



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

September 27, 2016

Quick hits: Wild 2, Sabres 1

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 26, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. – The Sabres' first preseason game doubled as a chance for Penn State to thank Terry and Kim Pegula for bringing hockey to the campus. Buffalo failed to join in the tribute.

Minnesota scored with 4.6 seconds left Monday night to pick up a 2-1 victory. With Evander Kane in the box for high-sticking, Jason Zucker buried a one-timer to drop the Sabres to 0-1.

The fans in Pegula Ice Arena expressed their appreciation immediately. The student section taped a 40-foot sign reading, "Thank you Terry & Kim Pegula" on the glass behind one net, and they loudly chanted, "Thank you, Terry!" as soon as the puck dropped for the opening faceoff.

The Pegulas, who were among the 4,000 in attendance, received a partial standing ovation late in the first period after a tribute video featuring Penn State administrators, coaches, players and employees appeared on the scoreboard.

First of the year: Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons, looking to rebound from a subpar year, used a rebound to get 2016-17 started right. A save by Minnesota goaltender Alex Stalock caromed to the slot, and a wide-open Girgensons unleashed a high rocket to open the scoring. It was the only goal of the first period. Buffalo had a 17-11 shot advantage.

Busy debut: While the Sabres finished the first with a hefty lead in shots, the game certainly didn't start that way. Minnesota took the opening eight shots in just 4:12, but Sabres newcomer Anders Nilsson stopped them all to allow his teammates to gain their footing.

Nilsson played two periods and stopped 26 of 27 shots. Minnesota's Kurtis Gabriel beat him after collecting a loose puck in the slot late in the second period. Linus Ullmark played the third period and faced just four shots during the 20 minutes.

Opening lineup: While the Wild used a lineup filled with prospects, the Sabres treated the Penn State crowd to an NHL-heavy roster. The lines were center Johan Larsson with left wing Evander Kane and right wing Sam Reinhart, Girgensons between Marcus Foligno and Brian Gionta, Cal O'Reilly centering for Cole Schneider and Alexander Nylander, and Giorgio Estephan in the middle of Justin Bailey and William Carrier.

The defense pairs were Josh Gorges and Casey Nelson, Brendan Guhler and Justin Falk, and Brady Austin with Erik Burgdoerfer.

TV time: The Sabres' next four preseason games will be on television. Tuesday's visit to KeyBank Center by Ottawa, Thursday's meeting with Toronto in St. Catharines, Ont., and Friday's game against the Maple Leafs in Buffalo will be on MSG. The Sabres and Carolina meet next Tuesday for the "Kraft Hockeyville USA" game in Marquette, Mich., and the game will be broadcast by NBCSN.

Brian Duff and Rob Ray will be the announcers Tuesday and Thursday. Rick Jeanneret will join Ray on Friday. Dan Dunleavy and Ray will call the Carolina game and team up for radio-only broadcasts Oct. 5 against the Hurricanes and Oct. 7 against Ottawa.

Point man: Just like during last week's prospect tournament, the Sabres used Nylander at the point on the power play. He was on a unit with Larsson, Kane, Reinhart and Nelson. The other group featured Girgensons, Foligno, Gionta, O'Reilly and Burgdoerfer.

Eichel almost ready: Jack Eichel, who has yet to skate with the Sabres after representing Team North America at the World Cup, is scheduled to have his first practice Wednesday.

First cuts: As expected, the Sabres began trimming their roster by sending players back to their junior teams. The initial cuts were East Aurora's Austin Osmanski and fellow defensemen Vojtech Budik and Devante Stephens, plus forwards Cliff Pu, Vasily Glotov and Brandon Hagel. The cuts left the Sabres with 50 players – 29 forwards, 16 defensemen and five goaltenders.

Next: The Sabres will play their second of seven exhibitions at 7 p.m. Tuesday when Ottawa visits KeyBank Center. Defenseman Dion Phaneuf and forwards Bobby Ryan, Kyle Turris, Chris Kelly and Chris Neil are among the Senators scheduled to play. Eichel's teammate at Boston University, Matt O'Connor, will start in goal for the Senators.

Girgensons feels at home again with Sabres

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 26, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. – Zemgus Girgensons feels it when he steps on the ice. He feels his feet churning. He feels his mind racing. He feels like himself.

