



Buffalo Sabres

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Monahan scores in OT, Flames top Sabres

Associated Press

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CALGARY, Alberta (AP) — Sean Monahan's overtime goal brought a sense of relief to the Calgary Flames' locker room.

Monahan scored 2:26 into overtime, giving Calgary its first win of the season, 4-3 over the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night.

The 22-year-old made a nifty move and beat Robin Lehner over his shoulder for his first of the season after being set up alone in front by Johnny Gaudreau.

"Everybody needed that goal, and when I say everybody, probably the fans, the coaches and Momy himself," said Glen Gulutzan, who earned his first victory as Calgary's coach.

After dropping back-to-back games in Edmonton and then losing in overtime in Vancouver on Saturday, the Flames had pressure building on a team expected to take a giant step forward in 2016-17.

"When you win, it brings confidence," Monahan said. "As a group, it's home ice and the way that we battled back and found a way to win is big for our team."

Matthew Tkachuk got his first NHL goal, and Michael Frolik and Micheal Ferland also scored for Calgary.

Zemgus Girgensons, Ryan O'Reilly and Marcus Foligno scored for Buffalo.

Calgary trailed 2-1 entering the third period but tied it at 1:10. Foligno's turnover in his own corner was taken by Ferland, who darted straight to the net and lifted a backhand into the top corner.

Foligno made up for his error on his next shift, with a nifty inside-out move to sidestep Deryk Engelland and then flicking a high shot past Chad Johnson on the glove side.

The Flames got it back to even once more at 4:52 on Tkachuk's goal. The 18-year-old snapped a shot from off the wing that beat Lehner over his shoulder on the short side.

"Obviously unbelievable," Tkachuk said. "You dream about scoring in the NHL for a long time. Now that I've got the first one out of the way, hopefully we can just keep rolling as a team."

Tied 1-1 after the first period, O'Reilly put the Sabres into the lead on a power play and via some misfortune for Calgary defenseman Dougie Hamilton.

O'Reilly's slap shot from the top of the circle was kicked out by the right pad of Johnson but the puck hit Hamilton in his chest and bounced into the net.

"I don't think there's many positives to take at all," O'Reilly said. "Our compete level, our execution was just embarrassing. That's not the way we want to be. We want to be a consistent team. We have to be a lot better."

O'Reilly's goal came shortly after a stretch of nearly 18 minutes in which the Sabres never generated a shot. However, Calgary could not solve Lehner during that stretch, which involved a couple squandered power plays including a 5 on 3.

Johnson made 18 saves for the victory. Lehner had 30 stops in the loss.

Calgary tied the game 1-1 at 16:12 of the first period.

In their first stretch of sustained pressure, the Flames eventually capitalized with Frolik digging out a loose puck lying by the pad of Lehner and sliding in his third goal.

Buffalo opened the scoring at 7:25, taking advantage of a mishandling of the puck by Calgary defenseman TJ Brodie. Tyler Ennis was the beneficiary of the turnover and he zipped a pass in front where Girgenson deflected it into the top corner.

NOTES: Gaudreau was blanked again and has been held to just one assist in four games. ... Veteran defensemen Dennis Wideman and Nicklas Grossmann were scratches for the Flames as rookie Brett Kulak got in the line-up again. Wideman and Grossmann have a combined 1,350 games in their NHL career.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Play Thursday night at Vancouver.

Flames: Host the Hurricanes on Thursday night.

Sabres look for bounceback in finale of Western trip

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 19, 2016

VANCOUVER -- Forget about getting one mere point in a road game. That's not what the Buffalo Sabres want this year, even with Jack Eichel and Evander Kane out of the lineup for the foreseeable future.

The Sabres had three leads Tuesday in Calgary, including two in the third period. They lost the game in overtime, 4-3. So practice here was workmanlike on Wednesday as the Western road trip moved to its third and final stop. The Sabres meet the Vancouver Canucks Thursday in Rogers Arena, looking to possibly come home with five out of six points.

They already have three in the bank after opening the trip with a solid win in Edmonton. But that's not enough. The standard is completely different this year.

