



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Jack is Back: Fresh off World Cup, Eichel oozes confidence for second season with the Sabres

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

September 28, 2016

Jack Eichel got an unexpected wake-up call Wednesday morning. His roommate and teammate Sam Reinhart was strumming a guitar in the apartment they share.

Welcome back to Buffalo, Jack.

"He thinks he's an artist but he woke me up," Eichel said.

What song was he playing?

"Ah, he was just strumming the guitar. He doesn't know what he's playing," Eichel said with a casual shrug of his shoulder and a well-timed delivery.

There were more jokes about living with Reinhart, including a reluctant admission that they've been eating out too much. "We should probably work on that," Eichel said. "We need to go do the groceries."

Eichel always has been a confident hockey player but entering his second professional season, with one NHL tour under his belt and a fantastic ride with Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey, he's upped his confidence game.

"You just become more comfortable with things. I think you can say the same thing for both of us," Eichel said, referring to Reinhart. "Year One, there's that little bit of shyness to start the year. I think we both obviously came along and I think for the most part it says a lot about the guys in the room. They made us feel comfortable from Day One and I think that's what allowed us to be successful on the ice and enjoy our time here. I think that's important and for me and Sam it's important we do that for the younger guys."

Wednesday was the first practice for Eichel at Sabres training camp after an exciting, and slightly disappointing, World Cup experience.

Eichel had a goal and an assist in the three round-robin games, including an assist in the final game against Sweden. The dramatic game saw Team North America take a 2-0 lead then a 3-2 advantage after one period. Sweden tied the game in the third to send it to overtime, with North America notching the victory in the three-on-three session.

It became an instant hockey classic.

But Team North America had to wait for the result of the Russia-Finland game to see if it would advance to the semifinals. A 4-3 loss to Russia and giving up the overtime point to Sweden meant the collection of young guns needed help. When Russia defeated Sweden, it was all over for Team North America, and a dynamic collection of hockey players dispersed to their NHL camps.

"It was definitely tough," Eichel said. "You'd like to put the fate in your own hands. You don't want to put the fate in someone else's hands. You want to be able to control your own outcome and your own destiny. I think for a good amount of us we thought we were in after the Sweden game until our coach told us we needed to see how Russia did due to the fact we went to overtime and gave Sweden that one point."

"Looking back on it, it's probably six minutes, eight minutes that cost us in the second period against Russia and you play eight bad minutes in a tournament like that and you're out of the game. Do I think that we deserved to have moved on? Sure I do. I thought we had a great team. But standings-wise, point-wise, we didn't do enough as a team to move on. Unfortunately the fun ride had to come to an end. We were all a little bit bummed but I'm excited to get back to Buffalo. I've been looking forward to this season for a while now. It's great to have one season under your belt. You just expect more of yourself every day."

Expectations are high. They've always been high. And Eichel has usually delivered. Which is why it's easy to forget that Eichel doesn't turn 20 until Oct. 28.

"Still a young man. Young adult," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

The second half of Eichel's rookie season was his best, once he found his pace, once he found a comfort level and the team collectively was able to execute its new system. Bylsma expects Eichel to pick up from that point, to get even better and to make a decision as to what type of player he wants to be.

"We're looking at a guy who has the puck on his stick more than anybody else in the game over those last roughly 40 games," Bylsma said. "I think you're going to see another level to his game. ... The sky's really the limit for where he can go with his game. ... but I also think what's going to be a determining factor is how he wants to play. I think if he hones in on his game and hones in right where he can be with his shot, I think he can be a massive goal scorer. He may turn into more of a playmaker but I think it's really where he decides to go with his game. I think that's going to be the exciting part of what we see this year."

What does Eichel want? If he has personal statistical goals, he's not sharing them with the media. But he does have one goal in particular – to be playing meaningful hockey games in March and April and end the Sabres' playoff drought.

"Obviously there's goals and numbers in the back of your mind but I think for the most part I think we all have the same one and that's make the playoffs," Eichel said. "You could say 'be in the hunt' or whatever but I think we have the guys in the room and I think we all believe in ourselves and we have the team to do it.

"Obviously it's tough. You look at the Eastern Conference and some of the teams in there and how competitive it is but," the goal is to "be in the hunt at the end of the year. Playing games in March and April and keep going. I think that's important for us. That's what this organization wants and that's what we want in the room. I think anything less than that is underachievement this year for us."

