, skating coach, my family and maybe a couple close friends that still truly believe in me," he said. "I definitely have a chip on my shoulder coming in to prove a lot of people wrong that maybe lost a little belief."

No player in Buffalo's training camp has more to prove on the ice than Moulson. If it weren't for the five-year, \$25 million contract that has three years remaining, the 32-year-old might have played himself out of the NHL last season. He had a goalless drought of 44 games and found the net just once in 63. His ice time plummeted into the single digits for long stretches, and the three-time 30-goal scorer couldn't get off the fourth line.

"This summer was about making sure I put in the work and believe in myself to get back to where I want to be," Moulson said in HarborCenter. "I think I've done that, and obviously I have a lot to prove."

Moulson, whose workouts were panned by General Manager Tim Murray last season, sat down with his trainer after finishing with just eight goals in 81 games. They analyzed what went wrong or right during the season, then they went to work. Moulson has focused on his skating three or four days a week since May, and his time in the gym has created a leaner look.

"I know this is a big camp, so it was a big summer for me," he said. "I'm here to earn everything. I spent a lot of time with a trainer and a skating coach making sure my body is ready to go and be able to help this team. I think where I'm at physically right now is where I want to be."

The winger has a lot of work ahead if he wants to return to a scoring line. He's opened camp as the fourth-line right winger. Based on coach Dan Bylsma's line combinations, Kyle Okposo, Sam Reinhart and Brian Gionta are ahead of Moulson on the right, and Tyler Ennis, Evander Kane and Marcus Foligno are above him on the left.

"I've spoken to Dan," Moulson said. "He's pretty blunt in what he says. He doesn't mix words, so I know I have to earn everything, and that's what I'm here to do."

"Competition's good within a team and good for the team and the people pushing them. We have a lot of good players on this team. It's going to be a tough camp. Skating with the guys before, everyone's ready to go."

Moulson's life off the ice will surely be different this season. Jack Eichel has moved out after living with the Moulson family as a rookie, and Okposo has arrived in town. They are godparents to each other's kids, so one of the few remaining believers in Moulson's game is again by his side.

"He's an unbelievable player and also a great friend," said Moulson, who played with Okposo for parts of five seasons with the New York Islanders. "Just having him there to have someone to be an extra person to talk to and ask their opinions and get their true, true feelings – he's not going to sugarcoat it –that's definitely good on a personal and team level."

"I'm making sure that I'm going to be in the best possible physical shape, mental shape to make sure I'm here to help this team."

The Sabres have one more scrimmage scheduled, but the training camp champion has already been crowned. The Blue group, featuring Sam Reinhart, Evander Kane, Alexander Nylander and Zach Bogosian, improved to 2-0 on Saturday with a 2-1 victory over the White team.

Forward Cole Schneider and goaltender Anders Nilsson excelled for the winners. After recording a hat trick Friday, Schneider had a goal and assist Saturday. Nilsson didn't allow a goal during his 30 minutes of action during the two games.

White and Gold, both 0-1, will complete the tournament at 9:50 a.m. Sunday in HarborCenter. The Sabres will also have practice sessions from 9-9:45 a.m., 10:40-11:25 a.m. and 12:50-2 p.m. Jack Eichel, back from the World Cup, could practice but may not take the ice with the team until Tuesday.

The first preseason game is Monday against Minnesota on the Penn State campus.

In an era of big goaltenders, John Muse stands out. When the 5-foot-11 netminder skates to the crease, he's instantly recognizable compared to 6-5 Nilsson and the 6-4 triumvirate of Robin Lehner, Linus Ullmark and Jason Kasdorf.

Muse signed a minor-league contract with Rochester in July after splitting last season with Texas and Charlotte of the American Hockey League. The 28-year-old was a combined 18-9-4 with a .911 save percentage. He made a game-saving stop with his pad with three seconds left in the Blue team's victory.

"You notice he's an outlier not only the size of him in the net, especially our net compared to the others, but not just a conventional, standard, blocking, big goalie taking up the net," Bylsma said. "You see a little bit of a kick save."

Grant seeks return to NHL, and Wegmans, with Sabres

By Kevin Oklobzija

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

September 24, 2016

BUFFALO — Having spent half of last season in California with the Stockton Flames, Derek Grant has seen a more laid-back side of the American Hockey League.

The AHL's California teams play only 68 games — compared to the usual 76 — and their schedules don't include stretches of three games in three nights, something that is traditionally a staple of minor-league hockey.

Sure, traffic in Los Angeles can add an hour or three to a bus trip, but that's a small price to pay for feeling refreshed from a lighter workload.

"The wear and tear does seem a lot less," Grant said. "That might have been the weather though. All the sunshine, the vitamin D."

Yet as training camp practice got underway on Friday for the Buffalo Sabres, here he was, back in New York, where his professional career began in 2011 with the Binghamton Senators.

"I miss Wegmans," the fifth-year veteran said with a smile.

He doesn't want to miss out on the NHL, either. As nice as 70 degrees can be in January, playing in the NHL feels even better, and Grant is hoping he can seize that opportunity with the Buffalo Sabres.

He signed a two-way NHL/AHL contract on July 2 and set out on Friday when training camp opened to show coach Dan Bylsma he belongs in the Sabres lineup. He was in the Ottawa Senators organization when Tim Murray was the assistant general manager, so there is some organizational familiarity since Murray is the Sabres general manager.

