



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*October 29, 2016*

## **Sabres hope to stop slide against visiting Panthers**

Associated Press

October 28, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Things have hardly gone according to plan for the Buffalo Sabres this season.

Just before the start of the season, budding superstar Jack Eichel was lost for up to two months with a high ankle sprain. In Buffalo's season opener, top forward Evander Kane suffered cracked ribs after a hard fall into the boards. Starting goaltender Robin Lehner has missed time due to illness.

That's all resulted in a dreadful start, with the Sabres earning one win in the first first six games (1-3-2).

The Sabres hope Saturday's matinee against the visiting Florida Panthers (3-3-1) can mark the start of a turnaround, or at least temporarily stop the bleeding.

"I feel like we're there, that's the frustrating part," said Lehner, according to the Sabres' team website. "I feel like we're in the game and then in five-minute segments we kind of lose the game. Small details. We just need to stay consistent to our game plan. It's not like we're not in games.

"We've got to buy in. We've got to buy into the game plan. It's not 55 minutes buying into the game plan or 50 minutes, it's 60 minutes or if it's overtime we do that too."

It'll help if Lehner returns between the pipes for Buffalo, but it's expected that the Sabres will wait until Sunday's game against Winnipeg to insert him back into the lineup. Anders Nilsson started two games in Lehner's place, both losses, and is expected to get the call once again against Florida.

The Sabres fell to the Minnesota Wild last time out on Thursday in a 4-0 home defeat. Buffalo mustered almost no offense throughout the game, minus a brief spell at the start of the second period after falling behind.

"I think that (the shots are) gonna go in and we've got to believe that, and we've just got to continue with the way that we need to play," forward Kyle Okposo told the team's website.

The Panthers end their four-game road trip with back-to-back games against Buffalo and Detroit before heading back to Florida for two home games. Florida is coming off back-to-back 3-2 losses to Toronto and Pittsburgh. Forward Jonathan Marchessault came out of nowhere to become one of Florida's most surprising success stories. Through seven games, the unheralded offseason signing has 10 points (five goals, five assists).

Marchessault joined the Panthers from Tampa Bay, signing a two-year deal worth only \$750,000 per season.

"Every year I was a surprise. I fuel off people that don't believe," Marchessault said to Sportsnet. "Every year, nobody thought I was going to do good. Every year, nobody thought I was going to make that team, make junior, make pro, make AHL, make NHL. It wasn't the easiest path I had, but it was a different one. I made it here."

Young standout Aleksander Barkov is next in points behind Marchessault with five (two goals, three assists). The ageless Jaromir Jagr is not far behind with a goal and three assists through seven games.

In net, Roberto Luongo is off to a strong start to the year with a 3-2 record and a save percentage of .916.

## **Inside the Sabres: Simonick still letting it rip**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

October 28, 2016

Rip Simonick, the last of the original Sabres, has set a retirement date.

It's an unthinkable situation. The Buffalo native has really, truly seen it all. He's befriended Hall of Famers Gilbert Perreault, Pat LaFontaine and Dominik Hasek. He's congratulated 17 coaches after victories and cried with some of the 464 players after losses. He welcomed Mike Foligno after arriving from Detroit, and he welcomed Marcus Foligno after arriving from childhood.

After 52 years in hockey and more than 3,500 NHL games, Simonick still shows up at the rink with a smile. But he knows there's a time to call it quits.

"When Marcus' son plays in the National Hockey League, that's when I'm going to retire," Simonick said with a grin.

Thankfully, that gives hockey quite a bit more time with one of the characters of the game. The 25-year-old Foligno just got married this summer, so any son of his won't be skating in the NHL for a couple of decades.

"I love the game or else I wouldn't be here," Simonick said Thursday as he prepared for Game No. 3,503. "We'll be doing this when I get to 4,000."

Simonick knew he'd be a hockey lifer long before the Sabres came into existence. He started as a stick boy with the Buffalo Bisons of the American Hockey League in 1964. His older brother, Paul, first got the job through a friend in the neighborhood. Rip joined him, then took over when Paul headed to junior hockey and Vietnam.