Sabres notebook: No first-day jitters as Dmitry Kulikov joins Sabres camp

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

September 28, 2016

There were no nerves for Dmitry Kulikov. New team. New systems. New teammates and coaches.

No problem.

The 25-year-old Russian defenseman was late arriving to Buffalo Sabres camp after playing for Team Russia in the World Cup of Hockey. But in his first practice with his new team, Kulikov was more eager than anxious.

"No not at all," Kulikov said when asked if he was nervous skating with his new teammates for the first time in KeyBank Center Wednesday morning. "Just like another practice. It's good.

"The training camps are the same in all 30 teams I guess. It's just the personnel that's different. As soon as I get to know everyone in the locker room it will be an easy adjustment."

The Sabres traded for Kulikov at the NHL Draft in June, swapping draft picks and sending defenseman Mark Pysyk to the Florida Panthers.

Kulikov spent his first seven NHL seasons with the Panthers, collecting 138 points (28 goals, 110 assists) in 460 career games. More importantly for the Sabres, he's a left-handed shot and a defenseman who likes to hit.

"He's definitely hard to play against because he's looking to hit," said Sabres forward Tyler Ennis. "He's a left-handed shot, which we needed, and I'm looking forward to having him in the lineup. He was a good World Cup player and we're happy to have him."

Kulikov played all four games for Russia in the World Cup of Hockey, losing in the semifinal to Team Canada on Sept. 24.

Although he arrived late to Sabres camp, Kulikov already felt a bit ahead of the curve in terms of being game-ready. He already is game-ready. There's no rust to shake off.

"Having gone through the full camp with Team Russia and playing and practicing with the best players in the NHL, it does help a lot," Kulikov said with a laugh. "There's no secret there. Just feels like I'm more ready, more prepared, more in game shape and sharper on the ice."

His business now is getting to know his teammates and coaches and learning coach Dan Bylsma's system.

"Just needed a little adjustment to come back and hit the reset switch and get right into the training camp," Kulikov said. "First practice is out of the way. I'm learning the system now. A lot of video. Getting to know the guys around the locker room. Mostly just getting to know everything new."

In his first practice with the team he already impressed Bylsma.

"You see Dmitry out there, his commanding presence and skating ability," Bylsma said. He heard a "couple comments that the ability of the D-man to get the puck up to the forwards improved today with Dmitry. That's good to see."

Fighting for one of the open forward spots at camp is second-year pro Evan Rodrigues. The forward, who played with Jack Eichel at Boston University, made his NHL debut at the end of last season. He notched a goal and an assist in two games for the Sabres while scoring 30 points (nine goals, 21 assists) in 72 games with the Rochester Americans.

"The end of the year was obviously good, getting my couple games and scoring my first goal. That was exciting," said the 23-year-old. "I worked a lot on my shot this summer, my speed this summer. Those are areas I think I needed the biggest improvements with. Those are areas I put a lot of emphasis on and I'm excited to show that off."

Two preseason games in and what has Bylsma learned about his team?

"The game we should have won we lost and the game we probably shouldn't have won we won," Bylsma said, noting the first and third periods against the Minnesota Wild Monday at Penn State was "more the type we'd like to play and want to play" while Tuesday's night's win against Ottawa saw the Sabres "on the receiving end for quite a bit of the game.

"You can see the difference in the lineups in preseason in the different games and different matchups," Bylsma said before praising starting goalie Robin Lehner. "The one thing you can draw from the game," Tuesday night, "is if that's the way our goaltender plays for us we're going to have a lot of success. He was commanding in the net. ... He played outstanding in the game."

Bylsma noted that Kulikov could possibly be in Friday's lineup when the Sabres host Toronto at KeyBank Center. Jack Eichel, however, likely will not play this week.

Jack Eichel sets bar high for Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 29, 2016

BUFFALO – Jack Eichel spoke with conviction rarely heard from teenage athletes. After growing together for a season, the talented center said, the Sabres possess the belief and talent to make the playoffs.

“Anything less than that,” Eichel said Wednesday, “is an underachievement this year for us.”

Eichel, 19, just returned from a three-week gig at the World Cup of Hockey. His time with Team North America, a rollicking squad comprised of elite 23-and-under talent, has clearly energized the young star as he begins his second NHL season.