But that doesn't assure him a job in Buffalo, only opportunity. His resume from last year says he deserves a look, that's for sure. A fourth-round pick of Ottawa in 2008, Grant scored 27 goals in 36 AHL games with Stockton. That's a rare scoring pace for today's game. There were just two 30-goal scorers in the AHL last season. There were four in 2014-15.

While he scored 21 in 72 games for Binghamton in 2014-15, even he couldn't have predicted the pace he was on last season in Stockton.

"I actually couldn't tell you what happened," he said. "Maybe the fresh start, maybe the new place? I've worked hard and I think I've matured and grown. I tried to shoot the puck a lot more (he averaged 4.58 shots a game, compared to 2.45 the season before in Binghamton)."

Training camp and the preseason games will be important for Grant. He knows it.

"It's an opportunity to showcase yourself to people that haven't seen you at all, or haven't seen you the past couple years (like Murray)," he said. "I want to try to show I can make this team better."

The Langley, British Columbia, resident hasn't scored a goal in 40 career NHL games (15 with Calgary last season, 25 with Ottawa during his time in the Sens organization) but has always shown a willingness to go to the net and stay there. He'll take a little abuse to score a goal.

"It's not as bad as it was in the olden days," Grant said of the net-front battles, "but it's still not that fun."

He's aware he could end up with the Rochester Americans, who will need his scoring if he's in the AHL. The set-up of the AHL affiliate, how the organization uses and treats the farm team, and the proximity from the parent team all factor into the where-to-sign equation during summer free agency.

"You don't want to think about that, not when you're in camp, but at the same time, it's your life, too," Grant said. "It's a luxury to have Rochester so close, and I think that actually creates more opportunity."

Sabres' Moulson says he's put in the work.

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 24, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- After the NHL lockout, Matt Moulson scored 15 goals in 47 games for the Islanders. That works out to a 26 goal pace. He had 30 goals in each of the three seasons before that.

Since being traded away, he's scored 38 goals in 222 games with Buffalo and Minnesota. That works out to 14 in 82 games.

Last season was miserable for Moulson as he netted just eight goals in 82 games. He didn't appreciate it when General Manager Tim Murray spoke about his workout habits publically and Murray said Moulson told him so.

Moulson put in a summer of work and he felt he needed to get back to where he thinks he can be, "I put in a lot of work. I know this is a big camp for me, so I put in a lot of work."

"I know it was a big summer and I'm here to earn everything. I spent a lot of time with the trainer and skating coach to make sure my body is ready to go so I'm able to help this team."

Moulson takes a lot of grief outside the locker room for not producing. He said he hears the noise, "I definitely have a chip on my shoulder coming in to prove a lot of people wrong that maybe lost a little belief. I have a trainer, a skating coach, my family and maybe a couple of close friends that still truly believe in me and I think this summer was about making sure I put in the work and believe in myself to get back to where I want to be."

So where did it go south for Matt Moulson? He said, "I think maybe there was a bunch of different things, but I can't think about that, it's just making sure that I'm going to be in the best possible physical shape, mental shape, to make sure I'm here to help this team win." Moulson added, "When I'm a bit leaner and a little bit lighter, I feel better on the ice."

Moulson played with the newest Sabre Kyle Okposo in Long Island. I thought they might be together in training camp, but so far they're not. Moulson is playing with Nick Deslauriers and Dan Catenacci while Okposo is with Johan Larsson and Tyler Ennis.

Moulson is excited about his old friend being here, "He's an unbelievable player and also a great friend. We spent a lot of time together this summer, we were out in Vail a couple of weeks ago together where we skated and trained together. He'll be a great asset to this team and organization, just having him there to have an extra person to talk to."

Moulson did confirm that they played a lot together in Long Island.

If you're a player and you expect Dan Bylsma to coddle you, you're in for a big shock. Moulson said he has met with the head coach, "He's pretty blunt in what he said, he doesn't mix words, so I know I have to earn everything."

In the end that's all a player can ask for, an opportunity to do better. We'll see if Moulson gets that.

Team Blue got goals from Williamsville's Cole Schneider and Derek Grant to beat the White's 2-1. Nick Baptiste scored for the White.

Sabres' Cody Franson healthy after career-worst season

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 24, 2016

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Cody Franson had never experienced anything like the unusual vision ailment that sidelined him the final 23 games last season.

"It was very weird," Franson said Friday following the first sessions of training camp inside HarborCenter.

Franson was originally diagnosed with a concussion after Columbus' Scott Hartnell boarded him Feb. 19. But the loquacious veteran quickly passed his testing and briefly resumed practicing before his season ended.

So what was wrong?

"It was more of a vestibular thing than anything," Franson said.

Franson's left eye was moving about 20 percent slower than his right eye, creating all sorts of problems.

So in addition to his normal workout regimen, Franson spent much of the offseason retraining the muscles in his left eye "to speed back up with the way my right was going," he said.

"Every time I'd turn I'd get lightheaded because my left eye was tracking slower than my right, so it was a very odd injury and tough to rehab," he said. "I was able to get a good handle on it over the course of the summer, and I'm feeling good now."

Part of his rehab included wearing goggles for "tracking drills" and working on perception.

"Until you get the goggles on, you couldn't really feel your eye muscles doing much," said Franson, who has 20/20 vision again. "So it was frustrating."

It was also scary overcoming such an abnormal injury. A vision problem, of course, isn't like hurting a knee.

"You just can't battle through some pain and feel your rehab process working," Franson said.

Franson, 29, is clearly excited for a fresh start after enduring the worst season of his seven-year career. His 6-foot-5, 236-pound frame looks different than last year.