"It has to be for sure," said winger Sam Reinhart, a Vancouver native making his second return home in the NHL. "Coming right from day one of training camp, two weeks before the season started, our whole roster minus a couple guys at the World Cup was ready and excited to get going. That was part of the reason why, the mentality around the room.

"If you look around the league, playoff teams need to find ways to win games when they're not playing their best. You're going to have games like that. When you're that close, with two leads in the third period, it was a tough one to swallow."

It was particularly tough for Reinhart, who was plummeted from behind by Calgary's Sean Monahan a few seconds before Monahan scored the winning goal. The Sabres were outraged at the lack of a cross-checking call on the play in the immediate aftermath of the game but Reinhart took the high road Wednesday.

"It's over. But I didn't dive. I can tell you that," Reinhart deadpanned. "We can talk about that all day but it's more important to look at what we could have done better. We gave ourselves a chance to win even when we weren't playing our best. It's tough we weren't able to do that, all that being said."

The Sabres were disappointed with their power play going just 1 for 5 in the game, including a failed two-man advantage. Still, they entered Wednesday seventh in the NHL with a 25 percent rating on the power play (4 for 16), and one of three teams perfect on the penalty kill at 9 for 9.

"We're going out there with a purpose, whether it's to kill it or create offense," Reinhart said. "We've had our fair share of practice and I know that's helped us."

The Sabres are 1-1-1 on the season and can get above .500 for the first time since they were 2-1 on Jan. 24, 2013, the third game of the lockout season. Most of Wednesday's session was spent on the man-advantage units, which have needed quite a bit of retooling due to the injuries.

"We still have implementation and development to do with the groups," said coach Dan Bylsma. "You get an opportunity for a 5-on-3, 4-on-3 not very often enough. When you get the opportunity, you want to be ready for it."

"After three games, if you say your power play is 4 for 16 and your penalty kill is what it is, I think you've got to be pretty happy with that scenario. You talk about keys to winning hockey games and winning the special teams battle in the game is a big factor. Unfortunately, we've won all three games but only have one win to show for it."

Heading into Wednesday's action, the Sabres joined Florida and Minnesota as the only NHL teams yet to allow a power-play goal. The Wild's penalty killers are 11 for 11, and Florida is 7 for 7. The Sabres killed off six penalties Tuesday in Calgary, which allowed them to stay in the game. They just didn't come up with the one final goal they needed.

"I like the fact that the onus is on us, how we need to play, how we can play," Bylsma said. "I think you hear that and see that with our players being disappointed in last night's game. It's not so much about what the Calgary Flames did. It's about what we did or didn't do."

Banged-up Miller won't face Sabres as Canucks go for 4-0

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

October 19, 2016

VANCOUVER -- Goaltender Ryan Miller won't start Thursday in Rogers Arena after what he described as "tightness" in his core areas knocked him out of the Vancouver Canucks' lineup Tuesday.

Miller told Vancouver reporters he expects to dress for the game against the Buffalo Sabres and serve as the backup against his former team while Jacob Markstrom gets the start.

Miller said he woke up Monday on the team's off day feeling the twinges but felt they would go away so he could play Tuesday against St. Louis. When they did not, Markstrom played in the 2-1 overtime win over the Blues and the unbeaten Canucks had to call up University of British Columbia goaltender Matt Hewitt to serve as the backup because their AHL farm team is across the continent in Utica.

"As a goaltender, you feel this way probably 10 times a season," said Miller, now 36. "It's 'Oh, I'm a little tight today but tomorrow I'll have my hips and back lined up, do the right recovery and I'll feel fine.' Once you're able to get that rest, you're fine the next day. It just held on a little longer. It not an injury, it's more a muscle that didn't want to settle down. Something in my alignment was off."

Buffalo's all-time leader in victories made 25 saves in his only start thus far this season for Vancouver, a 2-1 shootout win Saturday over Calgary. The issue likely occurred when he stretched on a shootout attempt by Johnny Gaudreau. Miller practiced on his own Wednesday for about 45 minutes and will likely take the morning skate Thursday, albeit cautiously.