“The games were exciting, and the thing was we were having fun playing and enjoying it,” Eichel said inside KeyBank Center. “That made it that much better.”

Wednesday’s session was Eichel’s first training camp practice this season. He won’t play tonight in St. Catharines, Ontario, against the Toronto Maple Leafs or Friday when the Sabres host their rival, coach Dan Bylsma said.

Eichel looked confident and relaxed during his 12-minute chat with the media, discussing the World Cup, his goals for the upcoming season and joking about his roommate, winger Sam Reinhart. He sounded like a 10-year veteran.

There are, of course, *huge* expectations for him following a terrific 24-goal, 56-point rookie season in which he steadily improved. Just a month before his 20th birthday, he has already become the face of the Sabres.

While Eichel has some personal milestones in mind, he wouldn’t divulge them. Instead, he only spoke about his team goals.

After a strong second half last season, he believes players should “expect more out of ourselves.”

“I think we all have the same (goal), and that’s make the playoffs,” Eichel said. “You can say, ‘Be in the hunt or whatever.’ I think we have the guys in the room, and I think that we all believe in ourselves. We have the team to do it.”

And, quite possibly, an elite center to help drive the team to the postseason for the first time since 2011.

In the final 40 or so games of 2015-16, Bylsma said no NHL player had the puck on his stick more than Eichel, the second overall pick in 2015.

“I think you’re going to see another level to his game and more of a level than you saw at the end of last year,” Bylsma said. “The sky is really the limit for where he can go with his game.”

Bylsma, however, is unsure where that game might go.

“I think he can be a massive goal scorer,” he said. “He may turn into more of a playmaker. But I think it’s really where he decides to go with his game, and I think that’s going to be kind of the exciting part of what we see this year.”

Eichel did well at the World Cup, compiling one goal and two points in three games.

There had never been a squad assembled like Team North America, whose exciting, fast brand of hockey wowed fans, becoming the talk of hockey.

“It’s been a hit,” Eichel said of the tournament. “Looking at the way the tournament has been received, there’s been a lot of buzz around it, which is great. I think, as a league, we definitely want to keep doing that.”

Still, based on recent reports, the radical idea of a young all-star team could be one-and-done. The country-on-country format might return in 2020.

"It was something that was definitely in the back of our minds that the coach had talked about, you have a chance to be a part of hockey history just playing on this team," Eichel said.

North America's thrilling 4-3 overtime win against Sweden last Wednesday is already being called an international classic. The team, which Eichel said quickly grew close off the ice, went 2-1, narrowly missing a chance to advance.

"For the most part, (coach Todd McLellan) was giving us the reigns to go out there and play," Eichel said. "It was really fun. We were really enjoying playing hockey and just everything."

Eichel enjoyed Wednesday's practice, skating with Reinhart and Matt Moulson, his old roommate. He already went through a short training camp and exhibition schedule before the World Cup started, so he's prepared for another camp.

"Now you're stepping into camp, you've already played six real high-end games against the world's best," Eichel said. "You're ready to get going and hit the ground running. You're in game shape."

Dmitry Kulikov finally joins Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
September 29, 2016

BUFFALO – Coach Dan Bylsma noticed it right away. So did some others on the ice for Wednesday's practice, the Sabres' first training camp session with defenseman Dmitry Kulikov.

"A couple comments on the D-man (being) able to get the puck up to the forwards with Dmitry," Bylsma said inside KeyBank Center. "It's good to see."

The Sabres acquired Kulikov from the Florida Panthers on June 25 for a slew of reasons, including his strong ability to move the puck.

Kulikov, 25, just spent three weeks with Team Russia at the World Cup of Hockey. He was joined Wednesday by center Jack Eichel, who also participated in the tournament.

"The skill level of our team spiked today with both those guys being on the ice," Bylsma said.

With defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen still unsigned and out of camp, Kulikov, who could be a first-pair defender, mostly practiced with Zach Bogosian.

"It hasn't been long since the World Cup," Kulikov said. "I just needed a little adjustment to come back and hit the reset switch and get ready for training camp. First practice is out of the way, I'm learning the system, video, getting to know the guys here in the locker room."

Like Eichel, Kulikov relished his World Cup experience.