"He came back with a little bit different body composition," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "He's a little leaner. I think he's moving better."

To help him forget about last season, Franson switched from No. 46 to 6, his favorite number. With Josh Gorges wearing 4, his first NHL number, and Mike Weber sporting 6 last year, Franson combined the digits when the Sabres signed him to a two-year, \$6.65 million contract

"I wasn't really a fan of the number," Franson said. "It went along with probably the worst year of my career, so when 6 became available, it was an easy chance to get out of that number."

Franson's numbers dropped across the board last season. In 59 contests, he scored a career-low four goals and 17 points. He had averaged six goals and 35 points the previous two seasons.

Still, he enjoyed a strong start, compiling 10 points before December. But after Zach Bogosian returned from a lower-body injury Nov. 17, Franson's role changed. His minutes dwindled from around 20 some nights to about 15 or 16.

Eventually, Franson, whose power-play prowess is his greatest asset, wasn't skating on either unit.

"I had to adapt to a different role, and I struggled with it last year trying to play in that lower-minute range," Franson said. "I pride myself on being a power-play guy."

Right now, Franson is probably a third-pair defender. Given his past exploits on the power play and the Sabres' problems last year, Bylsma might want to give Franson another crack.

"I was very frustrated and set a number of goals for myself to try to come into camp and reassert myself here," Franson said. "I wasn't happy with the way last year went for myself and the way I played. I knew this was going to be a big year for me, and in order to have a big year I had to come in here and prove my worth in camp."

5 Sabres training camp observations: Day 2

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 24, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Saturday the Buffalo Sabres were on the ice for the second day of training camp at HarborCenter. There were three on ice sessions and one scrimmage.

Here's 5 observations from Day 2:

1) Cole Schneider is on fire

Friday, Schneider scored three goals in the Sabres first scrimmage of training camp, leading the Blue team to a 5-0 win against the Gold team. He was all over the ice and joked after practice that he needed to keep that production up. Saturday, he didn't disappoint and the hot streak continued. Schneider had another goal and added an assist, once again leading the Blue team to a 2-1 victory, this time over the white team. Schneider hasn't been playing against the opponents top pair defenseman but regardless, he has looked sharp. Saturday Sabres Head Coach Dan Bylsma said that Schneider could've had another goal and has looked really solid. The Sabres second year coach also said that Schneider's lineman Derek Grant was one of his three stars from Saturday's practice and that "both those guys have been standouts in both scrimmages."

2) Hop aboard the Jake McCabe bandwagon

With about 20 minutes left in the final session of Saturday's practice Jake McCabe showed he's for real. He was paired one-on-one against Justin Bailey and flattened him against the boards. One minute later, he did it again. Only Hudson Fasching was able to get by McCabe during the drill and he didn't even get off a quality shot. Friday, McCabe said he's going into this camp focused on making strides as a team, not as an individual. He told reporters that last year he didn't think he had a very good training camp because he was so worried about making the team. Now, he's one of the Sabres best defenseman and during the first few practices he's certainly looked like it. Bylsma said it's evident after the first few days how good McCabe has looked and that he's been one of their best players.

3) Let's get physical

It only took a day for the hitting to really start picking up. It was especially apparent during the scrimmage and Bylsma loved it. "I liked every part of it. I liked us at the net and I liked our guys protecting the net." He's referring to a scuffle in front of Anders Nilsson featuring Nicholas Deslauriers, surprise surprise. As the players started heading back to the bench you could tell they were laughing — but even after that skirmish the physicality continued. Veteran defenseman Zach Bogosian had some nice clean hits behind the net, as did fellow vet Josh Gorges.

4) Up for grabs

Yesterday Bylsma said there's a few roster spots open and they'll be won during training camp and the preseason. Saturday, he spoke more in detail about the open competition saying "I think there's five or six guys you could probably put into that category." The Sabres coach was asked specifically about Grant and Schneider -and I think those five or six guys Bylsma's talking about (along with Grant and Schneider) are Fasching, Bailey, Nylander and Baptiste. After a strong Prospects Challenge, Baptiste had another nice scrimmage Saturday, scoring the White team's only goal. Nylander had a solid two-way game and Bylsma said along with Grant and Gorges he was one of the team's three best players on Saturday.

Fasching and Bailey have yet to stand out since camp has opened up — but there's still plenty of time for the young forwards to make an impression.

5) Chemistry for days

This quote pretty much says it all:

"I don't think you can compare this year to last year," Bylsma said. "The understanding of how we want to play and what we're expecting from the players is significantly higher now than it was last year at this time."

It's obvious that this team has more chemistry than they did last training camp — and it's because this roster is pretty similar to the roster last season. That might sound like a bad thing, but it's not. Aside from Kulikov and Okposo, most of these guys have played with each other. If the chemistry continues to grow and the Sabres stay healthy, Sabres fans have a reason to be optimistic.

The Sabres are back on the ice at 9 a.m. on Sunday for Day three of training camp at HarborCenter. The practices are open to the public.

Guhle Taking Second Camp One Day At A Time

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

September 24, 2016

It seems the long summer was well spent by most - if not all - of the Sabres players. Tyler Ennis, Sam Reinhart, and Cody Franson are among the faces that have come to camp noticeably stronger than they were at the end of last season.

Another name you can add to that list is Brendan Guhle, who was pinpointed by fellow defenseman Jake McCabe on Friday as a player who looks entirely different than he did at camp a year ago.

