



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres' high hopes take a big hit with Eichel injury

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 12, 2016

Eight minutes.

That's how far away a somber Dan Bylsma said the Buffalo Sabres were from the end of practice Wednesday morning in KeyBank Center. It might turn into eight minutes that define their season before it even started.

The Sabres' coach tried to put on a brave face with reporters after enduring the sight of Jack Eichel going down in a heap on the ice and then hobbling off to the dressing room. But he knew. Everyone in the room did too.

Eichel is the face of the franchise and you're not going to see him for at least a month. I wouldn't be surprised if it's quite a bit more than that. High-ankle sprains are like Kryptonite to hockey players.

Losing Eichel is the nightmare scenario for the Sabres, close to Armageddon for their playoff hopes before the puck is dropped Thursday against Montreal. If Eichel misses more than 20 of the 82 games, you can forget about this team having any shot at competing for a playoff berth this season.

The margin for error is small enough as it is. There's no way this club can withstand that kind of loss. Cross your fingers and toes that he's back before Thanksgiving.

The scene seemed so innocuous. Then came the sound. It was just like a similarly routine morning a few years ago when Lindy Ruff suddenly was drilled to the ice during practice and his howls filled the empty arena. Same with Eichel.

He screamed and you looked up and saw him writhing on the ice, holding what looked like his left knee or ankle after a harmless collision with Zemgus Girgensons during a power-play drill. It was hard to believe what your eyes were telling you because Eichel virtually never took a hard hit his entire rookie season. He missed one game, and that was because of food poisoning.

Most of the players encircled Eichel. Trainers came on to the ice. He skated off but only by putting all his weight on his right leg until he hopped down the tunnel and into the dressing room.

Bylsma said he knew the players were shocked right away. The arena fell quiet for the final couple of minutes of practice. No chatter, not much hard skating.

"I think we all felt it on the ice," Bylsma said. "We were having a good practice, a lot of jump and enthusiasm in practice and that happened and took the wind out of the arena a little bit and the wind out of the guys a little bit. At that point in time you could probably slap them in the face to say, 'snap out of it' but everyone's thoughts are with the injury and with the extent of it."

At the time reporters were talking to the team, players were all in hopeful mode. It was the only way to be. They had to know the season had just taken a dark turn.

The Sabres have eight games in October and have six in November by Nov. 11, which would be four weeks without Eichel. That's 14 games off the schedule and seems like it would be wildly optimistic for Eichel to return in that span, so let's forge further into it.

Buffalo has 14 games in November, which would mean Eichel would miss 22 games if he were out seven weeks. Add another six games in early December for a total of 28 if Eichel is out two months (eight weeks).

Bylsma tried to say injuries happen and this one stood out more because it was at the beginning of the season. It was more like he was trying to convince himself. For this to happen the day before the opener is plain brutal.

Bylsma tried to say the Sabres are not just Eichel or for that matter Ryan O'Reilly, in another example he used. That's how he's going to have to sell it. But Eichel is the guy on this team. He sells tickets and jerseys. He's the one every out-of-town reporter comes to talk to. He's the one who was on Team North America, the talk of the World Cup.

You hear high-ankle sprain and you think Robin Lehner, who missed three months last year when he suffered the injury in the second period of the opener against Ottawa. But Lehner is a goalie, a much tougher recovery to make, and was overweight at the start of the season.

Sidney Crosby suffered the injury with a feet-first slide into the boards in 2008. He missed 50 days, which in terms of this year's Sabres schedule would put Eichel at 22-25 games.

When Connor McDavid went down in Edmonton last year with his collarbone injury, he was out three months and the Oilers were toast. Lo and behold, the Sabres are in Edmonton on Sunday for what is a nationally televised game in Canada, the second game ever in the Oilers' new Rogers Place. And like the meeting that McDavid missed last year in Rexall Place, there will now be no McEichel matchup in Edmonton for the second straight year.

This is a loss for the NHL at large and it has not been a good week on the injury front.

Crosby is out with a concussion. Boston announced Patrice Bergeron will not start the season due to a lower-body injury. Florida's Jonathan Huberdeau is sidelined 3-4 months after a skate lacerated his leg during the final exhibition game. Pittsburgh goalie Matt Murray is dealing with a broken hand suffered during the World Cup.

The Sabres thought they were catching a big break early in the day when they learned Montreal goalie Carey Price won't make the trip here for the opener due to the flu. But Kyle Okposo is still out, O'Reilly's balky back might prevent him from taking faceoffs and now there's Eichel.

Bylsma was happy to get the return of three defensemen this week in injured Dmitry Kulikov and Zach Bogosian and now-signed Rasmus Ristolainen. He was taking the glass is half-full approach. He has to. Pondering the other side, for a franchise hoping to make real strides this year, had to be too much to bear.

Without injured Eichel, Sabres have big challenge awaiting

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
October 12, 2016

It seemed so innocent. Jack Eichel was merely turning to get a loose puck.

Now all heck has broken loose. How quickly the Sabres calm things down could determine the 2016-17 season – and it hasn't even started yet.

Eichel suffered a high-ankle sprain Wednesday, troubling news that could easily keep the star out until Thanksgiving. Buffalo had built its forward depth to a point where it could compete for the playoffs, but the absence of Eichel is a blow of the highest magnitude.

The worst part is he won't be the only impact forward sidelined Thursday when Montreal visits KeyBank Center.

Right wing Kyle Okposo, the marquee summer signing, will sit out the season opener with a bruised knee. Ryan O'Reilly also could miss the game with an ailment to his back and midsection. Even if the center plays, he'll be limited.

The Sabres hoped the most unforgettable noise in their arena this week would be the applause of fans welcoming them back. Instead, it'll be Eichel yelling in agony.