"It was amazing, if one word could describe everything," he said. "You never dream that a tournament like that would be played again. When ... they announced the teams and I was on the roster, I was thrilled. Having that experience now, especially before the season, coming into a new team, I think it's going to give me more confidence and boost my play throughout the season."

Kulikov will sit tonight when the Sabres play the Toronto Maple Leafs in St. Catharines, Ontario, their third preseason game, Bylsma said. He could play Friday when the Sabres host the Leafs.

The Sabres traded defenseman Mark Pysyk and swapped draft picks for Kulikov.

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Bylsma on Sabres goalie Robin Lehner, who looked sharp while stopping 37 shots in Tuesday's 3-2 overtime win against the Ottawa Senators: "The one thing you can draw from the game (Tuesday), I think if that's the way our goaltender can play ... we're going to have a lot of success. He was commanding in the net."

Lehner underwent season-ending ankle surgery in late March and spent the summer rehabbing and losing weight. He looked quicker Tuesday than last season, his first with the Sabres.

Sabres' Jack Eichel happy to be part of history at World Cup of Hockey

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

September 29, 2016

BUFFALO – There had never been a squad assembled like Jack Eichel's Team North America, the collection of 23-and-under talent that wowed at the World Cup with its exciting, fast brand of hockey.

"It's been a hit," Eichel said this afternoon following his first practice with the Sabres. "Looking at the way the tournament has been received, there's been a lot of buzz around it, which is great. I think, as a league, we definitely want to keep doing that."

Still, based on recent reports, the radical idea of a young all-star team could be one-and-done at the World Cup. The country-on-country format might return in 2020.

"It was something that was definitely in the back of our minds that the coach had talked about, you have a chance to be a part of hockey history just playing on this team," Eichel said.

Eichel smiled and spoke enthusiastically about tournament. The talented center clearly had a blast for three weeks on and off the ice.

"The games were exciting, and the thing was we were having fun playing and enjoying it," Eichel said. "That made it that much better."

North America's thrilling 4-3 overtime win against Sweden last week is already being called an international classic. The team went 2-1, narrowly missing a chance to advance.

"For the most part, (coach Todd McLellan) was giving us the reigns to go out there and play," Eichel said. "It was really fun. We were really enjoying playing hockey and just everything."

Eichel's happy to be back for his second NHL season. He looked relaxed during his 12-minute chat with the media inside KeyBank Center, discussing his goals for the upcoming season and joking.

"There's goals and numbers in the back of your mind," Eichel said of his personal stats. "I think for the most part ... we all have the same one, and that's make the playoffs. You can say, 'Be in the hunt or whatever.' I think we have the guys in the room, and I think that we all believes in ourselves. We have the team to do it."

Eichel, 19, won't play in Thursday or Friday against the Toronto Maple Leafs, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. The Sabres also have three preseason games next week.

Whenever he debuts, Eichel will be ready.

"Now you're stepping into camp, you've already played six real high-end games against the world's best," Eichel said. "You're ready to get going and hit the ground running. You're in game shape."

Check back later for more on Eichel, who skated with roommate Sam Reinhart and Matt Moulson (his former roommate) today.

Sabres defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, a World Cup participant with Russia, also practiced for the first time today. Kulikov, a June 25 acquisition from the Florida Panthers, could play Friday, Bylsma said.

The tournament was also a memorable experience for Kulikov.

"It was amazing, if one word could describe everything," he said. "You never dream that a tournament like that would be played again and when we played again and they announced the teams and I was on the roster, I was thrilled. Having that experience now, especially before the season, coming into a new team, I think it's going to give me more confidence and boost my play throughout the season."

JW: Half a decade in the rearview

WGR 550

September 28, 2016

Hockey is back. But this time, like, really.

The last five years of watching the Buffalo Sabres have been unlike any others in my sports life. Before we all embark on the 2016-17 let's take a moment to note just how different this season is, in its normalcy.

For those of you that checked out for a while, here's what you missed:

2011-2012: After a somewhat slow start to the season (that included a pair of wins in Europe) the Sabres close 18-8-6 in their final 32 games. This, is affectionately referred to as a heroic run to ___ place. In 2012, the Sabres had that run and fell short. Fun fact - JASON POMINVILLE SCORED 73 POINTS. It's a season to forget. The team added Grigorenko and Girgensons in the draft.