"That's nice of him to say," Guhle, Buffalo's second-round pick in 2015, said. "I put on about eight pounds since last camp and my body fat is still the same, so it's pretty much all lean muscle. I feel stronger out there, more powerful with my strides. I think it's got to translate into the game though. That's the most important thing."

Size was just about the only thing Guhle was lacking at last year's camp, during which he made a compelling case to make an early jump from the junior ranks to pro hockey at age 18. However, that camp ended early thanks to an open-ice hit from Dion Phaneuf during a preseason game in Toronto. Once he recovered, he was assigned back to Prince Albert of the WHL, having left a major impression, nonetheless.

Guhle returns to camp in a position that McCabe knows well. He's a young defenseman looking to break into the NHL. McCabe faced a similar situation last fall before he established himself as a top-four defenseman for the Sabres during his rookie season. His advice to Guhle and other young players: Don't try to do too much.

McCabe said his camp was actually better two years ago, when he arrived with the expectation of playing in Rochester, versus last season when he knew he had a shot with the Sabres and was playing with the pressures of making their roster.

Guhle, so far, is heeding that advice.

"My mentality last year was just come in game-by-game and day-by-day and just do my best," Guhle said. "This year I've got the exact same mentality. I'm just taking it day-by-day and seeing what happens and not thinking about roster spots."

Guhle earned an assist in the scrimmage at practice on Saturday, grabbing the puck on the forecheck and passing it to the front of the net where Cole Schneider was waiting to deflect it in. His team won both of their scrimmages, 5-0 on Friday and 2-1 on Saturday.

He mentioned that while adding strength was a priority for him over the summer, he was careful not to add too much weight so that it wouldn't impede his greatest skill, which is his skating. The scrimmage on Saturday was a sign that he's headed in the right direction.

"You've seen him kind of progress over the last year but especially that weight," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "I like to see the skating with knowing the fact that he's put on the weight. A couple times today in the scrimmage he bursts up the wing and joins the play and was a factor."

McCabe impresses in practice

Speaking of the second-year defenseman, Bylsma had great things to say about him after practice on Saturday.

"I think one of the things you hope from veteran guys - and I say that knowing Jake's really only going into his second year - but guys returning to our team is you want them to be leaders," Bylsma said. "You want them to stand out in how we work and how we practice and Jake has clearly done that in the first two days. He's been one of the best, he's been pushing it the hardest and really leading the way and I think it's quite evident if you're watching."

More from Schneider

After he scored three goals during the first scrimmage on Friday, Schneider posted two more points with a goal and an assist on Saturday. Three of his goals, including the one on Guhle's pass, have been deflections at the net-front.

Schneider also picked off a pass in the offensive zone to feed linemate Derek Grant for a goal. Grant and Schneider were previously teammates in Binghamton while members of the Ottawa Senators organization.

"We played probably on and off for two years," Grant said. "Probably not set linemates for too long, but I definitely played a number of games with him and probably developed a bit of chemistry."

Bylsma said that he thought both Grant and Schneider have been standouts in both scrimmages. They figure to be among those considered not only for the open 13th forward spot, but also to break into the regular NHL lineup.

"I think there are probably five or six guys you can put in that category, where if you're looking at 12 forward spots on our roster right now, they'd be competing for that spot," Bylsma said. "But I think there's more to that to compete for as well, it's not just the 13th forward. There are probably five or six guys who are looking at a chance to play in the top 12."

Grant, 26, recorded 45 points (27+18) with Stockton of the AHL last season and also played 15 NHL games for Calgary. You can watch his full interview with the media from Saturday below:

Alexander Nylander has wheels

Nylander showed the speed and skating ability that made him the No. 8 pick in the draft this summer on this play from Saturday's scrimmage. Take a look:

Bylsma said Saturday that he's been impressed with both of Nylander's two days at camp playing on the right wing with Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane, calling him one of the standouts of Saturday's scrimmage.

Up next

The Sabres are back at it on Sunday, with practice once again open to the public at HarborCenter and set to begin at 9 a.m. with a scrimmage to follow. Then it's time for preseason games, beginning against the Minnesota Wild on Monday at Penn State.

After recovering from vision problem, Sabres' Franson hopes to open some eyes

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2016

Before Cody Franson could get to the typical offseason goals – stronger, faster, etc. – he had to focus on his eyes. They couldn't focus.

His brain wouldn't let them.

Franson left the Buffalo Sabres' lineup in February after getting boarded by Columbus' Scott Hartnell. Franson's head hit the glass hard, and the initial diagnosis was a concussion. Eventually, it was determined the defenseman had a vestibular disorder, which involves the parts of the inner ear and brain that control balance and eye movements.

Franson was fine while sitting still. As soon as he'd move his head, trouble started.

"Every time I'd turn I'd get lightheaded because my left eye was tracking a little slower than the right, so it was a very odd, very odd injury and tough to rehab," Franson said in HarborCenter. "My rehab basically consisted of trying to retrain the muscles in my left eye to kind of speed back up with the way my right was going."

In order to get back to normal, Franson needed to strap on special goggles and work with specialists.

"It was a lot of tracking drills and stuff with eye goggles on, trying to work on deception and things like that," Franson said. "Until you actually got the goggles on, you couldn't really feel your eye muscles doing much."

He wasn't able to start skating again until July.

"It was frustrating," Franson said. "A lot of people asked me, 'How ya doing?' and it's tough to really give them a good answer because you're trying to train the muscles in your eye and that's not easy to do. Once I got into visual therapy, it was easy to feel the rehab making progress, and it was actually able to give me statistical data to tell me how I was doing."