"When you count the Bisons and the playoffs and the exhibitions, it's probably 5,000 games," said Simonick, whose real first name is Robert, though no one ever calls him that.

He got to know Seymour H. Knox III while working at rinks, and when the Sabres' co-founder brought the NHL to Buffalo in 1970, Simonick was there. He never left.

Buffalo Sabres trainer Rip Simonick sharpens a skate during game against Philadelphia Flyers in second period of preseason game at HSBC Arena in Buffalo, N.Y. on Sunday October 3, 2010. Sabres 3-2 Flyers after 1 period of play . {Photo by John Hickey}  
Rip Simonick at work in 2010. (John Hickey/Buffalo News)

"I knew it would be my life," he said. "The day Gilbert Perreault and Jean Beliveau walked into the Aud for the first NHL game, I was like, 'I can't believe this is happening.'"

Simonick has declined offers to write a book, but the tales are readily available for anyone who asks. People always do. Take a walk toward the Sabres' dressing room, and odds are good a smiling Simonick will be in the hallway catching up with someone he's met along the way.

"If I met one person every day for 3,500 games, that's a long list of friends," he said. "It's a long road. A lot of fun, a lot of heartbreaks."

The springtime joy and ultimate pain of two runs to the Stanley Cup finals stick out the most. The Sabres nearly went from the cradle to the Cup in 1975, and Hasek's brilliance gave them a chance again in 1999.

"They were heartbreaking when we lost, but we were there," Simonick said. "I hope to get there one more time. Maybe the third time will be the charm."

While Simonick has remained constant, change has swirled around him. The little game has become a billion-dollar business. Coconut whey smoothies have replaced cigarettes after practice. Team chefs have made coffee runs obsolete.

"I used to walk down Main Street to White Tower and get 30 coffees for the visitors and 30 for the home team," Simonick said. "That kept me going. Everybody liked me because I brought the coffee.

"Bottled water? There was no such thing as bottled water. It was right from the tap. It's just weird things, little things that people don't think about."

While many things have gotten easier, the hours keep getting longer. In Simonick's early days, the Sabres would fly into a city just before game time, then head home after the final whistle. He could still take classes at Buffalo State.

Now the equipment guys can barely take a nap. A typical day might see them show up at KeyBank Center for a morning practice, pack the equipment in a truck and drive it to the airport, then load the plane. After arrival in the next town, they'll reload the gear, drive to the arena and wait for a concert or basketball game to finish. After setting up the dressing room well past midnight, Simonick, fellow equipment manager Dave Williams and assistant George Babcock might just sleep there since the team is coming soon for the morning skate.

"I've got great guys to work with," Simonick said. "It makes it a lot easier."

The friends on the road and in the game have helped him heal from losses at home. His wife, Maize, and his brother-in-law, EJ McGuire, both died in 2011.

"You miss things," Simonick said, his eyes moistening. "I miss my brother-in-law, my wife, but they were part of my hockey life. They pushed me. EJ was great and well-respected. My wife, the same thing. She was the best hockey person in the family.

"I'm still here. I'm still trying hard."

Thankfully, he'll be here for a long time.

Amerks news takes hit

While one fixture is remaining in Buffalo, another is unfortunately gone in Rochester. Kevin Oklobzija, who has delivered news, anecdotes and profiles about the Amerks for more than three decades, was laid off by the Democrat and Chronicle on Tuesday. The shocking news came as Gannett Co. cut 2 percent of its workforce.

Oklobzija has tracked the Sabres' minor-leaguers since the 1985-86 season. He kept fans abreast of their progress and let them know who was getting called up. He told the organization what it was doing right and wrong. He did it with a sense of humor that created bonds in the dressing room.

"I have a lot of respect for him," said Sabres captain and Rochester native Brian Gionta. "He was great to myself and my family. Nothing but first class in everything he did and how he handled himself. He'll be missed in the rooms. I always enjoyed chatting with him."

The Sabres have to be worried how Oklobzija's departure will affect the Amerks. He was a daily presence. In the four days after the layoff, not one story about the hockey team appeared on the Democrat and Chronicle website. Out of sight, out of mind would be troubling as the Sabres fight with the city of Rochester for improvements to the arena.