2012-2013 - A lockout! Dammit! Wait the lockout is over?! Ok let's go baby. This team is going back to the playoffs! Just kidding they can't score and they're going to fire Lindy Ruff. Ron Rolston came in and won 8 games in April. There is talk of taking that momentum into the following season. The Sabres draft Ristolainen and Zadorov.

2013-2014 - Rolston's Sabres start off 4-74 or something insane like that. He gets fired and the true purge begins. Fresh off that 2013 hero run to 9th, fans approach with a "Let's stop doing those and finish at the bottom. Maybe we'll draft a guy named Sam?". This played out with zero drama. The Sabres finish in dead last and draft Sam Reinhart.

2014-2015 - The appetizer 30th place finish is a distant memory... the main course in 2014-15 is so memorable we can probably recall more moments from that season than any of the last 8 combined. It worked. It was stressful. Sabres finish 30th and draft Jack Eichel. There's so much to say about that year, but so little time. Someone should open a museum to commemorate it. How will we explain to the next generation of fans just how much we love Jonathan Toews, Cam Atkinson, MacKenzie Skapski, and the broken stick. These important players can never leave our hearts. I'm serious. Museum.

2015-2016: Welcome to the team that couldn't fail. A year off a hellaciously bad 54 point season, any improvement was going to be viewed as a good thing. The over-under for the season was in the neighborhood of 76.5 and if you bet that you're a smart cookie. While the team failed to ever contend for a playoff spot, the interest was there for me and for many to watch them go through a full year of building.

2016-2017: "Sharpen Your Swords" opens the year as the team slogan. It's fitting for a two reasons:

1. The team is named after swords. (Snarky comment about the goal song that I won't make cause the song they use is fine)
2. Now, things matter. Sharpen your pitchforks wouldn't really fit, but it's kinda the idea.

It's been a long time since the Sabres were any good. It's almost been nearly as long since anyone expected them to be any good. This year, allow me to turn the "sword" slogan into a pitchfork thing and you get the idea. I'm not thinking of demanding action if the team falls short of the playoffs. Not yet. That said, enough time has elapsed to expect an appearance in the playoffs, or at least a real push toward that.

When was the last time you watched the team with an eye on the right end of the standings? I'll tell you the answer. It was March of 2012. The Sabres beat Washington to jump in to 8th place in the East. They then closed out 1-3-1 and missed. It's been almost five years since the playoffs were even an idea for this team. Almost 5 years since you paced watching a game (Yes of course we all freaked out during the McEichel race but you know what I mean). Much of it has been by design, and I have LOVED that design.

This team has been built up. The talent they have, is the talent they have. There were other goalies, other defensemen, other trades to make along the way. If they're not good enough on the back end, then that's on the team for the way they're constructed. Evaluation, in earnest, begins now.

GM Tim Murray occasionally talks about the criticism that he sees on twitter. He ain't seen nothing yet.

Anyone looking to go at Murray can bring up some aggressive trades for Kane and Lehner. There's little else to even bother with. Now, the GM gets judged on the full team he has iced.

This season there is no talk of growing or tanking. This season is about one thing - winning.

Gone are the excuses about tight purse-strings.

Gone are the excuses that no one wants to come here.

Win games.

Win shootouts.

Play well in 3-on-3.

Put Jack Eichel on the off-wing.

Show us your goaltender is worth that #1 draft pick you traded.

Show us that Kulikov is the right addition to your left-right blue line.

The previous four seasons were a necessary purge of assets and binge of acquisitions.

Now, we begin. Sharpen your swords. Get wins, get in, and let's go.

It's about time.

Sabres' Eichel is very clear on where this team should be

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

September 28, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Jack Eichel took part in his first team practice of Training Camp as did new defenseman Dmitry Kulikov. It doesn't sound like Eichel will play Thursday or Friday, but it seems a strong possibility that Kulikov will play Friday.

Eichel said he felt rested and was ready to go on Wednesday. He's also very clear on where the team goals should be this year, "We all have the same one and that's make the playoffs. You could say be in the hunt, but we have the guys in the room and I think that we all believe in ourselves and we have the team to do it." Eichel added, "Be in the hunt at the end of the year. Playing games in March and April and keep going. That's important for us. That's what this organization wants and that's what we want in the room, so anything less than that is underachievement for us."