"It was an interesting injury, but it's behind me. Everything is good and I'm healthy."

With his vision back, Franson set his sights on turning around his game. That needed work, too.

The 29-year-old struggled after signing a two-year, \$6.65 million contract with the Sabres. He finished with the lowest offensive output of his seven-year career – four goals and 13 assists in 59 games – and he failed to fit in on the blue line. He started off fine, putting up two goals and nine points in the opening 18 games, but returns from injury by Josh Gorges and Zach Bogosian put Franson in a diminished role.

"The first 20 games Bogo was hurt last year, so I was playing a role I was comfortable with," Franson said. "When he came back, things changed a little bit, so I had to adapt to a different role. I struggled with it last year trying to play in that lower-minute range. I pride myself on being a power-play guy, and I wasn't on it at the end of the year."

He'll need to earn his way back to the power play this year. Bogosian, unsigned Rasmus Ristolainen and trade-acquisition Dmitry Kulikov figure to get plenty of looks.

"He needed to have a good summer," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said of Franson. "He needed to get cleared, get fresh and then have a good summer working out. He came back with a little bit different body composition. He's a little leaner. He's moving better as a result of the summer he had, and it's just got to translate to his play on the ice."

Franson, who has career highs of eight goals and 28 assists, is determined to get back into prime offensive situations.

"I'm taking it very seriously right now trying to re-establish myself in this lineup and make it tough on the coaches to not play me," Franson said. "I knew this was going to be a big year for me, and in order to have a big year I had to come in here and prove my worth in camp and try and give myself the best chance to put my right foot forward out of the gate."

One of the changes made by Franson has nothing to do with enhanced mobility or more explosive acceleration. He's swapped No. 46 for No. 6, which came open with the departure of defenseman Mike Weber.

"I wore 6 all through juniors and while I was in the American League," he said. "It was my favorite number to wear. When I came up to Nashville I had to switch to 4 because Shea Weber was wearing 6, so I've worn 4 pretty much everywhere I've went since then.

"Forty-six was really all that I had to choose from when I got here last year, and I wasn't a fan of the number. It went along with probably the worst year of my career, so when 6 came available it was an easy choice to get out of that number."

Sabres Notebook: Busy week with four preseason games; physical scrimmages

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 25, 2016

After just three days of training camp, it's time for the Sabres to say goodbye to HarborCenter and hello to other teams.

Buffalo will open its seven-game preseason schedule Monday in the other arena Terry Pegula built. The Sabres and Minnesota Wild will meet at 7 p.m. in Pegula Ice Arena on the Penn State campus. It will be the first NHL game contested in the arena, which opened in 2013 after a \$102 million donation by the Sabres' owner and his wife, Kim.

The Sabres have not announced their lineup, but the Wild is going with a youth-laden squad. Former Buffalo forward Chris Stewart and Charlie Coyle, Jason Zucker and Matt Dumba are among the few established players who will play for Minnesota. Alex Stalock, who came over from San Jose, is expected to start in net.

The game kicks off an extremely busy week for the Sabres, who have a pair of back-to-back situations. They host Ottawa on Tuesday night in KeyBank Center. They'll practice in the arena Wednesday, then face the Toronto Maple Leafs on Thursday night in Meridian Centre in St. Catharines, Ont. The Leafs visit Buffalo on Friday night.

The four-game week will allow coach Dan Bylsma to get good looks at his roster hopefuls. Stars Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly won't play, pushing forward candidates such as Derek Grant, Justin Bailey, Alexander Nylander, Evan Rodrigues and Hudson Fasching into more prominent roles.

"I think you're going to see some good competition probably as a result of that," Bylsma said.

The Sabres, who started with 56 players in training camp, are expected to trim their roster. Most of the early cuts will be prospects sent back to their junior teams.

The Sabres' final intrasquad scrimmage was a 3-2 victory by the White team Sunday. The Gold squad opened a 2-0 lead on goals by Johan Larsson and Kyle Okposo, but Brian Gionta and Nicolas Deslauriers answered to tie the score. Defenseman Erik Burgdoerfer, signed to a two-way contract during the summer, scored the winner on a low shot from the point.

For the second straight day, the scrimmage featured solid hits and angry glances from guys competing for positions.

"I liked every part of it," Bylsma said. "I liked us at the net. I liked our guys protecting the net. I think if you got really close you probably would have saw more of a smile than an angry face, but I like both of that from every one of those guys."

The Sabres built HarborCenter and renovated the training areas in KeyBank Center with the goal of making their three-rink complex the jewel of the NHL. It's working.

"Everything here is first class," Buffalo defenseman Mac Bennett, who is new to the organization, said Sunday. "I was with Montreal the last two years, and I didn't think it was going to get much better than that. They've definitely outdone Montreal with the facilities and the way we're treated and on top of that everything we have at our disposal. It's pretty cool to see."

Sabres' Matt Moulson determined to prove doubters wrong

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 25, 2016

BUFFALO – [Sabres winger Matt Moulson](#) knows he has plenty of doubters. The former 30-goal scorer understands following a miserable year punctuated by his general manager challenging his work habits, some support for him has eroded.

Moulson, 32, has clearly been humbled. An eight-goal season can do that. So can drawing Tim Murray's ire.

"I definitely have a chip on my shoulder coming in to prove a lot of people wrong that maybe lost a little belief," Moulson said Friday following the first sessions of training camp. "I have a trainer, a skating coach, my family, maybe a couple close friends who truly believe in me.