"You kind of felt right away that it wasn't that good," goaltender Anders Nilsson said. "You could see he was in a lot of pain."

The Sabres were nearing the end of their power-play drills when Eichel went down in front of the net. He turned to get the puck, but his left skate didn't. As he fell to the ice and writhed in pain, all other noise in the arena ceased. Stunned teammates could only stare or wave for an athletic trainer.

"It's Jack Eichel, so it's tough," left wing Marcus Foligno said. "You never want to see that happen to anyone, but especially a player who means so much to your team."

With Eichel unable to put weight on his left leg, two teammates helped him off the ice. The rest of the players encircled the 19-year-old and slowly glided along with him.

They hope it wasn't a funeral procession for their season.

"This just feels a little bit different because it's the cusp and the eve of starting a new season, one we're all looking forward to," coach Dan Bylsma said. "It kind of takes a little chunk out of the team in that situation. It's one we're going to have to deal with whatever the extent of the injury is.

"Our team is not just Jack Eichel. It's not just Ryan O'Reilly. It's not just one player."

This is, however, the one player the Sabres could least afford to be without. He was expected to lead the team in points during his second season. He's also the team's identity. Buffalo could stack up with any NHL team down the middle with Eichel and O'Reilly in the lineup.

When the Sabres take the ice for the opener, their centers could be Derek Grant, Johan Larsson, Zemgus Girgensons and a minor-league call-up. It's also possible the Sabres shift Sam Reinhart from right wing to center, the position he played in junior hockey. That would allow right wing prospect Hudson Fasching to move up the roster.

No matter the lineup, it's not the same without Eichel.

"That's a huge piece of the team," Foligno said. "It's unfortunate right before the regular season kicks off. You want to start off on the right foot."

It's the left foot that's bothering Eichel. It typically takes 45 days for hockey players to recover from a high-ankle sprain, according to multiple medical studies, so that would leave Eichel sidelined through Nov. 25. He would miss 20 games, essentially one-quarter of the season.

The Sabres did not give an initial timeline in announcing the diagnosis. Goaltender Robin Lehner suffered a high-ankle sprain last year and missed 10 weeks, then needed season-ending surgery after the injury flared up when he returned.

Since goaltenders use their ankles differently than forwards, examples involving skaters could be more accurate:

*Kyle Palmieri suffered a high-ankle sprain in September 2014. Anaheim initially said he could miss two weeks, but he missed two months.

*Pittsburgh's Sidney Crosby suffered a high-ankle sprain Jan. 18, 2008. He returned March 4 after missing six weeks.

*Dallas' Trevor Daley suffered the injury Dec. 5, 2013. He missed four weeks, returning Jan. 6, 2014.

*Toronto's Colby Armstrong left a game Oct. 26, 2010, with a high-ankle sprain. He didn't play again until Dec. 4, a span of six weeks.

Eichel has never missed any games because of injury, so how well he heals is unknown. What is known is the Sabres will miss him.

"It's just an unlucky incident," Nilsson said. "Hopefully, it's not too bad, but it sure didn't look that good."

Sabres Notebook: Price out for Habs; Bylsma believes in D

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 12, 2016

Like the Sabres, Montreal will open the season without its best player. Carey Price is only sick, however, not injured.

The goaltender has the flu and will miss Thursday's opener in KeyBank Center. Price, who won the Hart Trophy as the NHL's most valuable player two seasons ago, did not travel to Buffalo with the Canadiens.

"He caught a nasty bug, as we're seeing now," coach Michel Therrien said Wednesday in Montreal. "It's too bad, but there's nothing we can do about it. That's hockey. There will be setbacks."

It appeared the absence of Price would be a season-welcoming gift to the Sabres, but they lost Jack Eichel to a high-ankle sprain shortly after Montreal's announcement. Buffalo right wing Kyle Okposo (bruised knee) will also sit out, while center Ryan O'Reilly (back, midsection) is doubtful.

Price missed nearly all of last season with a knee injury, but he went 10-2 with a .934 save percentage before getting hurt. Al Montoya will start for the Canadiens. He is 3-0-2 with a .929 save percentage in five appearances against the Sabres. He signed with the Canadiens this summer after spending the previous two seasons in Florida.

"The start was going to come sooner or later, but it's here now and I'm excited," Montoya said in Montreal. "I'm ready for it. This is what I've been preparing for. I'm looking forward to stepping onto the ice with this group."

Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner is 2-2-3 in eight appearances against the Habs with a .916 save percentage.

With depleted forward lines, the Sabres will put extra emphasis on their defense corps. Coach Dan Bylsma believes the group – Rasmus Ristolainen, Zach Bogosian, Dmitry Kulikov, Jake McCabe, Josh Gorges and Cody Franson – is up for the challenge.

"I think you have guys and pairs that can play against anybody in the league, through our top five guys especially, and I think that's a lot different than we had last year," Bylsma said.

The Sabres did not do any five-on-five drills Wednesday, so the defense pairs were unclear. Bylsma hinted the duos could be Gorges-Ristolainen, McCabe-Bogosian and Franson-Kulikov.

"I think any one of those pairs could be out on the ice against the top lines and you're not going to be saying, 'Get them off the ice,'" Bylsma said.

The coach plans to use his pairs more evenly this season. Ristolainen, who returned to practice after signing a six-year, \$32.4 million contract, was 10th in the NHL in ice time last year at 25:16 per game. Bylsma doesn't want a repeat.

"I don't anticipate him playing 30 minutes a night for us," the coach said. "I think it took its toll on him as the year went on. I don't want to say he's going to be used in a lesser role, but we don't need to lean on him for 30 minutes a night and don't want to lean on him for 30 minutes a night."