Many players come to camp to work the kinks out. Eichel doesn't have to do that and he's glad, "It was nice and you start the season a little bit earlier and I think it was great. Now you're stepping into camp and you've already played six real high end games against the World's best and you're ready to get going and hit the ground running."

As Eichel comes in from the World Cup, he has to get refocused. He said that will not be a problem, "Unfortunately the fun ride had to come to an end. We were all a little bit bummed, but I'm definitely excited to get back to Buffalo. I've been looking forward to the season for a while now and I expect more out of myself every day."

As far as the World Cup itself, Eichel felt it was a once in a lifetime experience, "It was fun, but I really enjoyed getting to know the guys. It was a really good group and we came together so quickly, so just the time and getting to spend it with them was one of the best parts."

Last season Eichel roomed with Sam Reinhart on the road. This season they are roommates here in Buffalo too. Reinhart seems like the serious guy while Eichel seems like the fun loving guy. Jack said, he likes hanging out with his new friend, "It works for a lot of reasons. He's obviously a great kid, he's easy to live with. We were together all the time on the road last year even when we were in Buffalo. I spent some time at his place last year."

"It's something we talked about very briefly, it was like, 'Hey you want to live together' then it was 'Hey do you want to find a place' and we found a place the next day and it's been great so far."

I wanted to know who does the cooking and Eichel admitted that hasn't happened yet, "We've eaten out a lot. We should probably work on that, we need to go do the groceries and get a grill."

Eichel was centering Eichel and Matt Moulson on Wednesday while Derek Grant was between Evander Kane and Alex Nylander.

Buffalo travels to St. Catharines Thursday to play the Leafs.

Eichel expects Sabres to make the playoffs

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 28, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. - Jack's back and it doesn't look like he has missed a beat.

On Wednesday, Buffalo Sabres forward Jack Eichel joined his teammates for practice at Key Bank Center, just hours after their first win of the preseason.

Eichel was one of the four Sabres players that participated in the World Cup of Hockey. He returned to Buffalo last week after Team North America was eliminated and believes he now has a leg up on the competition.

"I think I was great. Now you're stepping into camp and you've already played six real high end games against the world's best," Eichel said. "You're in game shape, you know I feel good on the ice now so it's really nice."

The 19-year-old forward said he wished the tournament would've went differently but he knows now it's time to focus on the Sabres.

"I'm definitely excited to get back to Buffalo. I've been looking forward to this season for a while now and it's great to have one under your belt and come in here and expect more out of yourself everyday. It's a great group and we're all excited."

Last year, Eichel lived up to the high expectations, finishing with 56 points (24G,32A) during his rookie campaign. This season, he doesn't have any statistical goals, at least he says he doesn't, but he does think he'll continue to grow as a player.

"You're more comfortable. As you do something more and as you get some experience under your belt and you feel more comfortable with things and confident."

But what about from a team standpoint? Does Eichel think this roster is good enough to make the playoffs? Well, that's certainly his goal.

"(We want to) be in the hunt at the end of year. Playing games in March and April and keep going. I think that's important for us and I think that's what this organization wants and that's what we want in the room. I think anything less than that is an underachievement."

Eichel will not play in either of the Sabres next two preseason games. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said there's no rush to get Eichel back in the lineup.

Sabres Top 20 Talents in 2016: No. 13 RW Justin Bailey

By Matt Bove

WKBW

September 28, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Buffalo Sabres training camp is underway and the regular season is just weeks away. Heading into this year it's playoffs or bust for most fans, but is the roster talented enough for the Sabres to end its five year playoff drought?

As the regular season draws near, 7ABC will take a closer look at the training camp roster and put together our list of the "Top 20 Talents."

Here's the criteria on how the rankings will be established:

-Overall skill level

-Past performance

-Age, improving/declining ability

-Potential

On to the countdown:

No. 13 RW – Justin Bailey

Why He's Here

When putting together this list I debated whether to put Bailey at 13 and (Hudson) Fasching at 14 or vice versa. Bailey's play during the Sabres Prospects Challenge made my decision a little easier. He dominated in the only game he played against the Boston Bruins prospects. The 21-year-old spent most of last season in Rochester, finishing with 45 points in 70 games. The Western New York native got a small taste of NHL action towards the end of last season – playing eight games with the Sabres.