"I think summer was about making sure I put in the work and believe in myself to get back to where I want to be. I think I've done that. I have a lot to prove."

Moulson, who lost "a couple pounds" over "a big summer," looks slimmer. He said he took a week or two off following last season and started "getting after it." He began skating three or four times a week in May and also worked with a trainer and a skating coach.

"I'm a bit leaner and a little bit lighter," Moulson said, who's listed at 6-feet and 202 pounds. "I feel a lot better on the ice."

Of course, Moulson, who's beginning the third season of a five-year, \$25 million contract, won't simply be given ice time this season, according to Sabres coach Dan Bylsma.

"He's pretty blunt in what he says," Moulson said. "He doesn't mince words. I know I have to earn everything. That's what I'm here to do."

Through two days of camp inside HarborCenter, Bylsma has noticed Moulson's determination and tenacity, especially down low, where the underachieving veteran's at his best.

"I've seen a lot more out of him in his play ... playing down low," Bylsma said. "Today, he chipped the puck in, went physical on the defenseman, won the puck battle, knocked the guy down in the offensive zone and hung onto the puck. I can see it in how he's played the first two days here."

Moulson started changing his work habits prior to ending his stunning *44-game* goal drought Feb. 16. In early March, perhaps to keep prodding him, [Murray said on the radio](#) Moulson "has neglected some things in the last couple years as far as how workouts are changing, how we as an organization are changing with our young players and even our players on the team."

Murray said then Moulson was responding to the challenge. In their end-of-season meeting, Moulson told Murray his comments ticked him off.

When the Sabres gave Moulson a new plan, they knew they likely wouldn't see any results until 2016-17. Still, it might've helped a bit late last year, as Moulson scored three goals in his final six games.

"I think putting in a lot of extra work last year during the season when things weren't going well may have paid off a little bit at the end," Moulson said.

If Moulson, whose goal production has [dropped three straight years](#), approaches even a 20-goal clip, he could earn another spot on a scoring line. After scoring four goals in his first 12 outings last season, Bylsma mostly relegated him to fourth-line duty [as he slumped](#), skating him short minutes. He was even scratched once.

A productive Moulson – remember, he scored 30 goals in each of his first three NHL seasons – could be reunited with [newcomer Kyle Okposo](#), his frequent linemate with the New York Islanders. Moulson and Okposo are close.

Like Bylsma, Okposo won't be afraid to give Moulson an honest opinion.

"He's a great asset to this team and this organization, just having him there to have an extra person to talk to and get their true feelings," Moulson said. "He's not going to sugarcoat it."

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Saturday's scrimmage featured some unusual intensity for a 40-minute contest just two days into camp. At one point, wingers [Nick Deslauriers](#) and [Evander Kane](#) shoved each other during a scrum.

Bylsma loved the jump the players showcased.

"Absolutely, absolutely," he said. "I liked every part of it. I liked us at the net. I liked us protecting the net. I think if you got really close you would've saw more of a smile than an angry face in there."

xxx

Bylsma said he plans to meet with [center Jack Eichel](#), who just spent three weeks at the World Cup of Hockey, and review the next three days. Eichel hasn't practiced with the Sabres yet.

Fit Robin Lehner ready to 'perform better'

NHL

September 25, 2016

After an offseason of mixed martial arts training, Buffalo Sabres goalie Robin Lehner entered training camp more than 20 pounds lighter in hopes of staying healthy for his second season in Buffalo.

"I've got to go out and perform," Lehner told the Buffalo News on Saturday. "That's what I expect out of myself. That's what I expect out of my teammates. That's what they expect out of me. It's a results-based game, and we've got to go out and perform this year."

Buffalo acquired Lehner from the Ottawa Senators in a trade for a first-round pick (No. 21) at the 2015 NHL Draft. He started Buffalo's season opener against the Senators on Oct. 8 but sustained a high-ankle sprain. The lingering injury limited him to 21 games (5-9-5, 2.47 goals-against average, .924 save percentage) before he had surgery on his right ankle March 30.

Lehner was chosen to represent Team Sweden at the World Cup of Hockey 2016 but pulled out of the tournament to recover from the surgery. He is entering the final season of a three-year, \$6.75 million contract he signed with the Senators on July 31, 2014 and can become a restricted free agent after the season.

Lehner has not played more than 36 games in any of his six NHL seasons, but the Sabres signed him hoping he could be their No. 1 goaltender. Despite a 27-point improvement from 2014-15, Buffalo missed the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the fifth straight season in 2015-16. They acquired defenseman Dmitry Kulikov in a trade with the Florida Panthers on June 25 and signed forward Kyle Okposo to a seven-year contract reportedly worth \$42 million on July 1.

"It's a big year for me personally, but I think it's another big year for our team," Lehner said. "It's a season where we can start putting our mark in and do everything we can to try and make the playoffs and take our first step."

Penn State prepares to host its 1st NHL game at Pegula

By Matt Castle

Centre Daily Times

September 25, 2016

UNIVERSITY PARK - When the puck drops at Pegula Ice Arena on Monday, the National Hockey League's Buffalo Sabres and Minnesota Wild will skate across center ice over the iconic Nittany Lion logo.

It will be the first professional hockey game to be played at Penn State, made even more significant because the man with his name on the building is the owner of the Sabres.

Terry Pegula's \$102 million in donations helped build the arena and establish the men's and women's varsity hockey programs.