"Thank you for 30-plus years of hockey coverage in this community," the Amerks tweeted. "It hasn't gone unnoticed and is greatly appreciated by many."

Home depreciation

The Sabres have played 125 home games from the start of the 2013-14 season to Saturday morning. They won just 43 of those. That didn't give fans much bang for their buck.

A season-ticket holder sitting in 200 Club spent \$13,434 on those 125 games. That works out to \$312.42 per victory. A fan in 100 Level II spent \$8,053. That's \$187.28 per victory. The \$4,297 spent by a season-ticket holder in 300 Level II equated to \$99.93 per win.

It's time for Sabres season-ticket holders to start getting their money's worth.

## **Sabres Notebook: Pysyk is back; Eichel sheds walking boot**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
October 28, 2016

People have always praised Mark Pysyk's hockey IQ, so it's no surprise he knew something was up during the offseason.

"I thought something was going to happen – not necessarily me, but I thought somebody was going to get moved," Pysyk said Friday. "When I found out it was me, it was a little bit of a shock."

Buffalo's busy draft weekend included trading the defenseman to Florida in a deal that brought Dmitry Kulikov to the Sabres. Pysyk is back for the first time and will face the Sabres on Saturday afternoon in KeyBank Center.

"This is where I started my career, so nothing but good things to say about the organization," Pysyk said after practice. "It was a little bit weird, but it's good to be back."

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Pysyk, the Sabres' first-round pick in 2010, spent 125 games with Buffalo. It hasn't taken him long to settle in with the Panthers. He's paired with longtime friend Alex Petrovic and has one goal and a plus-2 rating in seven games.

"The fresh start has been good so far, and I'm definitely enjoying the place," Pysyk said. "We've got some good skaters back there and can do the job and play defense pretty well. We've been jelling as a group of seven, and it's been fun."

Pysyk never found a steady role in the Sabres' defense corps, which is why General Manager Tim Murray was willing to ship him to Florida. Pysyk has averaged 15:13 of ice time this year after getting 15:54 in 55 games with Buffalo last season. The 24-year-old will get a chance to show what his skating and passing skills can do against his old team.

"It's going to be weird for me, but it's a team, so we need to come and beat the Sabres," Pysyk said. "We lost the last two, so we need to get back on the right track here."

Kulikov, meanwhile, is gaining his footing after getting hurt during the preseason. He is averaging 21:38 of ice time in five games. He is minus-2 while looking for his first point.

The 25-year-old may find the game even stranger than Pysyk will. He spent seven seasons and 460 games with the Panthers.

"Playing for them for so many years and now being on the opposite side, it'll definitely be weird," Kulikov said. "A lot of friends, a lot of good relationships that I built there. I had a great time in Florida, but it's all over now. I'm focused only on the Buffalo Sabres right now, getting a win, getting our team back on track with a win."

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Jack Eichel has given his walking boot the boot. That doesn't mean he's close to returning.

Eichel, who suffered a high-ankle sprain Oct. 12, walked through the arena without his scooter and walking boot. He still has a brace on the left ankle. He's only 2½ weeks into an injury that typically lasts six to eight weeks.

Evander Kane (cracked ribs) was also at the arena. It's possible he may start cardio work next week, but he's not expected back until mid-November.

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The Sabres are changing their second power-play unit. Right wing Hudson Fasching replaced center Derek Grant, joining holdovers Brian Gionta, Tyler Ennis, Cody Franson and Kulikov.

"For me it's just take away the goalie's eyes, retrieve pucks, just try and help out the best I can, try to keep the play going, just kind of assist the other guys," Fasching said. "Those guys are going to be making the plays. For me, it's just to make it easier for them."

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NHL legend Jaromir Jagr will face the Sabres for the 88th time. He has 46 goals, 58 assists and 104 points against Buffalo.

The 44-year-old has one goal and four points in seven games this season. The goal was the 750th of his career.