It's been awhile.

The Buffalo Sabres forward had a season to forget last year, and after one preseason game he's doing his best to clear it from his mind. Girgensons scored Buffalo's only goal Monday night in a 2-1 loss to Minnesota, a welcome return to the score sheet for a player who didn't appear on it enough in 2015-16.

"It's always a good feeling when it crosses the line, so it's nice to get that one," Girgensons said in Pegula Ice Arena. "I definitely want improvement from last season. I want to show what I'm capable of, what I did the year before last year, kind of step my game up by a lot."

Girgensons, who put up 15 goals and 31 points in 61 games as a go-to guy under Ted Nolan two years ago, generated little during Dan Bylsma's first year on the bench. Girgensons recorded just seven goals and 11 assists in 71 games. He also failed to find a home, bouncing between center and wing in an aimless search.

Bylsma is planning to keep Girgensons at center with the hope the 22-year-old can remain in the middle of the action. He scored from the slot Monday.

"It's a preseason goal, but it's still an opportunity for him to feel good about himself," Bylsma said. "Zemgus is a heart-and-soul, gutsy player, a player that's got to work hard in all areas of the rink and bring that to the offensive zone. He's going to get plenty of opportunities to do it."

The 22-year-old's downturn came in a contract year, and the restricted free agent settled for a one-year, \$1.15 million deal. He's banking on a big year and better negotiations next summer.

In addition to the goal, Girgensons took four shots and won nine of his 14 faceoffs. It's the debut he was looking for after a solid start to training camp.

"Playing, I can feel it," he said. "I can feel my legs going, my mind working on the ice. I already feel better than I did last year."

Of course, it's pretty easy to feel better than last year.

"It came down to confidence level," Girgensons said. "I was down and didn't believe in myself sometimes. Definitely right now I feel like I'm capable of doing more, and I'm going to try to bring it every day."

While Girgensons was the only Sabres player to find the net, he had plenty of help in the offensive zone. Buffalo peppered Wild goaltender Alex Stalock with 40 shots. The Sabres had 17 in the first period, but a rebound blast from the slot by Girgensons was the only one that mattered.

"We had plenty of opportunities to score more than just one," Girgensons said. "Definitely the first and third period we were on them. We were forechecking. We were doing things right. We were hitting, getting to pucks. The second period we kind of backed off a little bit. That's something moving forward we just have to keep going."

The Wild, who tied the game late in the second period, scored on a four-on-three power play with 4.6 seconds left to stun Buffalo. The Sabres will play their second preseason game Tuesday night when Ottawa visits KeyBank Center (7 p.m., MSG, Radio WGR-AM 550).

Monday's contest in the arena funded by Terry and Kim Pegula actually felt like the first home game for the Sabres.

"It's a cool place," said defenseman Casey Nelson, who had an assist. "I wish we could have got a 'W,' but we'll keep working."

Sabres' next four exhibitions will be on TV

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
September 26, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, Pa. -- While Buffalo fans didn't get to watch Monday's preseason opener unless they traveled to Penn State, the Sabres' next four preseason games will be on television.

Tuesday's visit to KeyBank Center by Ottawa, Thursday's meeting with Toronto in St. Catharines, Ont., and Friday's game against the Maple Leafs in KeyBank Center will all be on MSG. The Sabres and Carolina meet next Tuesday for the "Kraft Hockeyville USA" game in Marquette, Mich., and that game will be broadcast by NBCSN.

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Sabres' next four exhibitions will be on TV

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
September 26, 2016

BUFFALO – In the first days of the season, Cole Schneider, an undrafted winger with two games of NHL experience, not an established veteran or hotshot prospect, has emerged as the biggest standout in Sabres training camp.

After scoring a hat trick in the first scrimmage and a one-goal, two-point performance the next day, Schneider, 26, could already have an inside track to earn a roster spot as the 12th or 13th forward.

"He's taking the opportunity right now to show he can make plays and he is a guy who can be counted on to put the puck in the net," said coach Dan Bylsma, whose Sabres open their preseason home schedule tonight against the Ottawa Senators inside KeyBank Center.

Despite consistently scoring 20 goals and 50 points in the minors, Schneider, a Williamsville native, toiled in relative obscurity for the Binghamton Senators until the Sabres acquired him in a seven-player AHL trade Feb. 27.