"The travel plans for the Buffalo Sabres have not been made public. There is always a possibility he will be in attendance, but it is unknown at this point," Penn State Athletics spokesman John Hanna said earlier this week.

Tickets are still available and prices have ranged from \$25 for students up to \$175 for the general public, according to Ticketmaster.com. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.

In the weeks leading up to the game, the arena staff had to make several changes around the building and on the ice.

"The ice crew has been preparing ever since we found out that we would be hosting this game," said Deborah Campbell, rink supervisor.

The most notable change was putting in the NHL-required trapezoid lines behind each net, the only area behind the goal line where NHL goalies are allowed to control the puck.

The rink staff had to remove ice and paint in the new lines, a different process because most of the lines at Pegula are made with tape. The work took about six hours.

"The lines are a lot easier to take out than they are to put in," Campbell said.

Though it is a Sabres home game, it is being treated as a neutral-rink game. The Nittany Lion logo at center ice and on the Jumbotron will remain. Logos of both NHL teams will be on the ribbon screen around the upper seating level.

The Sabres will use the Penn State locker room and the Wild will use the guest locker room.

The game will be played under standard NHL rules and will feature a commemorative puck with both teams' logos. The puck will be available for purchase at gates A and B, as well as at the merchandise stands for \$9.98.

It will be the Sabres' third preseason game, and the first for the Wild, but it will be the only preseason game for both played at a college arena.

"It's a great opportunity for us and the sport to play in different buildings. Obviously, Penn State has a program there that is up-and-coming and has a great new facility, so we are happy to show fans in the area what NHL hockey is like," Minnesota's head of media relations Aaron Sickman said.

Both teams will be without several top players, who are playing at the World Cup of Hockey in Toronto. Marquee players such as Buffalo's Jack Eichel and Zach Parise and Ryan Suter of the Minnesota Wild are not expected to play. The World Cup ends Saturday.

"It will be a good opportunity for some of our younger prospects," Sickman said. "Buffalo is in a similar situation.

"I've heard nothing but good things about the arena. We are looking forward to a good crowd and a good atmosphere."

Girgensons Eager To Prove He's Back After Down Season

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

September 25, 2016

When he came into camp a year ago, Zemgus Girgensons was coming off a season to be proud of, one in which he put up 30 points (15+15) in only 61 games and was voted into his first All-Star Game. At age 21 and with a better supporting cast around him, it was hard to imagine he'd go anywhere but up.

As last season wore on, however, he never did find the same offensive consistency. His point total dipped to 18 (7+11) despite playing in 10 more games than he had the year prior. Quite frankly, he says, it was a disappointing season.

Now, he comes into camp feeling a little bit different than ever before.

"Definitely a little bit more pressure to do better after a down year," he said following practice on Sunday at HarborCenter. "You want to prove to everyone what you're capable of and the last couple days, I've been going pretty hard. I'm trying to put everything out there and show I'm back."

Girgensons showed it at the scrimmage on Sunday, as did his teammates on the white squad in a 3-2 win. It was the most intense of the three scrimmages this weekend, and Girgensons said he thinks his practice group might be the chippiest of the three at training camp.

Maybe that's because they have the most to prove.

Matt Moulson is also a member of that group, and like Girgensons, he hopes to have a better season than last year. Moulson recorded 21 points (8+13) in 81 games, battling through multiple scoring droughts until his hard mid-season work paid off with three goals in his last six games.

Moulson, perennially a 40-point scorer before last season, knows some might have lost hope. But he believes he put the proper work in, both mentally and physically, to position himself to a point where he can return to his old form.

"I definitely have a chip on my shoulder coming in to prove a lot of people wrong that maybe lost a little belief," Moulson said. "I have a trainer, a skating coach, my family and maybe a couple of close friends that still truly believe in me. This summer was about making sure I put in the work and believe in myself to get back to where I want to be."

The white squad also includes Nicolas Deslauriers, who scored twice in the scrimmage on Sunday. He notched his first goal into an open cage after the puck was misplayed behind the net and then tipped in an Erik Burgdoerfer shot for his second of the game.

Deslauriers stood out for another reason in Saturday's scrimmage, when he laid a hard open-ice hit on Mac Bennett to clear a lane for Moulson, who nearly scored but rang a shot off the crossbar. It was the type of hit that showed just how seriously Deslauriers is taking this camp, which is born out of necessity as up-and-coming prospects create roster competition.

"I think for me, as not a top-six guy - obviously, you always want to be in that top six - but for me my job is completely different," Deslauriers said. "I think every camp for me is really important and that's why I just try to work hard over the summer and come here ready and just treat every camp like I have to make the team."

You can watch Deslauriers' two goals and the rest of the highlights from Sunday's scrimmage below in today's Sabres in :90 with Brian Duff.

Let's play some games

The preseason schedule begins tomorrow for Sabres with a game against the Minnesota Wild at Penn State. It's the beginning of a busy week for the Sabres, with more games to follow on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.

There's no TV broadcast on Monday, but you can hear the game live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Andrew Peters will be on the call. Visit us at Sabres.com and on Twitter for coverage throughout the day and for highlights following the game.

Sabres goalie Anders Nilsson used Russian job to jumpstart NHL career

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 26, 2016

BUFFALO – Two years ago, frustrated by his limited opportunities, Sabres newcomer Anders Nilsson bolted North America for a gig tending goal for Ak Bars Kazan, a Russian team in the KHL.