2016 Outlook

Where will Bailey end up? Three months ago I would've said that Bailey was the front runner among the young prospects to end up making the Sabres roster. Since, he hasn't done anything wrong, but some other prospects have really stepped up. At the end of the day, Bailey is still 6'3" and can fly down the ice. That size and speed are hard to find. He's still young and one or two more years in Rochester could pay dividends -- but a permanent spot with the Sabres could do a lot for Bailey's confidence.

My prediction

I think Bailey, Hudson Fasching, Derek Grant and Nick Baptiste are the front-runners when it comes to the young guys trying to make the roster. The last few weeks Baptiste has looked great but I think the Sabres would still lean towards Bailey or Fasching because of their size. Both showed flashes during their stints in Buffalo last season and can provide some physicality. Even if Bailey isn't on the Sabres opening night roster we will see him in blue and gold at some point this season and wonder -- why hasn't he been here all along?

Jack Eichel 'in game shape' for Sabres

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

September 28, 2016

BUFFALO -- Center Jack Eichel returned to Buffalo Sabres practice Wednesday ready to take what he learned playing for Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey 2016 into his second NHL season.

Team North America captivated fans with its up-tempo brand of hockey but ultimately fell short. Despite defeating Team Sweden 4-3 in overtime in its final preliminary-round game, one of the most entertaining of the tournament, and finishing 2-1-0, it failed to advance to the semifinals.

"Unfortunately, the fun ride had to come to an end and we're all a little bit bummed," Eichel said, "but I'm definitely very excited to get back to Buffalo and I've been looking forward to this season for a while now, and it's great to have one under your belt to come in here and you expect more out of yourself every day. It's a great group, and we're all excited for the season."

Eichel rejoins the Sabres after a strong rookie season when he had 56 points (24 goals, 32 assists). He was Buffalo's top goal-scorer and second in points to center Ryan O'Reilly, and second among rookie scorers to Chicago Blackhawks left wing Artemi Panarin (77 points).

Playing in the World Cup proved to be terrific preparation for the rigors of an 82-game NHL schedule.

"I think it was great," said Eichel, who had a goal and an assist in three games at the tournament. "Now you're stepping into camp and you've already played six real high-end games against the world's best and you're ready to get going and hit the ground running. I think that you're in game shape and you feel good; I feel good on the ice now. It's really nice."

Eichel said Team North America, which was comprised of players 23 or younger from the United States and Canada, let its opportunity to advance to the semifinals slip away during a brief stretch in its second preliminary-round game.

"It was obviously not the outcome that our team wanted, but looking back on it, it's hockey history, so it's great to be a part of it," Eichel, 19, said. "Looking back on it, it's probably six minutes, eight minutes in the tournament that cost us, in that second period against Russia (a 4-3 loss on Sept. 19), and you play eight bad minutes in a tournament like that and you're out after three games."

The Sabres are looking to end a five-season playoff drought, and how Eichel and fellow second-year forward Sam Reinhart each progresses in his development may determine that.

"Last year, I feel like I was dipping my toes in a little bit, a little nervous, I mean, I hadn't played in the NHL before," Eichel said. "Coming back after the World Cup, you just played against the world's best. You come back to training camp and, I think for myself, Year Two, you've got to expect a lot more out of yourself. Every day you come to the rink, be a leader, be a leader in the locker room, be a leader on the ice, be better in practice, and I think for our group, we're all excited."

"Last year, we had a lot of new faces coming in, a lot of different bodies, people didn't know each other that well. This year we come in, I mean, we came together really quickly as a team last year, and I think the second half of the year definitely showed that. We come together off the ice and that translates to on the ice. ... I think that for us, training camp, we want to get better every day and figure out our identity again. Just hit the ground running in Game 1 of the season and I think as a group we have to expect more out of ourselves."

Eichel, Kulikov Return To Practice For Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

September 28, 2016

Practice was broken into two groups for the Sabres at KeyBank Center on Wednesday morning, and both featured players returning from the World Cup of Hockey. You had Dmitry Kulikov in the first session, participating in his first practice as a Sabre, and Jack Eichel in the second.

"The skill level of our team spiked today with both those guys on the ice," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Jack's Jack, but to see Dmitry out there, his commanding presence, his skating ability ... the ability of the D-men to get the puck up to the forwards improved today with Dmitry. It's good to see."