Schneider impressed the Sabres so much with the Rochester Americans they recalled him for the final two games, the St. Joe's graduate's first big league outings after 287 AHL appearances.

"Sometimes a fresh set of eyes and a fresh look on a player is what a player needs," Bylsma said. "He got a little bit of that last year going to Rochester."

Bylsma has learned Schneider, who barely says a word about himself, possesses a quiet demeanor on and off the ice.

"He's shown a lot of kind of what I've heard about him coming to our organization last year, the player he was," he said. "He's not the fleetest afoot, he's not the fastest skater. But he's got good hands, can make plays, he's good around the net. He showed that a lot in the first three days."

The final two forward positions figure to be the most contested spots in camp. Bylsma believes as many as seven players – from top prospects to young veterans like Schneider – are in the mix.

"I'm very intrigued, and we're not just looking at one player," Bylsma said.

The expected names – prospects Nick Baptiste, Justin Bailey, Hudson Fasching and Alexander Nylander – are in that group. With Jack Eichel just back from the World Cup of Hockey and Ryan O'Reilly still competing, some players could receive a longer look at center.

Here's a closer at some of the others competing for the open spots:

Derek Grant

Grant, a 6-foot-3, 202-pound center the Sabres signed to a two-way contract July 2, enjoyed a monster season with the AHL Stockton Heat in 2015-16, scoring 27 goals and 45 points in only 36 games.

That's a 57-goal, 95-point pace over a full season.

"Every year you take strides," Grant said. "I think going into last year my focus was shoot the puck more. I started to do that early and good things started to happen."

However, Grant, 26, hasn't produced points at the NHL level, mustering only one assist in 15 games with the Calgary Flames last season and three points in 40 career games.

"I didn't produce at the NHL level like I hoped I would," Grant said of last season. "I was able to contribute in a different way."

Grant, who believes he plays "a strong defensive centerman kind of game," knows Schneider and Sabres general manager Tim Murray from his time with the Ottawa Senators.

"He can skate and move around," Bylsma said. "He's excellent positionally, smarts-wise. There's been determination to the way he's worked and played."

Dan Catenacci

Catenacci earned his first NHL action in his third pro season in 2015-16, mostly as a fourth-line center. To crack to the Sabres, he needs to showcase his speed and be an agitator.

While Catenacci, 23, went pointless in 11 games with the Sabres, he developed confidence.

"Getting a taste last year, I knew that I could play there and do well up there, so this summer I just had the confidence of coming in and earning a spot out of training camp," Catenacci said.

Catenacci, a 2011 third-round pick, had 12 goals and 24 points in 50 AHL games last season.

Cal O'Reilly

The versatile O'Reilly, who turns 30 years old Saturday, played 20 games with the Sabres last season, compiling three goals and seven points.

Given O'Reilly has already earned some trust from Bylsma, who also coached him briefly with the Pittsburgh Penguins, he could be a favorite to stay in Buffalo.

"Being up here a lot last year and playing a lot of games showed them I could play," O'Reilly said.

O'Reilly has 16 goals and 48 points in 133 NHL contests and also captained the Amerks last season.

Evan Rodrigues

Rodrigues, a free agent from Boston University, played his first two NHL games in 2015-16, scoring a goal in the season finale. As a pro rookie, Eichel's high-scoring college winger had nine goals and 30 points in 72 AHL games.

While Rodrigues is often overshadowed by youngsters the Sabres drafted, he's quietly one of the team's better forward prospects. His tenacity and work ethic has impressed Bylsma.

A small taste of the NHL was special.

"I think maybe I pushed myself just a little bit harder in the summer just having that experience and knowing what it's like at the next level," Rodrigues said.

Wild Take Preseason Opener From Sabres 2-1

WGR 550

September 26, 2016

Zemgus Girgensons opened the scoring in the first period, but the Wild scored two straight -- including a very late power play goal by Jason Zucker -- for the 2-1 win over Buffalo. The game was played at the Pegula Ice Arena at Penn State University. Anders Nilsson played the first two periods for the Sabres while Linus Ullmark entered the crease for the final frame.