The decision, of course, made Nilsson's NHL future iffy. But after 23 appearances with the New York Islanders, the Swede said he felt "ready for the next step." He wanted to develop at a high level, something a fourth straight season in the minors wouldn't offer him.

"You know, it's always a risk," Nilsson, who was acquired July 2, said Friday after training camp opened inside HarborCenter. "But I felt ... I was kind of going in the same footsteps. I felt I needed an environment to continue my development, so I felt it was the right way to go for me."

Nilsson, 26, thrived in Russia, compiling a league-low 1.71 goals-against average and a .936 save percentage. He followed up with terrific numbers – 1.54 and .936 – as Kazan lost in the league final.

All along, Nilsson wanted another crack at the NHL.

"My goal before I went to Russia was to come back to North America," he said. "That was always in the back of my head. I was fortunate to do that."

Nilsson's strong play in 2014-15 caught Edmonton's eye last year. He played 26 games before the Oilers traded him to the St. Louis Blues, who needed a third goalie for insurance.

After a backup goalie, believed to be Jeff Zatkoff, reneged on a verbal agreement hours into free agency, Sabres general manager Tim Murray dealt a 2017 fifth-round pick for the 6-foot-5, 229-pound Nilsson.

"It's tough to look at him and not see the size of him," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "To play big ... that's got to be the strength of his game. He's such a big body."

Ideally, the Sabres would like Nilsson to play about 20 games behind No. 1 goalie Robin Lehner.

"I'm trying not to think about it that much," Nilsson said of his playing time. "I know Robin is a really, really good goalie. It's going to be a competition between him and me."

Interestingly, the top three goalies in the organization – Lehner, Nilsson and Linus Ullmark – are all Swedish. Nilsson has played with both on national teams.

"They're both great guys and really good goalies," said Nilsson, who has a "really good first impression" of the Sabres.

Nilsson handled the bulk of the Oilers' goaltending duties for the first three months last season. He lost playing time and became expendable when he began slumping and Cam Talbot emerged.

"It's a lesson, and I learned a lot from last season," said Nilsson, who has a one-year, \$1 million contract.

While Nilsson's Edmonton numbers – 10-12-2, 3.14 and .901 – were weak, the steady action he received early was critical to his development.

"Coming into the season I have a lot more experience than I had at this time last year," he said.

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The Sabres open their seven-game preseason schedule tonight against the Minnesota Wild at Pegula Ice Arena on the Campus of Penn State University. A \$90 million donation from Sabres owner Terry Pegula helped fund the 6,014-seat facility.

Minnesota Wild and Buffalo Sabres ready to face off Monday night as first two NHL teams at Pegula Ice Arena

By Kara Duriez

The Daily Collegian

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In 2013, Pegula Ice Arena officially opened its doors to the Penn State's women's and men's hockey teams. As Pegula enters its fourth season, Penn State welcomes its first two National Hockey League teams to take the ice in the facility.

After a year of planning, the Minnesota Wild and the Buffalo Sabres will face off at 7 p.m. on Monday, Sept. 26 in their NHL preseason matchup.

As the game is the first of its kind to ever take place in Pegula, Penn State Athletic Director Sandy Barbour said that Penn State's hockey fans will be very interested in being a part of history.

"We are thrilled to host the first of what we hope will be many NHL preseason games in Pegula Ice Arena," Barbour said in a press release.

However, the NHL matchup is more than just a business opportunity. It is also a chance for the university to form a culture that connects the NHL and Penn State's two NCAA Division I teams.

"We are very appreciative of the NHL and the Sabres for their partnership to bring a preseason game to Penn State and further grow the game in central Pennsylvania," Barbour said.

Penn State's current partnership with the Sabres stems from alumnus Terry Pegula, and his wife Kim. Back in 2010, the Pegulas donated \$102 million to the university to fund the ice arena and establish the Division I men's hockey program. Now as the Sabres' owner, Pegula will bring his team to play in the arena that bears his name.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, who is close to the Pegulas, said that he is excited to see the idea finally come to life.

"We were hoping to get this opportunity to bring the NHL and bring Terry Pegula's Buffalo Sabres to be the first game at Penn State," Bylsma said. "I think I can speak for our players, we're excited to come in here and be the first NHL game."

While Bylsma remains excited for the game itself, he also took time to recognize what being in Pegula Ice Arena is really like.

"I have been fortunate enough to have been to the Pegula Ice Arena already," Bylsma said. "The Penn State locker room is as nice a locker room as I've been in in my life. I'm gassed up to see an NHL game in that arena. It's first class."

In addition to being in Pegula Ice Arena before, Bylsma also said that he has met with Guy Gadowsky several times prior to the upcoming game. Bylsma said he is greatly impressed with the work Gadowsky has done developing the program and the success he has had in a short amount of time.

"I haven't talked to him [Gadowsky] about playing at Pegula, but I will be seeing him in the morning on the 26th to talk about the game," Bylsma said. "If he can offer some advice, I'd like to have it. I want to know how to get the student section rolling there and be able to use it to our advantage."

While Bylsma hopes that he can get Penn State fans on the Sabres' side, Roar Zone President Chris Godissart (senior-biology) said that the student section already has plans to cheer for the club because it's Pegula's team.

"Not many of us are actually Buffalo Sabres fans, but we all recognize that without the contributions of Mr. and Mrs. Pegula, none of what we do would be possible," Godissart said. "We want to show how thankful we are for his generosity that allowed Penn State to jump to Division I for men's and women's hockey, and we also want to thank him and the Sabres organization for bringing an NHL exhibition game to Hockey Valley."