Both are returning from strong performances at the World Cup. Kulikov was relied upon heavily for Team Russia, which made it to the semifinal against Canada, while Eichel was the second-line center on Team North America.

North America's tournament ended prematurely, failing to advance beyond the preliminary round due to their head-to-head tiebreaker with Russia. Eichel revealed Wednesday that he and his teammates actually thought their overtime goal to end a thriller in their finale against Sweden had propelled them to the Semifinal, only to realize afterward that their fate was actually out of their hands.

Still, Eichel seemed just as grateful for the experience of playing for North America as most fans were for being able to watch North America play. It was a rare opportunity for him to play with Canadian stars that will revert to being his rivals on the international stage, and he said the team became close very quickly. They were given the reigns to play fast and loose and they had fun doing it.

"It was something that was definitely in the back of our minds throughout the tournament that the coach had talked about," Eichel said. "You know, you have a chance to be a part of hockey history just playing on this team. We don't know where it's gonna be, we don't know where this tournaments gonna be, so pretty special for us to do that."

Bylsma said he believes that Eichel has returned from the World Cup a more confident player, having had success while honing his skills in six games against the best competition in the world. What's next for Eichel as he begins his second professional season remains to be seen, but his coach thinks it's up to him.

"The sky is really the limit for where he can go with his game," Bylsma said. "If he hones in on his game and hones in on where he can be with his shot, I think he can be a massive goal scorer. He may turn into a playmaker, but I think it's really more where he decides to go with his game. I think that's gonna be kind of the exciting part about what we see this year."

For Eichel, the next step in year two is to become an even better leader on and off the ice, which is asking a lot for any 20-year-old. But he has high expectations for himself, and so do the Sabres coming off a strong second half of last season.

"I think there are numbers and goals in the back of your mind but I think, for the most part, we all have the same one," Eichel said. "Make the playoffs. You can say make the hunt or whatever; I think we have the guys in the room and I think that we all believe in ourselves. We have the team to do it."

Part of that equation will be Kulikov, who was acquired from the Florida Panthers in July. He called his experience at the World Cup "amazing," and has spent the last few days resting off the ice while watching film and learning his new team's systems.

"Having gone through a full camp with team Russia and playing and practicing with the best players in the NHL, it does help a lot and there's no secret there," Kulikov said. "It just feels like I'm more ready, more prepared, more into game shape and sharper on the ice."

You might not have to wait much longer to see Kulikov make his Sabres debut. Bylsma said the defenseman might play against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday night. Eichel, at this point, is not expected to play in either of the team's two upcoming games against Toronto on Thursday and Friday.

Jack and Sam, linemates and roommates

Eichel also spoke Wednesday about his new living arrangement with Sam Reinhart, which he said was decided upon rather quickly on a whim. Eichel and Reinhart were roommates on the road last season and were linemates again at practice on Wednesday along with Eichel's former housemate, Matt Moulson.

Eichel detailed his morning with Reinhart on Wednesday.

"I woke up to him this morning playing guitar on the couch downstairs," he said. "He thinks he's an artist."

Apparently, Reinhart is no Ryan O'Reilly with the strings.

"He's just strumming the thing," Eichel said. "He doesn't know what he's playing."

Wednesday's practice

First group:

63 Tyler Ennis - 22 Johan Larsson - 21 Kyle Okposo
82 Marcus Foligno - 19 Cal O'Reilly - 12 Brian Gionta
10 Cole Schneider - 72 Jean Dupuy - 56 Justin Bailey
71 Evan Rodrigues - 48 William Carrier - 85 Daniel Muzito-Bagenda
4 Josh Gorges - 34 Casey Nelson
77 Dmitry Kulikov - 47 Zach Bogosian
54 Brycen Martin - 81 Mac Bennett
31 Anders Nilsson
35 Linus Ullmark

Second group:

26 Matt Moulson - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
9 Evander Kane - 27 Derek Grant - 70 Alexander Nylander
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 43 Daniel Catenacci - 52 Hudson Fasching
73 Nicholas Baptiste - 74 Vaclav Karabacek - 42 Justin Kea
29 Jake McCabe - 6 Cody Franson
45 Brendan Guhle - 41 Justin Falk
64 Paul Geiger - 54 Brycen Martin
40 Robin Lehner
33 Jason Kasdorf