The Sabres' preseason schedule continues on Tuesday at KeyBank Center against the Ottawa Senators. Hear the call on WGR 550 and the Buffalo Sabres Radio Network at 7 p.m.

1st Period

Goals

16:25 - BUF - Zemgus Girgensons (1) (Casey Nelson, Marcus Foligno) BUF 1 MIN 0

2nd Period

Goals

12:34 - MIN - Kurtis Gabriel (1) (Nick Saracino) BUF 1 MIN 1

3rd Period

Goals

19:56 - MIN - Jason Zucker (PPG) (1) MIN 2 BUF 1

Wild Take Preseason Opener From Sabres 2-1

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 26, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jack Eichel has reported to training camp and passed his physical, but Rasmus Ristolainen has not.

Eichel will skate on Tuesday with the non game group. Dmitri Kulikov will likely be at practice on Wednesday.

All three players participate in the World Cup of Hockey. Ristolainen still doesn't have a contract. Dan Bylsma didn't seem too concerned, "I would love to have him with us right now, but I'm confident that will move to be getting done and he'll be joining us at some point in time."

As far as how he'll handle the World Cup guys Bylsma said, "My only worry would be too much rest for them. Talking to Jack a few days ago, he really doesn't want to sit out for five days to completely rest. He doesn't want to sit out any longer."

"Over rest, they would have to start over again, so they'll need three full days of rest for sure. Dmitri is a little bit different because he hasn't been with us. He needs to get with us and learn how we play."

The earliest any of them could play would be Thursday in St. Catharines.

Sabres return six to juniors

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

September 26, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres have trimmed its training camp roster to 50 on Monday after returning six of its prospects to their respective junior clubs.

Buffalo announced that the team has sent forwards Vasily Glotov (Cape Breton - QMJHL), Brandon Hagel (Red Deer - WHL), and Cliff Pu (London - OHL) back to juniors. The team has also assigned defensemen Vojtech Budik (Prince Albert - WHL), Austin Osmanski (Mississauga - OHL), and Devante Stephens (Kelowna - WHL) back to their junior clubs.

The Sabres now have 29 forwards, 16 defensemen, and five goalies remaining on the training camp roster.

The moves come shortly before the Sabres open up the preseason against the Minnesota Wild at the Pegula Ice Arena on the campus of Penn State University. Pre-game coverage gets started at 6 p.m. on WGR, with faceoff coming shortly after 7 p.m. with Dan Dunleavy and Andrew Peters on the call.

Sabres Lose Preseason Opener 2-1

WGRZ

September 26, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, PA- In the first ever NHL game played at the Pegula Sports Arena the Buffalo Sabres dropped a 2-to-1 decision to the Minnesota Wild.

Zemgus Girgensons scored in the first period to give the Sabres the lead. Kurtis Gabriel tied the game for the Wild in the second period.

In the final minute of regulation Sabres forward Evander Kane took a high sticking penalty. The Wild took advantage of the power play as Jason Zucker scored the game winning goal with just under 5 seconds remaining in regulation.

The Sabres play their second preseason game at home against the Ottawa Senators Tuesday night.

Sabres Lose Preseason Opener 2-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 27, 2016

STATE COLLEGE, PA (WKBW) - It wasn't how the Buffalo Sabres wanted to start things off — dropping the first preseason game of 2016 to the Minnesota Wild 2-1.

The Sabres scored halfway through the first period on a Zemgus Girgensons goal but couldn't find the back of the net again. A late high-sticking penalty by Evander Kane ultimately cost the Sabres — Minnesota's Jason Zucker scored on a rocket while on the power play with 4.6 seconds left. The score is one Sabres fans won't be happy with, but there's plenty of positives that can be taken from tonight's game. Five observations from the Sabres preseason opener:

Casey Nelson standing out at both ends of the ice

After the game Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Casey Nelson "looks like a seasoned, strong, NHL veteran on the back side." I thought Nelson was one of, if not the best Sabres on the ice. He got a ton of ice time on the first pair with veteran Josh Gorges and played in every situation. It says a lot about the Sabres trust in Nelson that he was on the ice in the final seconds during a 4-3 penalty kill. Ultimately, Nelson didn't get the job done at the end of the game but that's a tough position to be thrown into. The 24-year-old defenseman made a great play on the Sabres first goal getting the puck to net through traffic allowing Girgensons to put home a juicy rebound. Last month I didn't know where Nelson would spend this season, but if he keeps up his solid play, it'll be with the Sabres.