"This is one where I knew I had a muscle and fatigue, that if I went out and exploded into a save, I would put myself in a bad situation," Miller said, smiling at reporters. "Instead, you guys get the everyman-is-a-backup story, Hewitt has a fun night, Marky was great ... so it all works out and we keep going."

Miller is in the final season of his three-year, \$18-million contract he signed with the Canucks in 2014. He was just 17-24-6 for them last season with a 2.70 goals-against average and .916 save percentage.

The Canucks enter Thursday's game 3-0 -- and as the first team in NHL history to win its first three games without ever leading in regulation. Vancouver and Tampa Bay are the only NHL teams with unblemished records.

The Canucks scored in the final four minutes of their opener to tie Calgary before winning in the shootout, wiped out a 3-0 third-period deficit to post a 4-3 win Sunday over Carolina, then scored late in the third period against the Blues to force overtime and won it, 2-1, on Daniel Sedin's goal.

So they've given up five goals in three games and one of them was an own-goal by Loui Eriksson against Calgary, when he fired the puck into his empty net after Miller had left the ice during a delayed penalty.

"They just haven't given up a lot in the games they've played," said Sabres coach Dan Bylsma. "We saw how the puck went in them against them two games ago. That was the only way. They've haven't really given up a lot in all three games, they've hung around to get offense from their big guys and won in overtime and shootouts as a result."

Tuesday's loss in Calgary was Buffalo's first game in overtime this season, and thus the first one without the injured Jack Eichel and Evander Kane playing key roles in the 3-on-3 affair. Bylsma admitted OT is going to be a work in progress without those two key cogs.

Bylsma used Josh Gorges and Rasmus Ristolainen with Ryan O'Reilly to start the OT, and had another stretch where Johan Larsson was playing with Zach Bogosian and Dmitry Kulikov. The winning goal came with O'Reilly and Reinhart on the ice along with defenseman Jake McCabe.

"We're trying to win the game in overtime, there's no question about that," Bylsma said. "There's no such thing as waiting for a shootout. The matchups and deployments of guys is a little different without Jack and Evander in the lineup. We have to get creative with guys on... On possession, we would get the defenseman off the ice."

Larsson did not practice here Wednesday for what Bylsma termed a maintenance day but the coach said he expected Larsson to be available. The Sabres did not do any line work, focusing mostly on power plays with emphasis on 4-on-3 and 5-on-3 situations.

Amerks' Tyson Strachan offers Sabres depth

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
October 19, 2016

BUFFALO – Tyson Strachan's only human, you know. So while the veteran said his confidence never wavered looking for work during the summer, thoughts about his uncertain future crept into his head.

As the weeks dragged on without a contract, the gritty former Sabres defenseman wondered if he might have to play overseas or complete his degree at Ohio State University.

"I'd be lying to say those things don't come into your mind," Strachan said earlier this month inside KeyBank Center. "Obviously, you think about everything that's possible. At the end of the day, you're confident. There's nothing you can do about it other than just get yourself prepared."

Finally, the Sabres showed interest, bringing Strachan back to the organization on a one-year AHL contract Sept. 14.

"This was a good opportunity coming in and knowing management, knowing a lot of the guys," Strachan said. "I'm in a comfortable situation."

Strachan, 31, spent all of 2014-15 with the Sabres, playing a career-high 46 NHL games. In a truly awful season, he was one of the few bright spots, establishing himself as a solid depth defender.

"I loved my year here," Strachan said. "Buffalo's a great city. I was happy to come back here and be a part of it."

But unless the Sabres rework Strachan's contract into a two-way deal, he will be parked with the Rochester Americans all season.

Considering the dearth of experienced defensemen in the organization, a contract upgrade isn't too far-fetched.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma talked about Strachan like he could be in the queue for a recall. Bylsma planned to give Strachan some exhibition action before an ankle injury sidelined him.

"Hopefully, at some point ... I get some time back up here," said Strachan, who attended Buffalo's training camp on a pro tryout. "At the same time, if I'm down there the whole year, I'm excited about it."

Other than Strachan's one year with Buffalo, he has spent at least a portion of every season since 2008-09 in the AHL. Still, the Saskatchewan native is used to earning recalls. He has played 186 NHL games, including two last season with the Minnesota Wild.