"It's awesome," Pysyk said. "Being in that game, that's something you can remember for as long as you live that you were there and had a good seat for that."

## **Sabres' start at home a major boo-boo**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
October 28, 2016

The Sabres have played just two games in Buffalo this season, and the natives are already restless. It's hard to blame them.

The Sabres have won 43 of their last 125 home games. The abysmal record since the start of the 2013-14 season is the worst in the NHL.

Fans rolled with the punches for a while as part of the rebuild plan, but the honeymoon is over. Moral victories don't count anymore, as evidenced by the boos that filled KeyBank Center after a 19-shot, no-goal second period Thursday. What mattered was the Sabres lost again, falling to 0-2 at home and 1-3-2 overall.

"We hear the boos," defenseman Jake McCabe said Friday. "It's never good to hear that from your hometown fans, and we need to be better at home especially. Our home record last year was very subpar, and we need to get that going this year.

"The expectation is to win, and we need to start winning now. The whole rebuild thing is in the past. Our expectations for ourselves and our fans' expectations and all of Buffalo's expectations are to win."

The Sabres get their next chance at victory Saturday afternoon when Florida visits. Scoring would certainly help. The home games have been a 4-1 loss to Montreal in the opener and a 4-0 loss to Minnesota on Thursday.

"Last game there was absolutely no emotion," forward Nicolas Deslauriers said. "We didn't do anything for the fans to come on their feet."

It's been a recurring theme:

\*In 2013-14, the Sabres scored 89 times in their 41 home games, an average of 2.2 goals per game. They went 13-21-7.

\*In 2014-15, they scored 83 times in 41 home games, an average of 2.0. They went 14-22-5.

\*In 2015-16, they scored 97 goals in 41 home games, an average of 2.4. They were 16-19-6 in front of the locals.

"I'd like to give them a goal to help them out," coach Dan Bylsma said. "We have some disappointments in terms of expectations this year. I think we expect to win the game in Calgary. We should expect to win the game in Philadelphia. You're looking at a different feeling if we do."

Goaltender Robin Lehner watched two games from home this week with a stomach bug. He returned to practice Friday and will play in one of the weekend's back-to-back games. He wants to see passion from start to finish.

"There's a lot of games left," Lehner said. "That's the good thing going for us. We've got to buy in. We've got to buy into playing the game plan. It's not 55 minutes buying into the game plan or 50 minutes. It's 60 minutes or overtime.

"We've got to do what we're saying we're going to do. We have the ingredients to be able to play consistently and good hockey. I'm not going to sit here and say we're going to win every game because let's be realistic. I feel we can be competitive in every game and keep it close, but that requires that we play a certain way. As long as we don't do that, we can't expect results."

Though the shutout against Minnesota was dispiriting, the Sabres are taking the positives from the final 40 minutes. They outshot the Wild, 30-9.

"Our mentality has got to be going forward that this is how we're going to play, and we're going to play this way for the 238-odd periods we have left in this season," Bylsma said.

"I feel like we're there," Lehner said. "That's the frustrating part. We're there. It's close games, but it kind of gets stretched out. We're in the game, then in five-minute segments we kind of lose the game.

"We've got to stay consistent to our game plan."

## **Sabres' Lehner ready to go**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

October 28, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Robin Lehner was back at practice on Friday and declared himself ready to go. He said he had a stomach bug, but felt great in practice.

It was Lehner's first time back on the ice since being sick and he said he wants to play Saturday against Florida, but the coaches are holding him out until Sunday in Winnipeg, "Yes I'm ready. I'm not playing tomorrow, but I think I'm playing in Winnipeg."

Dan Bylsma wasn't ready to commit to his Saturday goalie. He said, "We'll see for tomorrow's game. I do think given the situation that it's probably not likely that he'll play both games, so again, we'll see about that situation."

"I had a good practice and it sucks, I really want to play right now. I felt like I was making strides and I'm feeling pretty good."

It was really tough for Lehner to watch the past two games which were losses to Philadelphia and Minnesota.