A dream come true for the "SHOOT THE PUCK" guy in the stands

Four minutes into the first period the Sabres were being outshot 8-0. They allowed three more shots the entire period and recorded 17 of their own. In the second they tallied 13, and in the third they 'only' recorded 10. They finished the night with 40 shots, which is something Bylsma said after the game, "that's the way we want to play." The Sabres in the 2014-2015 season had games where they finished with 17 shots, so 40 should be a number Sabres fans like to see. Of course the quality of the shots is important, but the more that get to the net, the more that go in.

Girgensons building confidence early

After the game Girgensons kind of played his goal off like it wasn't a big deal. "It's always a good feeling when it crosses the line, so, it's nice to get that one," he said. Girgensons is coming off a down year and is on a one-year, 'prove-it' contract this season. The 21-year-old forward needs to prove he's worth another contract or this may be one of his last seasons in Buffalo. I think Girgensons will have a nice season, and if tonight is any indication of what's to come, Sabres fans shouldn't give up on the Latvian Locomotive just yet.

Nilsson for the Vezina

Okay, maybe that's a stretch — but the Sabres new goalie turned away 26 of the 27 shots he faced, and the only goal he let in was off a weird bounce. Nilsson has had a nice camp, and in two scrimmages along with tonight's pre season game, has only allowed one goal. "My job is to stop the puck," Nilsson said after the game. "I'm trying to do that every day when I come to the rink, whether it's a practice, a scrimmage or a preseason game." Well, Nilsson is doing a good job of that and has absolutely looked like a solid backup so far.

Evander Kane still loves shooting the puck

Kane made a very costly mistake late which led to the Wild's game winning goal, but he had a nice game otherwise. The Sabres forward finished with seven shots and laid down some pretty nasty hits, too. "I thought right from the start of the game you saw the type of game Evander can play," Bylsma told reporters. "I challenged the guys to show their game and Evander showed it pretty much the whole game long." Kane will likely be in the Sabres top-six and has been getting a lot of work with forward Sam Reinhart. If he can clear some lanes and make some plays with his body, that pair could do some damage.

The Sabres won't wait long until their next game — they host Ottawa at Key Bank Center Tuesday night at 7 p.m.

Sabres' Ristolainen hasn't reported to camp just yet

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 26, 2016

(WKBW) - On Monday Jack Eichel joined his teammates in Buffalo after returning from the World Cup of Hockey -- Rasmus Ristolainen however did not, according to multiple reports.

The 21-year-old defenseman is a restricted free agent going into the 2016 season and is looking for a new deal. In 2015, Ristolainen had his best professional season with the Sabres -- at least offensively. He finished with nine goals, 32 assists, and 41 points.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma told WGR 550's Paul Hamilton, among other reporters Monday morning "I would love to have him with us right now, but I'm confident that will move to be getting done and he'll be joining us at some point in time."

The Sabres open up their preseason schedule Monday night against Minnesota.

My thoughts:

Ristolainen wants a long term big-money contract and the Sabres are likely going to give it to him, it's just a matter of how much they're willing to spend. Ristolainen likely wants somewhere between \$6 and \$7 million per year, and the Sabres will want to stay closer to \$5 million. I was told this summer the Sabres turned down offers for Ristolainen -- so they certainly see him as an important piece long term. I think this will get done sooner rather than later.

Wild win NHL game at Pegula Ice Arena

By Jordan Conigliaro

WJAC

September 27, 2016

UNIVERSITY PARK -- Penn State's Pegula Ice Arena hosted its first National Hockey League game Monday night.

The Minnesota Wild beat the Buffalo Sabres on a last-second goal by Jason Zucker.

Sabres owner Terry Pegula - a Penn State alum - and his wife Kim donated over 100 million dollars to build the hockey arena on campus, helping the men's and women's programs transition from club level to division one.

"He's everything to us," Penn State men's hockey coach Guy Gadowsky said.

"None of us would be here without him. Every great experience the student-athletes have had it's all due to him and Kim's gift. He's everything to us."