So this season could be "a little bit different," Strachan said.

"But I think your mindset's still the same," he said. "You're coming to work every day. Anything can change, right? That's been the story of my career. I've done that from Day One."

That was nine seasons ago, when Strachan began his pro career with a brief ECHL stint. These days, Strachan is the Amerks' oldest player.

"You start to kind of embrace that older guy attitude, right?" he said. "You want to help out the young kids."

For graybeards like Strachan, finding work has become difficult. The NHL has become a young man's league, and established talent is getting squeezed out.

"It's the first summer that I haven't signed in (the) first few days of free agency, so it was tough," Strachan said. "It's a hard thing to sum up, I guess. Obviously, you're always confident in what you can do. But it's just the way it's gone the last few years coming out of the last CBA. It's tougher for older guys.

"Some days are good, some days are bad. Some days you're worried that you need to find a new line of work. Some days you're just confident."

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Former Sabres goalie Ryan Miller, now with Canucks, will dress for tonight's contest in Vancouver against his old team. Miller missed last game because "a muscle didn't want to settle down," he said.

Sabres continue to refine special teams

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

October 19, 2016

Vancouver, BC, Canada (WGR 550) -- The Buffalo Sabres penalty kill remains perfect through the first three games this season. The team was a perfect six for six against the Calgary Flames on Tuesday night, and overall has killed off all nine minors this season. On Wednesday afternoon special teams were front and center at practice again, with an emphasis on the power play at Rogers Arena.

Josh Gorges was called for two of the Sabres' six minors against Calgary, but logged 3:28 of his overall 14:04 of ice time on the penalty kill. It is easy to point to what has gone right, according to Gorges, adding that "we've all bought into the idea that the penalty kill's only successful if the four guys and the goalie on the ice are on the same page."

"We start with the puck we get a chance to get it down ice, and that's really the starting point of your penalty kill" Gorges said. "If you can disrupt them coming through the ice, force them to make tough plays at the blue line or dump pucks in it gives us an opportunity to go get pucks and keep them on the run."

He was quick to compliment the work of both Ryan O'Reilly and Derek Grant for their work in the face-off dot during the penalty kill. Grant is getting his first real chance to be an every night player in the NHL, and time on special teams has helped him log significant minutes with the blue and gold.

It is no secret that by winning a face-off you give your team a better chance to clear the puck by establishing possession. Grant continued that "it's important for me to keep winning draws and, you know, that gets a clear right away and that can be big in a penalty kill, so for me that's what I like to focus on." The Abbotsford, BC native recorded 4:13 seconds on the power play, only second to O'Reilly who logged 4:30 of ice time on the PK.

One area of the game head coach Dan Bylsma lamented following the 4-3 overtime loss in Calgary was the power play. The team went just one for five on the man advantage and failed to score on 5-on-3 and 4-on-3 chances. A day later, Bylsma added some perspective, saying that "after three games if you say your power play is four for 16 and your penalty kill is what it is, I think you gotta be pretty happy with that scenario." O'Reilly again had the power play goal for Buffalo.

The bench boss likes the effort being shown while a man up, and believes that "one of the keys to our power play is a being a shooting power play and a recovery power play and having that mentality and the goal we got last night was a direct result of that." However, the team recorded just two of their 21 shots on goal against Edmonton on the power play, with one of the shots O'Reilly's goal.

Bylsma said that Johan Larsson was given a maintenance day on Wednesday, but he expects the forward to be ready to face the Canucks on Thursday. One player the Sabres do not expect to see on Thursday is Ryan Miller. The former fan favorite missed Tuesday night's 2-1 OT win against St. Louis, and plans to back-up tomorrow as he battles through muscle tightness. He does not expect to be a long-term injury, and took part in some of the Canucks' practice today to see how it reacted.

Miller likely won't play against Sabres

By Matt Bove

WKBW

October 19, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - It looks like Buffalo Sabres fans will have to wait until February to see longtime Sabres goaltender Ryan Miller in action against the blue and gold.

Wednesday Miller told reporters that he will backup Jacob Markstrom during Thursday's game against the Sabres, after feeling some tightness the last few days. "It's not an injury," Miller started. "It's more of a muscle that didn't want to settle down."