After the loss to the Flyers, Ryan O'Reilly was extremely upset because he felt that this team should be well past all the breakdowns and nervous plays. Lehner said this shouldn't be cropping up again, "No it shouldn't and he's right. At the end of the day it comes down to the guys, all of us in here. We've got to buy into the game plan. It's not 55 minutes buying into the game plan or 50, it's 60 minutes."

"We've got to be what we're saying we're going to do because turnovers and stuff like that, it really kills you and good teams that are winning on a consistent basis, they take care of the blue line and they take care of certain parts of the ice and they always have a good third guy and they keep things on the outside and we've got to get to that part because I feel like we have the ingredients to play consistently, but it requires playing a certain way, but if we don't do that, we can't expect results."

Jack Eichel was without his boot and scooter on Friday. Bylsma said, "Jack got the boot off and will move to another exercise level."

Evander Kane is also progressing with his cracked ribs. Bylsma said, "He's closer to starting cardiovascular off the ice. It would probably be in another three to five days."

Bylsma has never said how long Kane will be out for. He did say, "He has four broken ribs. Broken bones are four to six weeks healing timeframe and he's just maybe moving to another level of movement in the next three to five days, but there's nothing really cemented in that."

The Sabres worked for about 30 minutes on Friday and it was all on the power play. Dan Bylsma made a change on the second power play unit inserting Hudson Fasching for Derek Grant.

## **Sabres must build off positives in losses**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 29, 2016

BUFFALO – Ryan O'Reilly started rattling off some of the good things the struggling Sabres have recently accomplished within their losses.

"There's little things in every game that we're doing well," the center said Friday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon's tilt against the Florida Panthers inside KeyBank Center. "But it's just our consistency with it."

The Sabres played their most consistent contest Oct. 20 in Vancouver, O'Reilly said. They enjoyed a monster three-goal second period Tuesday in Philadelphia, "shooting the puck and getting it back."

"Our last game," O'Reilly said, "we had a great second period where we tilted the ice, we had the momentum."

Of course, the Sabres turned a period in which they outshot Minnesota 19-4 into nothing. After falling behind 2-0 early Thursday, they lost 4-0, their fourth consecutive defeat (0-2-2).

The Sabres haven't lost five straight contests since a six-game regulation skid Dec. 28-Jan. 8.

But as O'Reilly pointed out, the 1-3-2 Sabres have performed well at times. Their only win, a 6-2 shellacking of the Oilers on Oct. 16 in Edmonton, is the upstart team's only loss.

If the Sabres hadn't imploded late against Philadelphia, blowing a 3-0 lead, or held their late one-goal lead Oct. 18 in Calgary, their start would be viewed differently.

"I think we expect to win the game in Calgary," Bylsma said. "I think we should expect to win the game in Philadelphia. You're looking at a different feeling if we do."

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner said: "I feel like we're there, that's the frustrating part. We're there. ... We're in the game and in five-minute segments we lose the game. Small details, you got to stay consistent by the game plan. It's not like we're not in games."

After years of rebuilding and losing, a different feeling surrounds the Sabres this season. They're expected to make the playoffs, or, at the very least, seriously contend for a spot.

Fresh off a 27-point improvement in 2015-16, the Sabres need actual victories, not moral ones. Still, six games into the season, they're stuck trying to build off positives within their losses.

"This is our adversity right now," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said. "We've done some good things that have made us create momentum in games that we have to be able to sustain for 60 minutes."

Franson also said: "We need to ... try to take the momentum from the good things we're doing and find a balance between the two."

Thursday's second period, Bylsma said, "was the most dominant period of hockey we played" and something they must replicate.

"I think our mentality was ... this is how we're going to play and how we're going to play for the 230-odd periods we have left in the season and we'll be alright, we'll be fine," Bylsma said. "We got 76 more to go. Yes, we lost the one in Philly. Yes, we dropped a point in Calgary. Yes, it's a disappointing loss."

Despite ranking last in the Atlantic Division – the Sabres are already 11 points behind undefeated Montreal – they've stayed in a good place mentally, O'Reilly said, quickly getting rid of losses and looking ahead.