NHL hits the Happy Valley ice

By Gordon Brunskill

Centre Daily Times

September 26, 2016

UNIVERSITY PARK

As the music rose and filled every corner of Pegula Ice Arena, announcer Rodney Martin implored the crowd with a slightly altered version of a question he asks each home game:

"Are you ready for some NHL hockey?!!"

Hockey night in Happy Valley made its return Monday night. The colors might have been different for the teams on the ice, but there were still sticks and pucks and the home team was unloading 40 shot attempts.

It's a prelude to the return of Penn State hockey. The women played an exhibition game last weekend, and open their season Friday, and the men hold their first practice Saturday and have their own exhibition game Sunday.

Appetites were sufficiently whetted Monday night.

In the part that mattered for the teams, Minnesota's Jason Zucker scored the game-winning goal with 4.6 seconds left to give the Wild a 2-1 win over the Buffalo Sabres.

There was a wide array of jerseys dotting the crowd, although the NHL sweaters outnumbered the Penn State duds.

It was a home game for the Sabres, the connections between that team and Penn State strong thanks to the couple sitting in their suite in the upper corner of the arena.

Terry and Kim Pegula, who own the Sabres, donated the \$102 million for the building that bears their names and made the Nittany Lion varsity programs possible.

A huge sign stretched on the glass behind the net in the "Roar Zone" student section with the Penn State and Sabres logos saying, "Thank you Terry & Kim Pegula."

During the game, Kim Pegula even tweeted a "You're welcome" response.

While the "Roar Zone" may not have been filled to the rafters like a typical home game, there was still enough to make it feel like Buffalo was the home team.

When the Sabres scored their lone goal in the first period, the student section began their traditional taunting of Minnesota goalie Alex Stalock. And like other standard nights in the arena, the student section gave its "Hockey Valley!" and "We are ..." chants.

"Those types of things don't happen in the NHL," said Michael Cross, Penn State's assistant athletic director for new business development, who played a major role in landing the game. "You don't get those types of cheers. I'm really happy to see that."

There were even a few familiar names in the Wild lineup like former Notre Dame forward Mario Lucia and defenseman Mike Reilly, who was with the University of Minnesota last season. Reilly assisted on Zucker's winner.

Even Rich "The Blue Hair Guy" Seifert was on hand with his mane in midseason form, although he was wearing a Binghamton Whalers jersey instead of his usual Penn State sweater.

There also were a few differences, like the sight of beer in the hands of fans.

The Penn State teams were watching the game, happy to see the pros take over for a day. The Sabres had the run of the Nittany Lion men's dressing room, while the Wild took over the lockers of the women's team.

It was the first of what Penn State hopes will be many more NHL games to take over the building.

"We had conversations months and months and months ago about could this potentially happen?" said Cross, a Buffalo-area native. "The challenges are that the NHL has certain protocol that we need to follow. Medically there are protocol that need to happen, there's a marketing aspect where you can't just say, 'Hey, we're going to do this just like a Penn State game.' It has to be an NHL-caliber game. Ticketing has to be done like the NHL wants it, you have to think about pricing. Those types of dynamics go into it."

As for the game, Zemgus Girgensons scored early for Buffalo, firing it in from the slot for the only puck to beat Stalock, who made 39 saves. Kurtis Gabriel tied it midway through the second period for Minnesota in a game that used the depth of both teams in their first exhibition games with few regulars playing.

The game was lacking a little luster, with some of the biggest stars missing because of the World Cup, including Buffalo's Jack Eichel and Minnesota's Zach Parise and Ryan Suter.

Still, it was a chance to see some top-flight hockey hit the ice, and give a taste of what's to come at the corner of Curtin and University over the next six months.

"It was really cool for the community and our team loved watching it," Penn State head coach Guy Gadowsky said after the game. "It was so great to have Terry back in the building and it was nice seeing how many people are appreciative of what they've done."

It also left an impression on the pros.

"This facility is unbelievable," Girgensons said. "The locker room and everything is nice and the fans were loud. It was definitely fun to play here."

Players from the Minnesota Wild and Buffalo Sabres reflect on Pegula Ice Arena experience

By Jill Beckman

The Daily Collegian

September 26, 2016

For the first time, NHL players took the ice at Pegula Ice Arena on Monday night in a Buffalo Sabres-Minnesota Wild preseason matchup.