The 36-year-old added that he deals with the pain about ten times a season, and usually it goes away with some rest. In his first and only game of the season, Miller stopped 25 shots and earned the win.

Miller played 11 seasons with the Sabres, winning the Vezina Trophy -- awarded to the league's top goaltender -- in 2010. He was traded from the Sabres in 2014 to the St. Louis Blues, and signed the following offseason in Vancouver, where he has since been the Canucks starting goaltender.

Buffalo hosts Vancouver later this season on February 12th.

Sabres' Simonick reflects on unprecedented 3,500 games worked

By Eric Francis

Sportsnet

October 19, 2016

Robert Simonick was there when Gilbert Perreault needed his game-night coffee and smokes.

He was there when Brett Hull dashed Buffalo's Stanley Cup dreams in triple overtime of Game 6 of the 1999 Cup final with his foot in the crease.

He was there when Clint Malarchuk needed someone to help save his life as his sliced carotid artery almost caused the netminder to bleed out on the ice.

And he was there when Lindy Ruff pulled one of the great pranks in team history, followed by the inevitable payback that was almost as amusing.

Whenever needed, the man they call Rip has been there for the Buffalo Sabres, serving as the team's equipment manager for an incredible 46 years.

On Tuesday night in Calgary he worked his 3,500th game, an NHL record unlikely to be broken.

It makes him one of the most colourful historians for the team and the game as he's paid witness to the evolution of NHL players from a day they warmed up with caffeine and nicotine to the modern era where ultra-fit players treat their bodies like temples.

"Before games in the Montreal Forum in the early 70's I used to go get a pack of cigarettes for Guy Lafleur and Gilbert Perreault who were junior buddies and friends since they were kids," smiled the affable 66-year-old.

"I'd go get them six cups of coffee, a pack of cigarettes, two ashtrays and they used to smoke ten ciggies each, drink six cups of coffee and they were the two fastest guys on the ice. That went on for years.

"Every player had their own ashtray with their number on it and they used to count on me for smokes."

So revered in the business, Rip was paid a rare visit at the Saddledome Tuesday by legendary Flames trainer Jim "Bearcat" Murray who spent 16 years with the Flames before being inducted into the Professional Hockey Athletic Trainer Society Hall of Fame.

Rip would be in there too if not for the fact he's still active as a trainer and on the committee overseeing such accolades.

While Rip says he can still count on the odd European player to smoke in the laundry room ("you just open up the dryer, blow the smoke in and turn it on," he laughed,) or chew tobacco, players have obviously approached the game much differently as the salaries increased.

"The players are now fed breakfast, lunch and dinner - they'll probably change the league's name from the National Hockey League to Never Hungry League," he laughed.

"It's unbelievable what they do. We have dieticians and we take blood tests on the players to make sure they're getting their nutrition. It's a high tech sport now."

So much for running to the ol' coffee shop to get a peckish puckster a salami sandwich before opening faceoff.

Rip credits coffee for helping him get his foot in the door with the organization as a teen when his job was to get 30 coffees for each team on game days. The old Buffalo Auditorium didn't have a coffee machine.

Hired by Punch Imlach in 1970, Rip is the last original Sabres employee and has long been seen as a father figure for players through different eras.

He's catered to their every need and listened to all their stories.

And when it comes to equipping the players, he witnessed a complete transformation there too.

"I had Dave Andreychuk and he used the same helmet for 20 years in Buffalo," he smiled.

"Now these guys wear them for 25 games and then change them because those are the rules - the league wants the guys protected, which is the right thing.

"Some lines you'll never hear again: 'you're alright kid - get back out there.'

"Hey, the coaches want the players on the ice. It's still like that now, but not to the extent you'll take chances on an injured player."

The worst injury he ever tended to, by far, was Malarchuk's in 1989 when Steve Tuttle's skate blade sliced the goalie's neck in gruesome fashion. Rip was one of the first on the scene to help save the goalie's life.

"I was one of the guys, yes, but he actually saved his own life," said Rip, who assisted athletic trainer Jim Pizzutelli.