"I think we just realize we can't control the past," O'Reilly said. "Yeah, we made mistakes. It wasn't what we wanted. There's nothing we can do now. Yeah, I think we have grown a bit. I think in the back of our minds we know we have to win more hockey games."

The Sabres have plenty of opportunities soon. Today kicks off a stretch of four games in six days and five in eight.

"We got to buy into the game plan," Lehner said. "It's not 55 minutes buying into the game plan or 50 minutes. It's 60 minutes or (more). ... I feel like we have the ingredients to play it consistently and good. ... I feel like we can be competitive in every game and keep it close. That requires that we play a certain way."

## **Sabres goalie Robin Lehner set to start Sunday; Jack Eichel out of boot**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
October 29, 2016

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Robin Lehner, sidelined two games by a “stomach bug,” said he will likely start Sunday afternoon’s road contest against the Winnipeg Jets.

“I’m ready,” Lehner said today after practicing inside KeyBank Center. Lehner said he won’t play Saturday afternoon. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, meanwhile, wouldn’t divulge his starter for the Florida Panthers.

“We’ll see on our goaltender,” Bylsma said.

Goalies Anders Nilsson, Lehner’s sub, and Linus Ullmark also practiced today. Lehner, who spent four days off the ice, also skated before the regular session. He said he was better Thursday but the team kept him away because of the infection risk.

“I feel good,” Lehner said. “I had a good practice. It sucks. I really want to play right now. I felt like I was making strides.”

Lehner started the first four games. Bylsma said the Sabres will wait to send Ullmark down.

In other news, Sabres center Jack Eichel, out since sustaining a high left ankle sprain Oct. 12, is no longer wearing a walking boot.

“I don’t know exactly what his exercise level that he moved to, but I know he was walking in the boot for a few days before yesterday,” Bylsma said.

The Sabres said Eichel earlier could miss six to eight weeks.

Bylsma also said Sabres winger Evander Kane, who broke four ribs opening night, could possibly begin “another level of movement in the next three to five days.”

“There’s nothing really cemented,” he said.

The Sabres said Kane would be sidelined “weeks” after he was injured Oct. 13.

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Don’t expect Sabres defenseman Dmitry Kulikov to get too emotional about facing the Panthers for the first time since the June 25 trade that brought him to Buffalo.

“I’m sure it’s going to be a little weird, but it’s something I have to deal with,” Kulikov said. “It doesn’t matter what happened before.”

Kulikov, 25, spent his first seven seasons in Florida. The Sabres dealt defenseman Mark Pysyk and swapped picks for him.

The Russian no longer pays attention to the Panthers.

“I like to be in the moment,” he said. “Playing for Buffalo now, it’s all about here and now. Obviously, I had a good time in Florida. I’ve had a good start to me career and a good seven years. But, no, I don’t really follow it anymore.”

## **Preview: Panthers at Sabres; Saturday, 1 p.m.**

By Harvey Fialkov

Sun Sentinel

October 28, 2016

When/where: 1 p.m.; KeyBank Center, Buffalo

TV: FSF Radio: 1360 a.m., 640 a.m (Palm Beaches)

Scouting report: Despite two goals from Jonathan Marchessault, the Panthers couldn't hold onto two one-goal leads and lost 3-2 to the Maple Leafs, who had lost four in a row. Marchessault leads the team with five goals and 10 points, which ties him for second in the NHL in points and for fifth in goals. Florida has lost four of five and has yet to win a road game in three attempts. The Sabres have dropped four in a row and are one of two teams with just one victory. The Sabres lost 4-0 at home to the Wild on Thursday, despite outshooting them 30-9 over the final two periods. Former Islanders F Matt Moulson has scored four of the team's meager 14 goals. The Panthers won three of four last season, including both games in Buffalo, where they scored a combined 12 goals. Anticipated goalie matchup is Roberto Luongo vs. Robin Lehner. The Sabres are missing two top-line forwards in Evander Kane (cracked ribs) and Jack Eichel (ankle). The Panthers still are missing three top-9 forwards in C Nick Bjugstad (hand), F Jonathan Huberdeau (Achilles) and F Jussi Jokinen (lower body).