With the Roar Zone, Penn State's student section, and most of the crowd on the Sabres' side, the Wild sealed the win late in the third period with just 4.6 seconds left, avoiding overtime and tipping the score their way, 2-1.

Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons, who opened up the scoring with a quick snapshot from the slot on the side of the Roar Zone, felt like he was at a home game the way the crowd cheered for the Sabres and chanted to thank Terry and Kim Pegula, owners of the Sabres, who were in attendance and shown on the jumbotron much to the delight of the Roar Zone.

"It was definitely fun to play here," Girgensons said, then praised the "unbelievable" facility and nice locker room.

Sabres goalie Anders Nilsson was impressed by the arena, saying the players and fans are fortunate to have a facility like Pegula.

"Everyone said it was going to be a nice facility," Nilsson said after the game. "But it exceeded all my expectations."

However, a flashy arena can't get in the players' heads. The goalie had some advice for the Nittany Lions: Be professional and be prepared to work hard every time they enter the rink — and don't forget to have fun.

Even though the Wild were the away team, it didn't take away from the impression the rink had on their players.

During the middle of the third period, the Roar Zone seemed to be warming up for the Lions season, taunting the Wild's netminder Alex Stalock like they do all goaltenders.

"The facilities were awesome," the Wild's Jason Zucker, who scored the game winner late in the third period, said. "I thought overall the atmosphere was great -- best [preseason atmosphere] I'd say."

Players from the Minnesota Wild and Buffalo Sabres reflect on Pegula Ice Arena experience

By Ben Jones

StateCollege.com

September 26, 2016

Penn State is just over a week away from dropping the puck on the 2016-17 season but Hockey Valley was out in full force on Monday as the Buffalo Sabres took on the Minnesota Wild in an NHL preseason game.

"Everyone said it was going to be a nice facility, but it exceeded all my expectations," said Sabres goalkeeper Anders Nilsson. "It's a great setup for the guys who play here and all the fans have a great building and a great facility."

And perhaps fittingly as the Nittany Lions fell in their first game as a Division I team, in overtime, it was the Sabres falling just seconds away from overtime as a goal with 4.6 seconds left doomed the home favorites.

Even so with Kim and Terry Pegula in attendance it was a historic evening as Penn State celebrated just over six years of hockey at the Division I level with the first NHL exhibition game in State College. With plenty of hockey fans in the arena even a loss by the fan favorite Sabres hardly dulled the crowd's enthusiasm throughout the evening.

On the ice it was a slightly shorthanded affair as stars from both teams weren't on the preseason rosters including the likes of Minnesota forward Zach Parise and Ryan Suter while Buffalo was without the services of young phenom Jack Eichel who like his Minnesota counterparts is just off of the World Cup of Hockey.

Even so the hits and crisp passing kept on coming and Buffalo capitalized on a rebound in front of the net as Zemgus Girgensons slammed home the puck past Wild netminder Alex Stalock who made 16 saves in the first period. The Penn State crowd roared as the puck found the back of the net, the hometown fans supporting the Pegula-owned franchise.

"This facility is unbelievable," Girgensons said after the game. "The locker room and everything is nice. The fans were loud and it was definitely fun to play here. It's always better to play at home and to be honest this felt like a home game."

Minnesota got on the scoresheet with 12:34 gone by in the second period as Kurtis Gabriel slotted home a pass from Nate Prosser and Nick Saracen. Sabres goalie Anders Nilsson was solid all night making 26 saves though two periods including 15 in the middle 20 minutes of play.

For the third period the tight action continued and the game was seemingly headed to overtime until a 4-on-3 powerplay cashed in for the Wild as Jason Zucker went top shelf to give Minnesota a 2-1 advantage with 4.6 seconds left in regulation.

Sabres Fall To Wild On Late Goal At Penn State

By Jourdon LaBarber

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With scoring chances abound, a large lead in shots and some solid play in net, there was plenty to like about the Sabres' first game of the preseason against the Minnesota Wild on Monday night. The only thing that didn't end up on their side was the score - 2-1 in favor of Minnesota.

Evander Kane took a penalty with 32.2 seconds remaining in a 1-1 tie to give the Wild a 4-on-3 power play, and Jason Zucker took advantage with a one-time goal to earn the win for Minnesota with 4.6 seconds left on the clock.

Shots don't count the way goals do, but they're significant in the first preseason game. The final tally on Monday was 40-31 in favor of the Sabres, and that includes an early flurry of shots from Minnesota on its first power play early in the first period.

"They got seven shots on the first power play, we got 16 shots in the next 15 minutes," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said afterward. "That's the way we want to play."

The one goal the Sabres did score came off the stick of Zemgus Girgensons with 3:35 remaining in the first period. Marcus Foligno began the play by cutting to the net and taking a shot from in-tight, off of which Justin Bailey grabbed the rebound and made a good pass through the zone to Casey Nelson. Nelson took a shot from the point that bounced off the pad of goaltender Alex Stalock.

Girgensons, alone in the slot, wound up and put the rebound in the back of the net. It was an opportune goal for a player who had trouble finishing last season, when his point total dipped to 18 from the 30 he scored a season prior.

Girgensons said this weekend that his goal at camp is to prove he's back to old form. From talking to his coach, Monday seemed like a step in the right direction.

"Zemgus is kind of a heart-and-soul, gutsy player," Bylsma said. "A player that's got to work hard in all areas of the rink and bring that to the offensive zone. That's what we've got to see from Zemgus and, again, he's going to get plenty of opportunity to do it here and he did tonight."

Nelson, who earned the primary assist on Girgensons' goal, was equally impressive throughout the game. He played on Buffalo's top pair along with Josh Gorges as well as on the top power play unit. He put the puck to the net when given the chance on offense and was strong in his own zone.

"He's had a very good camp," Bylsma said. "He's had a commanding camp. He's been on the ice, really kind of dictating and controlling the play and I thought he was tonight. Not only on that play but on the power play. He looks like a seasoned, strong NHL veteran on the backside."

Nelson, 24, scored four points in seven games at the end of last season after he signed as a college free agent out of Minnesota State, averaging 14:49 of ice time. He stayed in Buffalo to train throughout the summer, and looks poised to build on that strong stint going forward.

"It's another opportunity each time I get it," Nelson said. "That's what I've got to take it as. Can't get comfortable, I've just got to keep working."

Impressive debut for Nilsson

Anders Nilsson got the nod in net for the Sabres to start the contest and was solid in his debut. In two periods of action, Nilsson made 26 saves on 27 shots, with the loan goal allowed coming on a rebound attempt from the slot.

He rebounded from that goal, scored by Gabriel with 7:26 remaining in the second period, and ended his performance with a quick glove save on a slap shot from Marco Scandella.

The Sabres acquired Nilsson from St. Louis in July in exchange for a fifth-round pick. Bylsma said he was pleased with Nilsson's performance during the first three practices in camp and during the intrasquad scrimmages in particular, and Nilsson continued his strong start on Monday.

"I've been feeling pretty good so far," he said. "It's still early. I mean, I'm not satisfied. I'm just trying to prepare myself for the season. My job is to stop the puck so I'm trying to do that every day when I come to the rink, no matter if its practice or a scrimmage or a preseason game."

Ullmark allowed one goal on three shots in relief.

"Thank you Terry"

That was the chant coming from the Penn State student section when the puck dropped, and again during a video tribute played in the second period. Sabres owner Terry Pegula made a \$112 million donation to fund the college's hockey program's rise to NCAA Division I, including the state-of-the-art Pegula Ice Arena.

Much like HarborCenter, Pegula Ice Arena houses two rinks to accommodate both the college's men's and women's programs. Interactive touch screens can be found throughout the concourse, as well as plenty of homage to past and present teams. Look closely and you'll even find a few nods to the Sabres.

The crowd was certainly on the Sabres' side against the Wild.

"The facilities are unbelievable," Girgensons said. "The locker room and everything was nice. It was definitely fun to play here."

Coming up next

The Sabres are back in action Tuesday at home against the Ottawa Senators. Tickets are still available with puck drop set for 7 p.m.

The Senators will be bringing the big guns to KeyBank Center, with Bobby Ryan, Kyle Turris, Mike Hoffman and Dion Phaneuf among those expected to make the trip. Check back for the morning skate report on Tuesday to find out who will be in the Sabres lineup and tune into the game live on MSG or listen on WGR 550.