The Sabres will have a party in the plaza prior to puck drop. The festivities, which start at 5 p.m., will feature DJ Kool performing the Sabres' goal song, "Let Me Clear My Throat." ... This will be the Sabres' 46th season opener. They are 24-17-4, including 17-8-4 at home. ... The 23 players on the Sabres' opening-day roster have combined to play 6,822 NHL games. That's 908 more than last year's roster.

Jack Eichel's ankle injury rocks Sabres before season opener

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 12, 2016

BUFFALO – The loud thud center Jack Eichel made crashing to the ice broke through the din that accompanied the Sabres' final preseason practice.

It was approaching 11:30 a.m. Wednesday, the eve of the season opener, and coach Dan Bylsma wanted another 10 minutes, maybe less, from his players before they showered and headed to the team's annual kickoff luncheon.

Then, suddenly, Eichel's left leg buckled after he lifted Zemgus Girgensons' stick during a power play drill, and he fell awkwardly, suffering a high ankle sprain, one of hockey's dreaded injuries.

The lively session inside KeyBank Center became eerily silent as the shocking scene unfolded.

Eichel writhed in pain before receiving attention. He was eventually helped off the ice without putting any pressure on his left leg.

Talk about a nightmare. Under the best-case scenario, Eichel, 19, will probably be out until mid- or late November or early December. High ankle sprains are notoriously tough to overcome.

"I think we all felt it on the ice," Bylsma said of Eichel's fall. "We were having a good practice, a lot of jump and enthusiasm in practice, and that happened. It took the wind out of the arena a little bit and the wind out of the guys a little bit.

"That point in time, you could probably slap them in the face to say, 'Snap out of it.' But everyone's thoughts are with the injury and with the extent of it. We'll all deal with it."

Eichel's so popular and talented his presence has already recharged the franchise and its rabid fan base. Optimism was brimming he would help lead the upstart Sabres to their first playoff appearance since 2010-11.

Tonight's season opener against the Montreal Canadiens won't be the same without the 2015 second overall pick.

The Sabres offered no timetable for Eichel's return in announcing the injury Wednesday afternoon. TSN's Bob McKenzie, however, reported the team anticipates he will miss four to six weeks or longer.

The Sabres play 14 games in the first four weeks and 20 contests in the first six weeks.

Recovering from a high ankle sprain can often be long and arduous.

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner suffered one on opening night a year ago, an injury that sidelined him three months and dogged him until he had season-ending surgery on his right ankle in late March.

Before Wednesday's injury was announced, Bylsma wouldn't compare Eichel to Lehner.

"We're not going to jump to conclusions just yet," he said.

Eichel, of course, is a potential superstar. He scored 24 goals and 56 points in 81 games during a rookie season in which he consistently improved and wowed fans with his dynamic talents.

"That's a huge piece of the team," Sabres winger Marcus Foligno said. "That's just unfortunate right before the regular season kicks off."

The 6-foot-2, 196-pound Eichel showcased strong durability as a rookie. Despite playing more than 19 minutes a game and constantly possessing the puck, Eichel rarely endured a notable hit thanks to his speed and smarts. He missed only one game because of the flu.

Bylsma said Eichel's injury is different than, say, the broken foot center Ryan O'Reilly suffered in the middle of last season.

"This just feels a little bit different because it's a cusp, an eve of starting a new season, one I think we're all looking forward to," Bylsma said. "I think that's really why it takes the wind out of the sails out of the arena today. We're 10 minutes away, maybe less than that, we're eight minutes away from practice being over and getting ready for the game tomorrow.

"That happens, it takes a little chunk out of the team, the situation. It's one we're going to have to deal with whatever the extent of the situation is. Our team is not just Jack Eichel, it's not just Ryan O'Reilly, it's not just one player."

Two weeks ago, when Eichel returned from the World Cup of Hockey, he spoke confidently and passionately, saying the Sabres possessed the talent to make the playoffs.

"Anything less than that," he said, "is an underachievement this year for us."

Those playoff hopes might already be in serious jeopardy.

Sabres notes: Rasmus Ristolainen happy to have contract done

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 12, 2016

BUFFALO – Rasmus Ristolainen said he trusted a new contract would be finished. Still, the Sabres defenseman wasn't sure if his deal would be completed before tonight's season opener.

"Thursday was coming pretty quick," said Ristolainen, who signed a six-year, \$32.4 million contract Tuesday, ending a brief holdout.

The Finn, 21, practiced Wednesday beside new partner Dmitry Kulikov as the Sabres prepared for the Montreal Canadiens inside KeyBank Center.

Ristolainen briefly left the Sabres earlier this week. He had been practicing as a restricted free agent, something his agent called a "goodwill" gesture.

Naturally, big expectations accompany his new deal, which carries a \$5.4 million salary cap hit.

Ristolainen cemented his status as the Sabres' No. 1 defenseman in 2015-16, compiling nine goals and 41 points while skating a team-high 25 minutes, 17 seconds a game in 82 appearances.

But he often struggled in the second half.

"I think he came out of the gates for the first 40 games or so, played a real strong, really almost dominating game for us on the backside," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "The consistency, he played a ton of minutes for us."

Those minutes clearly wore Ristolainen down. That's why Bylsma wants to cut back on his ice time a bit.

"I think it took its toll on him as the year went on," he said. "I think being more consistent in that game throughout the whole season is growth for Rasmus."

What does Ristolainen believe would be growth in his fourth NHL season?

"I want to be better," he said. "I want to reach the next level this year. I want to be better than last year."

With Ristolainen, Kulikov (bruised tailbone) and Zach Bogosian (groin) all back, the Sabres finally have a full defense corps.

Bogosian skated with Jake McCabe and Josh Gorges, Ristolainen's old partner, was paired with Cody Franson on Wednesday.

Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly (back/midsection spasms) practiced Wednesday and will likely play tonight.

"I think he looked good," Bylsma said.

Meanwhile, winger Kyle Okposo (bruised knee) is out tonight but was to skate in the morning, Bylsma said.

Canadiens goalie Carey Price, arguably the NHL's best, didn't travel to Buffalo because of the flu.

Sabres Eichel injured Wednesday in practice

By Nick Wojton

Batavia Daily News

October 12, 2016

BUFFALO – The Buffalo Sabres are holding their breath.

According to reports, center Jack Eichel was injured in practice on Wednesday, one day prior to the Sabres season opener against the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday.

Initial indications said Eichel was favoring his left leg as he went to the ice and was helped off the ice by his teammates.

Eichel was working with the power play unit during practice when he skated to the front of goal where his left leg buckled underneath him. He was not pushed or hit by a teammate before falling, however, his foot did get tangled up with another defender's skate. Eichel reportedly let out a scream upon being injured.

Sabres center Eichel out indefinitely with sprained ankle

By: Jonah Bronstein

Associated Press

October 12, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Buffalo Sabres top-line center Jack Eichel is out indefinitely after being diagnosed with a high ankle sprain on Wednesday.

The Sabres provided the update hours after Eichel was hurt in the team's final practice before it opens the regular season hosting Montreal on Thursday.

"As of now, no timetable has been set for his return," the team posted on its Twitter account.

Eichel was in front of the net when he got tangled up with a defenseman and his leg buckled beneath him .

He lay on the ice and grabbed his leg in pain as the team circled around him. Eichel was unable to put any weight on his leg as teammates helped him off the ice.

The injury occurred with less than 10 minutes remaining in practice, Bylsma said.

"It's the cusp and eve of starting a new season, one we are all looking forward too, and I think that's why it takes the wind out of the sails of the arena today," coach Dan Bylsma said.

Eichel is key to the Sabres future after being selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft. He is coming off a solid rookie season in which he had 24 goals and 32 assists for 56 points in 81 games last year.

Eichel played one year at Boston University and became the second freshman to win college hockey's top honor, the Hobey Baker Award.

"You expect to have to deal with injuries throughout the year," Bylsma said. "It's one we are going to have to deal with, whatever the extent of the situation is. Our team is not just Jack Eichel, it's not just Ryan O'Reilly."

O'Reilly, the Sabres' captain, participated in his first full practice Wednesday since he experienced muscle spasms during his preseason debut last week. "He looked good out there," Bylsma said.

Forward Kyle Okposo did not practice due to a bruised knee. Balsam said he expects Okposo to participate in a morning skate Thursday, but he is unlikely to play in the opener.

Okposo signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract with the Sabres in July after eight seasons with the New York Islanders, becoming Buffalo's second-highest-paid player, after O'Reilly, who signed a seven-year, \$52 million deal shortly after being acquired in a trade from Colorado last summer.

Sabres C Eichel injures ankle in practice

The SportsXChange Report

October 12, 2016

Buffalo Sabres center Jack Eichel suffered an injury to his ankle during practice Wednesday and needed help getting off the ice.

Coach Dan Bylsma told reporters that Eichel was being examined by the team's medical staff and did not know the extent of the injury.

"He has an ankle injury. At this point, not a lot to tell after that," Bylsma said. "He goes down in a lot of pain, obviously. The initial shock of it is you see that, but we're going to let it calm down here and get it evaluated and see the extent of him turning his ankle there.

"You're looking at one of your key players, one of your best players going down in pain on the ice. It's not a good thing."

Eichel was injured in front of the net when he got tangled up with teammate Zemgus Girgensons and yelled in pain as he crumpled to the ice, according to the Buffalo News. Eichel grabbed his leg in pain as the team circled around him. The 19-year-old Eichel was helped up but was unable to put weight on his left leg.

"I was just trying to get the puck, and we got tangled," Girgensons told reporters of the play. "He just fell awkward. It's always tough to see someone go down, especially a guy like Eichel."

Eichel, selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 NHL draft, had 24 goals and 32 assists in 81 games in his rookie season.

"We're not going to jump to conclusions what it is just yet," Bylsma said of Eichel's injury. "This just feels a little bit different because it's the cusp and the eve of starting a new season, one we're all looking forward to. That's really why it takes the wind out of the sails of the arena today.

"We're eight minutes away from practice being over and getting ready for a game tomorrow. That happens, it kind of takes a little chunk out of the team in that situation."

The Sabres host the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night.

Bylsma said newly acquired forward Kyle Okposo, who signed a seven-year, \$42 million contract with the Sabres in July after eight seasons with the New York Islanders, likely will miss the opener with a bruised knee injury

Eichel injury latest hard-luck blow to rebuilding Sabres

By Ryan Dixon

Sportsnet

October 12, 2016

BUFFALO, NY—The man at the centre of the Buffalo Sabres' rebuild and one of the NHL's biggest young stars crumpled in obvious distress Wednesday morning.

Practicing one day before the Sabres kick off a season packed with so much hope, Jack Eichel let out a piercing scream that immediately signalled trouble. The 19-year-old sustained a left ankle injury that put him on the ice for several minutes before teammates carefully helped him up and guided him toward the dressing room.

"Initially, he goes down in a lot of pain, obviously," said coach Dan Bylsma Wednesday. "I think the initial shock of it is you see that, but we're going to let it calm down here and let him get evaluated."

Rash assumptions were rampant inside the newly minted KeyBank Center when Eichel—who finished second in rookie scoring last season with 56 points in 81 games—went down. A boisterous practice immediately fell silent as Sabres from all over the ice gathered and hovered.

"I didn't really see what happened, I just saw the commotion," said defenceman Cody Franson.

There really wasn't a lot to witness on the play. Eichel moved to the front of the net during a power-play drill, may have clanked skates a bit, then buckled as he turned to follow a loose puck.

Any time on the shelf for Eichel would be a huge blow for an up-and-coming Sabres team with playoff aspirations. Of course, hard-luck is nothing new in Buffalo, even in a limited sample size. After signing with the Sabres as the top free agent on the market, right winger Kyle Okposo took a pre-season shot on the side of the knee and will miss the team's opener versus the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday.

Ryan O'Reilly, the club's No. 2 centre, has been plagued by back spasms during training camp. A year ago the Sabres lost Robin Lehner for months after the goaltender suffered a high-ankle sprain during his first start of the season. Lehner was acquired in a summer 2015 trade with Ottawa and had been anointed as the Sabres goaltender of the future.

Now the Sabres are losing their No. 1 centre and most offensively gifted player to an injury at a practice that was painfully close to its conclusion.

"We're eight minutes away from practice being over and getting ready for a game tomorrow and that happens," Bylsma said. "It kinda takes a little chunk [of enthusiasm] out of the team."

You could say the same thing of the entire league.

Eichel out with high ankle sprain

WGR 550 Report

October 12, 2016

Just one day before the Sabres hit the ice to open the regular season, the team will be missing Jack Eichel after suffering a high-ankle sprain in practice with no time table for return according to the team.

The injury occurred when Eichel was gaining position toward the front of the net, and collided with Zemgus Girgensons. The second-year forward reportedly screamed in pain, and remained on the ice for some time. Eichel needed help getting off the ice, and was not putting much pressure on his left leg.

The blue and gold were already dealing with injuries to Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo, with head coach Dan Bylsma telling the media assembled that Okposo would be out on Thursday. Now, the team will potentially be missing three of their top forwards as they drop the puck on the 2016-17 season:

Last season in his rookie year with the Sabres, Eichel scored a team-high 24 goals and registered 56 points. The 19-year old was Buffalo's first round pick (2nd overall) in the 2015 NHL Draft.

Robin Lehner suffered a high-ankle sprain in the team's season opening game last year and missed nearly three months recovering. The goaltender returned to the lineup on January 15th, but reaggravated the injury in mid-March and missed the last three weeks of the season.

Keep it locked to WGR and WGR550.com for all the latest from the KeyBank Center.

Is Reinhart the key to overcoming THE injury?

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 12, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- With Jack Eichel likely out around six weeks with a high ankle sprain, the Sabres season preview changes a lot.

The immediate thought is how do they plug that huge hole?

People for some reason love to number lines and some feel it is essential. It's really not. With everything Ryan O'Reilly does he is without question the team's number one center, but when Eichel plays, there is no number one line. You could make an easy case for O'Reilly's line or Eichel's line to be number one. And really, who cares, it makes no difference.

I wouldn't be surprised at all to see Sam Reinhart get the first chance at center. Ever since the off season started, Dan Bylsma has talked about how he's not sure if wing is the best place for Reinhart. I think this is the perfect chance to try it and stick with it to see where it goes.

Evander Kane would stay on the left wing and it seems like they want to give Marcus Foligno a chance.

His consistency and production went up in the 41 game streak last year and he played like a power forward. To me you have nothing to lose to give it a look. If it doesn't work, then Hudson Fasching gets my second look.

If Alex Nylander picks up the pro game in Rochester quicker than anticipated it could be the perfect place to call him up and give him a top six look.

When healthy I think it would be a good idea to play O'Reilly with newcomer Kyle Okposo and the harder working Tyler Ennis. I think they need to find out if the Ennis of two years ago is back or not.

I really liked the line of Johan Larsson, Brian Gionta and Foligno last year. All three complimented each other and played very well at both ends of the ice. If Foligno gets a look with Reinhart, I think Fasching is the choice there.

As much as I'd like to see where Matt Moulson is in his rebirth, I don't know if I'd plug him in here. If I did it would have to be for Ennis so he could try to rediscover a chemistry with Okposo. Then Ennis would benefit from Reinhart's great vision and passing.

If not, then Zengus Girgensons would center Moulson and Nick Deslauriers. That's quite a slide for one of Buffalo's best players under Ted Nolan. Nolan didn't really have a system and just told the former number one pick to go play. Ever since Bylsma has shown up, he's been confused and takes too long to figure out where he's supposed to be. When you hesitate because you're lost, you're done. Girgensons admitted last season that maybe too much was being thrown at him too quickly.

Girgensons may benefit the most from this being year two with Bylsma, but I think Larsson earned the chance to stay as the third line center with some very good play the last 40 games.

Derek Grant had a great preseason picking up six points in six games, but to me all it did was earn him the 13th forward spot. The great thing is if one of the bottom six really starts poorly, they know Grant is right here and ready.

I can't for the life of me figure out why so many think the Sabres defense is so bad.

First of all, there's no doubt that Rasmus Ristolainen is a number one defenseman. He is a good learner and is only going to get better. As the Sabres get better, the computer GM's will start to understand how good he is. To win big you must have that number one guy on D and the Sabres have theirs.

I wasn't a huge fan of trading away Mark Pysyk, but Tim Murray feels that Dmitry Kulikov is the guy that can log

number one minutes with Ristolainen. I don't agree, but we're going to find out.

By all accounts a defenseman who was a turnover machine started getting better about two years ago. Many of the Florida writers raved about him all the way through the playoffs.

You also can't sit and say you don't like that trade until you find out what Rasmus Asplund turns into. Kris Baker raves about this kid and watches every one of his games.

Jake McCabe showed vast improvement last year, but it wasn't all great. He played like a 22 year old defenseman who was in his first season. For me the good far outweighed the bad and I think he will be a solid second pair defenseman with Zach Bogosian.

Bogosian did not start the season well coming off injury. He started to play really well when he started using his speed. He can get up ice and back so well, he needs to join the play more.

There were times he'd play himself into some difficult spots, but much of that was early in the season.

Then there is Josh Gorges. People just rip into him, but again it's very uninformed and of course many of those people don't watch many games.

Josh Gorges isn't at a point in his career where he can't play first pair minutes against the other team's top forwards. If that's his role, I'm with you, but on the third pair, he's an asset.

You still get his shot blocking and penalty killing as well as his on ice leadership. If his minutes are around 15 to 17 minutes, Gorges will be just fine.

If you go by training camp, his partner will be Casey Nelson who was complimented more than once by Bylsma. If you go by Wednesday's practice, it's Cody Franson.

Nelson's passing is amazing and he just has a knack for creating offense from the point. His best attribute may be his hockey sense. He thinks the game very well and only gets in trouble when he's overpowered. He did work on getting stronger in the off season.

The first time I interviewed Franson in August he told me how horrible he was last season. I've heard him say numerous times it was the worst season of his career.

I think Nelson is better and I really don't see the point of keeping Nelson here as a seventh D unless you take him on the trip to Edmonton, Calgary and Vancouver and then send him down if there are no injuries.

Robin Lehner is in goal quite a bit leaner and in elite shape. We all know you need decent goaltending to be good. In 21 games he had a .924 save percentage and that was on a sore ankle and 25 to 30 pounds extra.

Lehner is 25 years old and this is his time. He needs to stay as healthy as he can and get a good sample of games in.

We'll find out more about O'Reilly and Eichel at the morning skate as the season is finally here.

Enjoy it people, it's hockey.

Price out Thursday against Buffalo

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

October 12, 2016

Montreal Canadiens goalie Carey Price will have to wait to make his return to the ice in the Canadiens' red, white and blue for at least one more game.

The Canadiens have announced on Wednesday that Price will not make the trip to Buffalo for Thursday's season opener against the Sabres with the flu.

Price has not played a game in the National Hockey League since Thanksgiving after suffering an MCL sprain in his right knee. Before his injury, the Canadiens were atop the NHL standings at 17-4-2 and with 36 points. From there, Montreal finished 21-34-4 and would end the season as the 22nd overall team in the league with 82 points.

Price most recently played at the World Cup of Hockey with Team Canada, and won the World Cup as the starting goalie. In five games with the Canadians, Price finished the tournament with a 1.40 goals-against average and a .957 save-percentage.

The Canadiens will turn to netminder Al Montoya for Thursday's opener. Faceoff from the KeyBank Center is at 7 p.m.

Sabres options If Eichel injury is long-term

By Matt Bove

WKBW

October 12, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Before we go any further let's make one thing very clear: The injury or the extent of Jack Eichel's injury hasn't been announced.

We do know Eichel suffered an ankle injury, and it was of the non-contact variety. That certainly doesn't sound good – but anything more than that would be speculation at this point.

If he is out for an extended period of time this is what I'm thinking:

You can't replace Jack Eichel – but why not give Derek Grant a shot to start the season with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart? The Buffalo Sabres and head coach Dan Bylsma could approach a potential long-term injury several different ways – but Derek Grant makes sense to me.

He's been on a tear during the preseason and is coming off a season in the AHL where he scored 45 points in 36 games. It does bother me that Grant has failed to produce when he has played in the NHL—but players getting called up are rarely put into good situations to succeed right away.

I understand that moving Reinhart to center makes sense – but flip-flopping his position several times during the same season is a lot to ask, even for a player like Reinhart. Give this a shot for a few games and see if it works. If Grant doesn't produce try something else.

Potential Lines Without Eichel

- 1) Ennis-O'Reilly-Okposo
- 2) Kane-Grant/Girgensons-Reinhart
- 3) Moulson-Girgensons/Grant-Fasching
- 4) Foligno-Larsson-Gionta

Another option would be sliding up Zemgus Girgensons to the second line and putting Grant on the third or fourth line. In 2014, Girgensons was an NHL all-star but is coming off an unimpressive 2015. He's still young and has plenty of time to develop – but some time with players like Reinhart and Kane could do Girgensons some good.

No one will be able to replace Jack Eichel – but these are just a few options. In the meantime, everyone will need to step up.

After practice that's what the players said—but that's also what we hear every time someone gets hurt. Kyle Okposo needs to play like a player who is making \$6 million a year. Tyler Ennis will need to play like the guy who dazzled at times in 2014. O'Reilly will need to be the Sabres best player.

Of course I think this injury, if long-term, is a massive blow – but I don't think this will lead to a season like 2014. The Sabres still have plenty of young talent – they just need everything out of that young talent until their most explosive player returns to the ice.

Eichel leaves practice with ankle injury

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

October 12, 2016

Practice fell silent at KeyBank Center on Wednesday, when Jack Eichel fell awkwardly on his left ankle and had to be helped off the ice by his teammates and trainers. Eichel's ankle appeared to twist as he went down in front of the net.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma confirmed that it was Eichel's ankle that was hurt, but said the team is awaiting updates.

"At this point not a lot to tell," Bylsma said. "He's going to get evaluated this afternoon. I think the initial shock, you see that, but we're gonna let it calm down here and get it evaluated and see the extent of him turning his ankle there."

The Sabres were practicing the power play with their most complete unit to date. Kyle Okposo was still absent due to a bruise on his knee, which was also sustained in practice, but Ryan O'Reilly and Rasmus Ristolainen were among those returning to practice on the eve of their regular season opener.

Bylsma stressed the importance of not jumping to conclusions before Eichel is evaluated, but he recognized the shock of the players on the ice given the the nature of the injury and the player involved. Eichel is entering his second season after scoring 56 points as a rookie.

"At that point in time you probably could slap them in the face to say, 'Snap out if it,' but everyone's thoughts are with the injury and with the extent of it," Bylsma said. "We'll all deal with it."

The turnaround time will be quick. The Sabres open their season against the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday night at KeyBank Center.

"Whatever the extent of the situation is, our team is not just Jack Eichel," Bylsma said. "It's not just Ryan O'Reilly. It's just not one player. You expect to have to deal with injuries throughout the year and it just happens that, if he is injured or the extent of his injury, it's happening on the cusp of the season."

UPDATE (4:16 P.M.)

Okposo ruled out for Thursday

Bylsma said that Okposo will not play against the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday, but that he will join the team for the morning skate. His update on O'Reilly was more promising.

"He's still out there working on his game," Bylsma said some 20 minutes after practice had ended. "I thought he looked good and I talked to him briefly on the ice. We'll see how he is post-practice here, how he responded to practice today to see if that means he's going to be in tomorrow."

Rasmus returns

Ristolainen returned to practice after signing a six-year deal with the Sabres on Tuesday. He skated on a pair with Dmitry Kulikov and practiced on a power-play unit with Eichel, O'Reilly, Sam Reinhart and Tyler Ennis.

Stronger, faster Reinhart ready to take next step

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

October 12, 2016

"He was the baby," Aidelbaum says over the phone from Whistler. "He was the little guy just running around off the ice that couldn't wait to get out there at the time."

Some 15 years later, Reinhart returned to Aidelbaum. It was the summer of 2015 - one year after the Sabres had selected him with the No. 2 pick in the draft. He'd played nine games for the Sabres that fall, and then he was sent back to junior hockey in Kootenay, B.C. He was, as Aidelbaum puts it, a young man on a specific path.

"He wanted to make the Buffalo Sabres," she said. "It was one goal."

What happened next should sound familiar. When he arrived at camp that September, he had questions to answer - namely, was he ready to make the leap to the NHL? His strength and skating were considered question marks. He was diplomatic when answering those in the dressing room, but he did his real talking on the ice. Not only did he make the team, he scored 42 points (23+19) and evolved into a reliable top-six forward at age 20.

That success can be traced back to the work he put in with Aidelbaum that in Vancouver, which is why he's especially optimistic entering his sophomore campaign. This summer, Reinhart doubled down on his offseason training.

Learning to skate

When Aidelbaum first saw Reinhart skate two summers ago, she says, she knew he was a forward. Based on her evaluation, his defensive skating skills - the ability to skate backward and backward lateral movement, for example - were at an amateur level.

"When I stand back and I look at any player, I don't want to know what position they play," she said. "They should be able to do everything."

So the focus for much of Reinhart's first summer with Aidelbaum was on skating backward. He learned about what part of the blade to be on at what times - whether he should be leaning on the front, the back, or dead in the middle. These were all things he'd never thought of despite having played hockey his whole life.

"It translated to my forward skating," Reinhart said. "It's just something like that that's so strange. You wouldn't think to practice that and work on it, but it helped everything."

Learning, Aidelbaum says, came easy for him. One aspect of Reinhart's game that has never been knocked is his hockey sense. He sees plays as they develop, makes sound decisions on the ice and consistently puts himself in the proper areas to score goals.

In fact, his hockey knowledge and body awareness was so strong that sometimes he'd be given a tip - say, for example, thrusting his hips while maintaining a low shoulder - and it'd come so easy that he'd *over-correct*.

"We had to back it up a bit," Aidelbaum said. "I'd tell him, 'We're talking two inches, we're not talking a foot.'"

Reinhart said last season that playing alongside faster players makes him play faster himself, and never was that truer than when he became linemates with Jack Eichel in March. The two played well enough alongside each other that Bylsma is inclined to keep them together heading into this season.

Back in Vancouver, Reinhart would take part in intense conditioning programs with other NHL players once per week. There, his skating partners were professionals whose ability was at least in the same stratosphere as Eichel's.

"I think it's very natural for him to go and be a linemate with someone like Jack Eichel because in Vancouver, he's conditioning partners with someone as fast as Jack," Aidelbaum said.

"Not saying there's two Jack Eichels."

Overtime

As much as hockey IQ was and is a glaring strength for Reinhart, so was his work ethic last season. Practice ending for the team was simply the beginning of another drills session for Reinhart and alternate captain Ryan O'Reilly. As the season wore on, many of their teammates joined in.

Reinhart credited those sessions for the way he improved over his rookie season, so it's no surprise that he was willing to put in more work going into his second summer with Aidelbaum. Exactly how much more he did, however, is a testament to his eagerness to improve.

Aidelbaum brought Reinhart in for a meeting when he returned to Vancouver. They went over his exit interview with the Sabres and his plan for himself over the summer. With that, combined with the tape she had already watched from last season, she laid out a regimen of ice time that she thought he'd need in order to improve.

"He did double," Aidelbaum said. "Exactly double. What I've learned with him is that when he works hard and sees improvement, he then starts to work even harder. Many people will coast, but he's the exact opposite."

When Reinhart came back to camp last September, he was faster and more agile. This time around, his work reflects what made him successful last season: namely, scoring at the net-front. Fourteen of Reinhart's 23 goals came around the net last season; four were tipped shots and four more were rebounds. (He's scored twice on tips already this preseason.) He also helped his teammates by screening the goaltender on eight goals, seven of which came on the power play.

"The league knows who he is," Aidelbaum said. "Once you've established yourself in the league like he did, it had to be more than just speed. He had to be certainly more stable."

Accordingly, they worked this summer to make Reinhart more difficult to knock off his feet. His acceleration improved, as did his ability to catch a pass and accelerate simultaneously, a handy ability when playing alongside the likes of Eichel and Evander Kane.

"I think everything I did was more intense, more in-depth," Reinhart said. "Days got longer, busier, working on different things, different places. It was just a busy summer, but with that being said, I had a lot of down time, a lot of rest to focus and prepare for next season."

Wearing a letter

When Reinhart finishes his sessions in Vancouver, kids line up along the boards to meet him and get an autograph. The funny thing is, these kids sometimes aren't that much younger than he is. At 20 years old, Reinhart has a maturity beyond his years.

"It doesn't matter whether it's a game in Buffalo or practice in Vancouver, 365 days a year he takes a lot of time for the younger players," Aidelbaum said.

But the maturity shows on the ice, too. Reinhart was one of three Sabres sophomores, along with Eichel and Jake McCabe, to serve as an alternate captain during the preseason. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said it's a concentrated

effort to let those three players know that they're expected to take ownership and accountability in the dressing room.

It's a conversation that Josh Gorges, a full-time alternate captain, said the team had last season.

"We talked about that last year with the group," Gorges said. "Yes, you're considered a rookie. Yes, you're considered a young guy. But you've got to be a leader ... I think all those guys too, they have the personalities.

"I think first and foremost, that's what makes them good hockey players, but it's gonna help with what they do from a leadership standpoint. It's great to see too that they're taking strides and they're wanting that as well. They're not reluctant to take on those responsibilities."

It's a shared mentality not only between Buffalo's young players, but everyone in the Sabres dressing room. Reinhart put in work this summer. Bylsma has commented that he can already see the improvement in Eichel's shot. Rasmus Ristolainen chose to be on the ice with his teammates even in the midst of a contract negotiation.

"I think this season is just the beauty of the situation we're in," Reinhart said. "If we're winning, everyone's doing the right things and everyone's playing well. That's the No. 1 priority and No.1 focus and I know we're all on board for that."

Buffalo Sabres' Jack Eichel suffers high-ankle sprain

By Mike Coppinger

USA TODAY

October 12, 2016

Buffalo Sabres phenom Jack Eichel crashed to the ice Wednesday, grabbed his left ankle and rolled around while screaming in pain.

Eventually, he buried his helmet in his gloves while in the prone position, a grim sight for the team's hopes on the eve of their campaign-opening contest vs. the Montreal Canadiens.

The Sabres and Eichel avoided the worst, though. The team announced that Eichel suffered a left high-ankle sprain; there's no timetable for his return.

The American Journal of Sports Medicine estimates that it typically takes a hockey player 46 to 48 days to recover from such an injury, per The Buffalo News.

The 2015 No. 2 overall pick got tangled with Zemgus Girgensons in front of the net during Wednesday's practice.

"You're looking at one of your key players, one of your best players going down in pain on the ice," head coach Dan Bylsma said. "It's not a good thing. We're going to let it calm down here and get it evaluated and see the extent of him turning his ankle there.

"This just feels a little bit different because it's the cusp and the eve of starting a new season, one we're all looking forward to."

Eichel, a Hobey Baker award winner, is the focal point of the Sabres' attack as their top-line center. The team hasn't qualified for the playoffs since 2011, when the Sabres were knocked out in the first round.

The Boston University graduate scored 24 goals and 32 assists during his rookie campaign. Bylsma announced that winger Kyle Okposo, who signed during the offseason for seven years and \$42 million, will miss the opener with a knee injury.

"It took the wind out of the arena a little bit," Bylsma said. "You could probably slap the guys in the face to say 'snap out of it.' We're eight minutes away from practice being over and that happens."

Jack Eichel of Buffalo Sabres injures leg in practice

ESPN.com news services

Oct 12, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Buffalo Sabres center Jack Eichel was helped off the ice after hurting his left leg during practice on Wednesday.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma told reporters that Eichel suffered an ankle injury and was being examined by team medical staff. He also said that newly acquired forward Kyle Okposo will miss the opener with a knee injury. The Sabres host the Montreal Canadiens Thursday night.

Eichel was in front of the net when he got tangled up with a defenseman and his leg buckled beneath him.

He lay on the ice and grabbed his leg in pain as the team circled around him. Eichel was unable to put any weight on his left side as teammates helped him off the ice.

Eichel is key to the Sabres' future after being selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft. He is coming off a solid rookie season in which he had 24 goals and 32 assists for 56 points in 81 games last year.

Eichel played one year at Boston University and became the second freshman to win college hockey's top honor, the Hobey Baker Award.

Sabres' Eichel suffers high-ankle sprain

TSN Report

October 12, 2016

The injury Buffalo Sabres star Jack Eichel sustained in practice Wednesday will keep him out for at least the month of October.

Eichel has been diagnosed with a high-ankle sprain, and TSN Hockey Insider Bob McKenzie says the Sabres have set a loose four-to-six week timeline for recovery - though it could be longer.

Several media members witnessed the scene at practice Wednesday, and reported Eichel screamed in pain as he fell to the ice.

Eichel is entering his second NHL season, he scored 24 goals and added 32 assists as a rookie last year.

He was the second overall pick of the 2015 NHL Draft. Eichel scored one goal and added an assist in three games with Team North America at the World Cup of Hockey last month.

The Sabres open their season on Thursday night against the Montreal Canadiens. Head coach Dan Bylsma ruled out forward Kyle Okposo for the opener with a knee injury and said the team would see how Ryan O'Reilly responded after practice before committing to his status. O'Reilly is dealing with a back injury.