"When it cut him he could feel the warm blood coming out and he basically put his thumb in the skatehole. It was the carotid artery. He was at the right end of the rink where the doctors were and he was at hospital in 14 minutes and stitched up."

So fearful he was about to die Malarchuk asked Rip to call his mother to tell her he loved her.

Asked if it ranked as the worst day of his professional life, he had an interesting response.

"Truthfully, and Bearcat will tell you this too, when a player gets hurt it doesn't hit you until the next day," said Rip, explaining he just went into autopilot.

"The next day I cried - I couldn't believe it."

Simonick pictured with Sabres legends Gilbert Perreault, Rene Robert, and Rick Martin at HSBC Arena on February 23, 2011. (Buffalo Sabres)

Simonick pictured with Sabres legends Gilbert Perreault, Rene Robert, and Rick Martin at HSBC Arena on February 23, 2011. (Buffalo Sabres)

Asked if today's players were far more coddled than years past, he shrugged.

"Today's players are very well treated from a young age so when they are drafted and come to training camp their agents have already called in with what they want to wear and who their contracts are with equipment-wise," he said.

"So we pretty much know what's coming when they come to us."

He said one of the best parts of the gig is you never know what's coming on a daily basis with a roomful of young, happy-go-lucky players constantly looking to make one another laugh.

"The westerners are the funniest, friendliest guys ever -they ride the buses for 12 hours and have a lot of time to think about pranks," he beamed.

"Lindy Ruff was the all-time best. He had a few injuries and when the first SUVs came out everyone had one. He went into everyone's pant pocket during practice, got their keys, put them in a jar and shook them up. Then he

put them back on their keys rings and not one guy's keys matched his truck. It took them, like, three hours to figure out who had what."

The predictable retaliation was equally as memorable.

"When he got back into the lineup one of the players who needed to get home quick that day took all Lindy's clothes and tied every single piece of clothing together and made one big ribbon around the room," said the proud member of the Sabres Hall of Fame.

"No one is safe."

In a nice touch, Rip's milestone game was saluted Tuesday by the Flames who congratulated him on the Jumbotron during a stoppage in play. He said he didn't need any recognition as his gift was the visit from Bearcat.

"He's a legend and we are a tight-knit group," he smiled.

"I would imagine it's an NHL record but I'm not a record follower. It's about the game – we're just here to win a game. 3,500 is just a number and I'm just proud to be a Buffalo Sabre."

Three games in, Sabres are excelling on special teams

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

October 19, 2016

VANCOUVER - We're now one full week into the NHL season, and only three teams currently sit among the top 10 in the League on both the power play and the penalty kill: the Carolina Hurricanes, the Tampa Bay Lightning and, naturally with this being Sabres.com, the Sabres.

Through three games, Buffalo is a perfect 9-for-9 on the penalty kill (one of three perfect teams remaining along with Florida and Minnesota), while their 25-percent conversion rate on the power-play (4-for-16) ranks eighth in the League.

So far, both units have been anchored by the same two names: Rasmus Ristolainen and Ryan O'Reilly. Ristolainen ranks atop the team with an average shorthanded ice time of 3:08; O'Reilly is second at 2:01. Ristolainen ranks fourth in the League in average power-play ice time at 5:35 per game; O'Reilly ranks eighth at 5:18.

The irony in Buffalo's power-play success is that the goals they've scored have come from a group of players who had almost no time to work together in the preseason. Ristolainen missed the majority of training camp while negotiating a new contract. By the time he returned to practice, O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo were absent due to injury.

The unfamiliarity hasn't stopped them. All four of Buffalo's goals with the extra man have come from its top unit, comprised of Ristolainen, O'Reilly, Okposo, Sam Reinhart and Matt Moulson. Okposo even missed the team's first game due to injury, but fed O'Reilly for a goal on his very first power play with the team on Sunday in Edmonton. O'Reilly scored another on Tuesday in Calgary, while Moulson has accounted for the other two goals.

So, what makes them click? Moulson said it starts with O'Reilly, Ristolainen and Okposo, who move the puck around at the top of the zone until they find the open man to take a shot. Moulson and Reinhart are the men down low who attempt to score on screens, tips or rebounds.