## **Sabres look at strong period as winning template**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

October 28, 2016

The Sabres fell into an early hole that they were never able to climb out of against the Minnesota Wild on Thursday night. But even after a shutout loss, they were provided with a basic template of how they'll need to play to be successful when they meet the Wild again in Minnesota next Tuesday - or in any other game, for that matter.

Even though they didn't score, the Sabres were in agreement on Friday that their second period against the Wild was as good as any they've played through six games this season. Buffalo generated 31 shot attempts in that period alone while allowing just 11 from the Wild.

"I would probably without a doubt agree with that," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said after practice on Friday. "Pretty much every aspect of the second period was our best ... We've had three periods with 11 scoring chances or 10 scoring chances so far this season, and that was the most dominant period of hockey we've played."

Those scoring chances started coming right out of intermission. Kyle Okposo put his size to good use on back-to-back possessions just one minute into the period, both times backing off a defender and spinning around to get in alone and put the puck on net. On the next possession, Ryan O'Reilly took a far shot through traffic and Zach Bogosian was stopped on a put-back attempt.

Their best chances came on a power play when Teemu Pulkkinen went to the box for hooking 3:50 into the period. Both units generated sustained pressure in the offensive zone and took multiple shots from in close to the net. Wild goalie Devan Dubnyk was on his game and recorded his second-straight shutout, but the Sabres believe that kind of effort will result in goals more often than not.

"I know myself personally, I've got to bear down on my chances more," Okposo said. "I think that they're gonna go in and we've got to believe that, and we've just got to continue with the way that we need to play."

The Sabres have shown flashes of how they're able to play in each of their last four losses. They had a third-period lead in Calgary, held the edge in shots in Vancouver and had a three-goal lead entering the third period in Philadelphia. What they have yet to do other than in their win in Edmonton is play within their system for a complete 60 minutes.

"Our mentality was in the second period and it's got to be going forward that this is how we're going to play, we're going to play this way for the 230-odd periods we have left in the season," Bylsma said. "Keep playing that way and we'll be alright, we'll be fine."

Robin Lehner practiced with the team for the first time since Sunday after missing the last two games with an illness. Lehner said he felt ready but that the plan was for him to wait to play in Winnipeg on Sunday afternoon. Bylsma agreed that it was unlikely for Lehner to start at home against Florida on Saturday but said he would wait until the morning to decide his starter.

Having watched the last two games from afar, Lehner echoed his coach and teammates regarding what the Sabres need to do to be successful moving forward.

"I feel like we're there, that's the frustrating part," Lehner said. "I feel like we're in the game and then in five-minute segments we kind of lose the game. Small details, we just need to stay consistent to our game plan. It's not like we're not in games."

"... Coach said this morning that there are a lot of games left, that's the good thing going for us. We've got to buy in. We've got to buy into the game plan. It's not 55 minutes buying into the game plan or 50 minutes, it's 60 minutes or if it's overtime we do that too. We've got to do what we say we're gonna do ... We have the ingredients to be able to play consistently good hockey. I'm not going to sit here and say we're gonna win every

game, let's be realistic. I feel like we can be competitive and keep it close but that requires that we play a certain way."

Fasching joins the power play

Hudson Fasching practiced with the second-unit power play on Friday. He replaced Derek Grant, who has played a net-front role on the power play through the first six games this season.

"I'm thinking Hudson deserves a bigger opportunity and a bigger role," Bylsma said. "The power play won't change per se, the structure of it and what they're trying to accomplish. Hudson will be at the net where he's strong at and has good hands and good instincts ... Hopefully he'll cash in on a goal for us."

You can hear from Fasching in today's "Sabres in :90" with Brian Duff.

Friday's practice

26 Matt Moulson - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo  
82 Marcus Foligno - 22 Johan Larsson - 12 Brian Gionta  
63 Tyler Ennis - 23 Sam Reinhart - 28 Zemgus Girgensons  
52 Hudson Fasching - 27 Derek Grant - 44 Nicolas Deslauriers

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

40 Robin Lehner  
31 Anders Nilsson  
35 Linus Ullmark