"They're scored their four goals a couple different ways," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "I think one of the keys on our power play is being a shooting power play and a recovering power play and the goal we had last night was a direct result of that."

That goal was simply Ristolainen drawing a defender with the puck before passing it off to O'Reilly, who put the puck on the net and got a fortunate bounce off a defender. Other times, the puck could find its way in as a result of Reinhart screening in front of the net or Moulson cleaning up rebounds in the slot.

The goal from Okposo to O'Reilly on Sunday was another example of the benefits of a shooting mentality. They cycled the puck until all five members were on their strong sides, and Okposo got the puck above the right wing circle on three occasions. The first two times, he shot into traffic to no avail. He changed it up the third time around, faking a shot and instead sneaking a hard pass through the defense to O'Reilly down low.

The common denominator on all four of Buffalo's power-play goals has been Ristolainen, who has earned either a primary or secondary assist on each. That, according to Moulson, is a testament to the young defenseman's advanced decision making.

"He's a great, great player. He's smart out there," Moulson said. "You're trying to create an advantage on the ice when you have an extra guy out there. He does a great job of quarterbacking, getting the puck up the ice. He makes great decisions."

The team's success on the penalty kill, meanwhile, actually began last season, when they finished at ninth in the League with an 82.6 percent success rate. Josh Gorges is a regular on the penalty kill, and he said it all goes back to the team choosing to do two things: taking pride in fundamentals, which begins in defending hard against the

power play in practice, and accepting that the penalty kill doesn't work unless all four skaters and the goalie are aware of what the rest are doing.

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner is as vocal as they come, and he's come up big on the penalty kill so far.

"Your goalie always has to be your best penalty killer," Gorges said. "They got an extra guy on the ice, they're gonna make plays. They're gonna create themselves opportunities. If we can limit those opportunities [so the goalies] know where those opportunities are gonna come from where he doesn't have to second guess and try to make a quick decision, he can get set before and I think it makes his job easier. But even when he has to, he's been there to bail us out."

Toronto coach Mike Babcock, who coached O'Reilly at the World Cup of Hockey, said it was O'Reilly's penalty killing skills that earned him a late roster spot on Team Canada. Naturally, the Sabres rely heavily on O'Reilly when shorthanded. O'Reilly was the only player in the NHL last season to average 2-plus minutes on the penalty kill while also averaging 3-plus minutes on the power play.

Gorges said that O'Reilly's value on the penalty kill begins in the faceoff circle. O'Reilly has been one of two primary faceoff men for the Sabres while shorthanded (along with Derek Grant) and is 4-for-5 in those situations. His 126 shorthanded faceoff wins last season ranked sixth in the League despite missing 11 games due to injury.

"The other side of it is he's just such a smart hoc key player," Gorges said. "When things break down, he knows where to be. He knows the position. He knows how to force the other team into tough situation and he's got a great stick on top of it."

That great stick came into play on Tuesday with the Sabres midway through killing a 5-on-3 power play for the Flames. O'Reilly came in from behind and stole the puck from Mark Giordano, which ended up leading to a high-sticking call against Giordano to cut the two-man disadvantage in half.

The Sabres will have an opportunity to extend their penalty kill streak to four games on Thursday; their opponent, the Vancouver Canucks, is one of three teams remaining who have yet to score a power-play goal. With that being said, the Canucks are also undefeated and rank third in the League with 1.67 goals-against per game.

It's an important game for the Sabres, who have a chance to come away from their three-game road trip in Western Canada with five points. If they can keep the ball rolling on special teams, it might just make the difference.

Wednesday's practice

Johan Larsson was absent from practice for a maintenance day, but Bylsma said he should be ready to play against the Canucks on Thursday. Here's how the lines looked in his absence:

23 Sam Reinhart - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
63 Tyler Ennis - 27 Derek Grant - 12 Brian Gionta
82 Marcus Foligno - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 44 Nicolas Deslauriers
26 Matt Moulson - 73 Nicholas Baptiste - 52 Hudson Fasching

4 Josh Gorges - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
29 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian
77 Dmitry Kulikov - 6 Cody Franson
34 Casey Nelson

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson