



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Bylsma looking to win in his 500th game on bench

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
November 16, 2016

Preparation is a pillar of Dan Bylsma's coaching philosophy. Buffalo's coach uses any tool available to ensure he knows what's going on with the Sabres and their opponents.

One thing he reads is the game notes, which lay out everything from stats to streaks to approaching milestones. It was the last category where Bylsma learned a little something about himself.

When Bylsma steps on the bench Thursday night in KeyBank Center, he'll be coaching his 500th NHL game.

"I saw the milestone in the game notes but didn't know it was coming until I read it," Bylsma said Wednesday.

He will become the 66th coach in NHL history to hit 500, but he can be excused for not making it a priority. With the injury-riddled Sabres winless in their last five games, Bylsma cares only about beating Tampa Bay.

"We have to be a determined group right now," Bylsma said. "We have to be a focused group in how we need to play to get victories right now, and that's where my focus is at."

It's no surprise to hear Bylsma mention determination and focus. Those are two of the traits the Sabres have noticed most since he took over last season. He's also passionate, conversational, enthusiastic and level-headed.

"He's a very detailed coach," alternate captain Josh Gorges said. "When you come in to play, especially right before the game, you know what your job is. You know your responsibilities. You know what your systems are. There's absolutely no way you can come out after the game and say, 'I didn't know what I was supposed to do.'"

"We're prepared. For a player like myself, I love that."

Despite Buffalo's 0-3-2 slide, Bylsma will enter Thursday's game as one of the most successful coaches in history. His points percentage of .632 ranks seventh among coaches with at least 150 games, putting him just behind Hall of Famer Toe Blake (.634). Among active coaches, Bylsma is second to Minnesota's Bruce Boudreau (.657).

Bylsma's record is 292-160-47, including 40-43-15 in Buffalo. He was 152-117-32 with Pittsburgh from 2009 to 2014.

His start with Pittsburgh helped form his game-day intensity. He was named interim coach with 25 games to go in 2008-09. The Penguins didn't remove the label until after he closed with an 18-3-4 record and won a first-round series en route to the Stanley Cup.

"When I got my first opportunity, it was one game at a time – and it was literally one game at a time," Bylsma said. "That's kind of been my approach throughout my time."

Despite feeling the need to win every game, Bylsma has a keen ability not to dwell on losses. They affect him, but he tries to make sure they don't affect the team.

Sabres captain Brian Gionta also noticed that in Hall of Famer Lou Lamoriello when they were in New Jersey.

"When you're winning, it's almost like you don't want to let things slip," Gionta said. "When you're losing, it's like, 'OK we've got to find a way to regroup as a group.'"

"It's not just coming in and screaming at guys and things like that. It's rallying around. Right now we're in a grind, and we're trying to find our way out of this. It's making sure the group is all on board, and he's the leader of that group."

Most coaches have an open-door policy, but many players aren't fond of coming through the door, especially during tough times. Bylsma makes a point of inviting players into his office or visiting with them at their locker stalls.

"He wants to keep a constant pulse," Gionta said. "He wants to keep that communication so you know where you stand, what your role is and things like that."

Bylsma is a contrast to recent Sabres coaches. He's more hands-on than Ron Rolston and Ted Nolan, stopping practice whenever instruction is needed. He's not as demonstrative as Lindy Ruff, whose facial expressions and acerbic wit left no doubt how he was feeling about players or situations.

But like Ruff, hockey and winning are what drive Bylsma.

"You can tell he just has a real passion for the game," Gorges said. "He just loves hockey, and he brings that enthusiasm about playing and competing and being at this level and doing what we do."

"Ultimately, he is the leader of our group on a day-to-day basis. When he has that kind of passion, it's infectious and it wears off on guys. Guys follow it, so he's a great coach to play for."

Sabres Notebook: Stamkos, O'Reilly out; Nelson sent down

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
November 16, 2016

The supermoon showed up. The stars won't.

The Buffalo Sabres and Tampa Bay Lightning will be without their marquee names when they meet Thursday in KeyBank Center. Steven Stamkos is sidelined for the Lightning, while Buffalo will again be missing Ryan O'Reilly, Jack Eichel, Tyler Ennis, Zach Bogosian, Dmitry Kulikov and others.

"I always feel better about going best-on-best and playing against the other team's best," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Wednesday. "That's what you want to compete against, what you want to beat. But at the same time, no one's going to sit around and feel sorry for anybody with the injuries you have or the injuries they have.

"We have our share."

Once again, Stamkos is not coming to play in Buffalo. The Sabres courted him during the offseason, but he chose to re-sign with Tampa. He has nine goals and 20 points in 17 games but suffered a lateral meniscus tear in his right knee Tuesday night in Detroit.

"We are in the process of evaluating options for repair and rehabilitation," said Lightning General Manager Steve Yzerman, who added the center is out indefinitely.

O'Reilly is expected to miss his third straight game with a midsection injury. He was one of the few Sabres to skate Wednesday as the team opted for team meetings, but Bylsma will continue a cautious approach.

"He's progressing," Bylsma said. "He's feeling better."

Eichel also took the ice. He hit the five-week point of his high-ankle sprain, which is expected to keep him out up to eight weeks.

"Jack is skating, upping his skating regime and showing signs of progress but still has a ways to go," Bylsma said. "He hasn't reached all levels of his skating yet in terms of stopping and starting and some of those things, but is progressing pretty well."

Bylsma confirmed Ennis' injury timeline as six weeks, matching The Buffalo News' report last week that the forward is out after double hernia surgery. Bylsma said Kulikov is "not better than day-to-day."

Buffalo has sent Casey Nelson to Rochester, where the defenseman played Wednesday night against Albany. The Sabres will need a recall for the game against Tampa.

If it's Nelson, he would be playing his third game in three nights. Buffalo could also opt for Taylor Fedun. He had 10 assists and 12 points in Rochester's first 13 games.

With the depleted back end, the Sabres have been relying heavily on Rasmus Ristolainen. He has averaged 27:24 of ice time during the past four games, including 29:57 against Ottawa. Bylsma had a stated goal of limiting Ristolainen to 25 minutes per night.

"Every time I see the time on ice, my words to you all ring in my ears from training camp on Ristolainen's minutes on the ice," Bylsma said. "With the injuries we have, we're going to be leaning on those guys pretty heavily through this homestretch."

The Sabres are starting four straight at home. They will also host Pittsburgh, Calgary and Detroit. Buffalo has the fewest home wins in the NHL at 1-3-2.

Buffalo has been whistled four times for too many men on the ice. The latest infraction, Tuesday in St. Louis, allowed the Blues to tie the game in their 4-1 victory.

Defenseman Josh Gorges says it's unacceptable.

"That's just being mentally aware," Gorges said. "Those are tough ones. There's no excuse for it.

"Sometimes you lose focus, and that shows you how important every shift and every opportunity is. You hear guys talking about playing a complete game and every shift and 60 minutes and all the clichés that they throw at you, but when you break it down and look at it, that's exactly it. That can be the difference in the game, so we've got to make sure we're mentally sharp."

Sabres searching for answers on offense

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

November 16, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The struggles continue for the Buffalo Sabres after dropping a 4-1 decision to the St. Louis Blues on Tuesday night on the road. Tuesday was Buffalo's fifth consecutive loss and its sixth loss in the past seven games.

The offense continues to lack in the goal scoring department with a league-low 30 goals in 16 games. The Sabres are also not throwing enough shots on goal, averaging just 28.4 shots per game. In this five-game losing streak, the Sabres have only managed to score five goals and throw 137 shots on goal. At the other end of the ice, the Sabres have given up 15 goals against and 172 shots against.

"It's pretty simple. We're not happy with where we stand the last week and a half here," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said on Wednesday. "Today we're not going on the ice, but it's not for lack of needing work and stuff like that. It's to make sure we have enough energy and to prepare for Tampa tomorrow night. We need to find a way out of this rut."

The Sabres got an early powerplay goal from Sam Reinhart on Tuesday against the Blues, but that was all the Sabres could muster in 60 minutes of hockey. Buffalo only got 24 pucks to the net on the night, and the shot totals have only gone down since Buffalo's first loss in this streak on November 7 against the Boston Bruins.

If the Sabres are looking to get back in the win column and end their current slump, the team has to find more ways to get more pucks to the net and find the back of the net more than one time per game.

"We gotta find ways to create second and third opportunities," Gionta said. "We gotta to bear down on the opportunities we do get, but it's collective as a group and not just one guy or one line. We all need to be better and find more ways to score goals for sure."

"We have to be a determined group right now. We have to be a focused group and [focus on] how we need to play to get victories right now. That's where my focus is at," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said.

The Sabres may be able to catch a break with an upcoming four-game homestand starting on Thursday against the Tampa Bay Lightning at the KeyBank Center. However, the Sabres have struggled all year on home-ice with a 1-3-2 record in six games and just seven goals.

While the Sabres will be at home all the way through Thanksgiving with four straight games, Bylsma is not looking too far ahead on the schedule.

"We've had a lot of road games and when we've had a home game, we've been home for one and then back on the road," Bylsma said. "You get a few more [home games] in succession here, but really our focus has to be on this next one against Tampa Bay."

While the Sabres did not practice this afternoon, forward Ryan O'Reilly did take to the ice. He has missed the past two games, and three of the last four with a middle-body injury. Bylsma says that O'Reilly is questionable for Thursday, but he is progressing with his recovery.

"He's feeling better," Bylsma said. "It's a little bit of a situation of having an injury that is prolonged by playing. He can play and be nagging, but in the last few days, he hasn't been able to play. I'm not hopeful for tomorrow, but he's getting better and I like his progress."

Bylsma also saying today that defenseman Dmitry Kulikov is not better than day-to-day with his middle-body injury. Players like Zach Bogosian, Nicolas Deslauriers, and Tyler Ennis all remain out on a week-to-week basis. Bylsma saying that Ennis' timeline for recovery from his sports hernia surgery is about six weeks.

As for Jack Eichel, Bylsma said he continues to step up his skating regiment and is showing signs of progress in his recovery from a high ankle sprain. However, Eichel has yet to reach all levels of his skating with stopping and starting, which will keep him skating by himself for the time being.

On the other end of the ice, the Lightning will be without captain Steven Stamkos. Stamkos left Tuesday's game against the Detroit Red Wings with a lower-body injury and was sent back to Tampa Bay for further evaluation. On Wednesday, the team announced that Stamkos will be out indefinitely with a lateral meniscus tear in his right knee.

#TBLightning captain Steven Stamkos is out indefinitely with a lateral meniscus tear, per GM Steve Yzerman.
<https://t.co/x7Fy2uy9IX>

— Tampa Bay Lightning (@TBLightning) November 16, 2016

The only other news to report on Wednesday afternoon is that defenseman Casey Nelson was assigned to the Rochester Americans. The Amerks host the Albany Devils at Blue Cross Arena.

It is unclear if Nelson will return to Buffalo after the game, or if the Sabres will call up another defenseman. Nelson has struggled in eight games this season with no points, seven shots on goal, a penalty, and a minus-4 rating.

The Sabres will return to the ice on Thursday morning for the morning skate. Faceoff from the KeyBank Center against the Lightning is set for 7 p.m.

Reeling Sabres playing close games

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 16, 2016

BUFFALO – When did we see this type of stretch from the Sabres – lots of dull, tight games they inevitably lose – before?

About three weeks ago, shortly after the season started, when they dropped four straight contests. After a brief turnaround, the Sabres are experiencing a similarly dreadful run entering tonight's tilt against the Tampa Bay Lightning, the start of a four-game home stand at KeyBank Center.

Having lost five straight games (0-3-2), the Sabres are reeling, in danger of falling out of the playoff chase if they don't start winning soon.

Teams far out of the race around Thanksgiving or Dec. 1 traditionally don't climb back in, so the clock is already ticking. The 5-7-4 Sabres are mired in last place in the Atlantic Division, 14 points behind the first-place Montreal Canadiens.

"I don't think there's any real reason or answer as to why or what has happened," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said Wednesday. "We're playing teams where we're (in a) tight-matched game and we get ourselves in situations where we're making mental lapses. We're not making clean plays when we need to. We're not making the smart plays ... and part of it is the confidence to make the right plays."

The Sabres have six one-goal losses, including two in their last four outings. They've even hung close in some of their bigger defeats. In Tuesday's 4-1 loss in St. Louis, for example, they began the third period tied at 1 with the Blues.

"All the games felt very similar, even the ones we've won 2-1 and the ones we've lost 2-1," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We're in the game. We're battling in the game. It's a tight game. It's a 1-1 game. It's a one-goal game. That's really where we need to play every game at this point in time with the team that we have."

Bylsma's current team is battered. Six regulars – Zach Bogosian, Nick Deslauriers, Jack Eichel, Tyler Ennis, Dmitry Kulikov and Ryan O'Reilly – are injured.

That's one reason why the Sabres own the NHL's worst offense. They've scored only 30 times in 16 games, a paltry 1.9 goals an outing. They've scored two or fewer goals in eight straight games, a stunning run of feebleness even in this low-scoring era.

For some perspective, the New York Rangers have already scored a league-leading *72 goals*.

"It's frustrating," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said of the low offensive output. "There's no way around it. You're not going to win many games in this league by scoring one goal."

The injuries have forced Bylsma, who will coach his 500th NHL game tonight, to utilize his top talents more than he planned to. In training camp, Bylsma said he wanted to trim defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen's ice time a bit. Instead, the Finn has averaged 25 minutes, 36 seconds a game – 17 seconds more than last season.

O'Reilly, out the last two games with a "mid-body" injury, has averaged 21 minutes, 46 seconds a game – two seconds more than last season.

"We've been leaning on them quite a bit now with time on ice," Bylsma said of his top players. "Every time I see the time on ice, my words to you all ring in my ears (from) training camp, Ristolainen's minutes on the ice. We're going for the next stretch here, for the injuries we have, we're going to be leaning on those guys heavily through this home stretch."

The Sabres have been awful at home so far, scoring only seven goals in their 1-3-2 start. They're upcoming schedule is difficult, with the Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins visiting Saturday after the Lightning, an Eastern Conference finalist last season.

The Lightning, however, won't have ace scorer Steven Stamkos tonight. The former 60-goal scorer is out indefinitely after tearing his lateral meniscus Tuesday in Detroit.

"I always feel better about going best-on-best and playing against the other team's best," Bylsma said. "That's what you want to compete against and what you want to beat. But at the same time, no one's going to sit around and feel sorry for the injuries you have or the injuries they have."

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O'Reilly, who's day-to-day, is questionable for tonight's game, Bylsma said. The No. 1 pivot skated on his own Wednesday and is "progressing," Bylsma said.

The Sabres held a team meeting Wednesday instead of practicing. They sent rookie defenseman Casey Nelson to the Rochester Americans later in the day.

In other injury news, Bylsma said Eichel, out all season with a high left ankle sprain, is "upping his skating regimen and showing signs of progress."

"But (he) still has a ways to go, hasn't reached all the levels of his skating yet in terms of stopping and starting," Bylsma said.

Bylsma also said winger Tyler Ennis will miss six weeks following groin surgery last week.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly questionable for Lightning; Jack Eichel progressing

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

November 16, 2016

BUFFALO – Top Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly, out the last two games with a "mid-body" injury, is questionable for Thursday's home tilt against Tampa Bay, coach Dan Bylsma said.

O'Reilly, who's day-to-day, skated this morning on his own and is "progressing," Bylsma said.

The Sabres held a team meeting today instead of practicing following Tuesday's 4-1 loss in St. Louis, their fifth straight setback (0-3-2).

The 5-7-4 Sabres have six one-goal losses. In some of the other losses, including Tuesday's, a contest the Blues scored three third-period goals, they hung with teams until late.

"I think all the games felt very similar, even the ones we've won 2-1 and the ones we've lost 2-1," Bylsma said inside KeyBank Center. "We're in the game. We're battling in the game. It's a tight game. It's a 1-1 game. It's a one-goal game. That's really where we need to play every game at this point in time with the team that we have."

In other injury news, Bylsma said center Jack Eichel, out all season with a high left ankle sprain, is "upping his skating regimen and showing signs of progress."

"But (he) still has a ways to go, hasn't reached all the levels of his skating yet in terms of stopping and starting," Bylsma said.

Bylsma also said winger Tyler Ennis will miss six weeks following groin surgery last week.

Update: The Sabres sent defenseman Casey Nelson to the AHL this afternoon. The Rochester Americans host the Albany Devils tonight.

The Sabres will catch a break Thursday, as ace Lightning sniper Steven Stamkos is out after suffering a lower-body injury Tuesday.

Clichés key to snapping Sabres' scoring slump

By Matt Bove

WKBW

November 16, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres just simply can't find the back of the net. On Wednesday the team didn't practice, but it's not because they don't need it.

"It's frustrating and there's no way around it," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "You're not going to win many games in this league by scoring one goal. Over the last little stretch we've been held to one goal per game and we need to be better, find ways and not make excuses." Since rattling off three straight wins, the Sabres have dropped six of their last seven and lost five games in a row. In those seven contests the Sabres have scored eight goals, averaging just 1.14 goals a game.

"We're making mental lapses," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We're not making clean plays when we need to, we're not making the smart plays when we need to."

Gorges said right now the team needs to get their confidence back and things might finally start going their way -- but it boils down to some pretty simple stuff.

"You know sometimes you lose focus and that shows you how important every shift and every opportunity is. You hear guys talk about playing a complete game, and every shift and 60 minutes and all the cliches they throw at you, but when you break it down and look at it that's exactly it, that could be the difference in a game."

During the Sabres five game losing streak, the team hasn't really been blown out, aside from a 4-0 loss to Boston. Here's what the scores have been in those five games after two periods:

BUF 0 BOS 3
OTT 1 BUF 1
NJ 0 BUF 1
BUF 1 NJ 3
BUF 1 STL 1

During the streak, the Sabres entered the third tied twice, and with the lead once, yet no wins. Wednesday, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said those are the games the team needs to slug out in order to get out of their recent slump.

Bottom line, the Sabres need to start scoring more than one or two goals a game. If they do, things will get better, but it needs to happen soon. Injuries are surely a part of the struggle, but by no means should they be an excuse. Even without Jack Eichel this team has players like Kyle Okposo, Evander Kane and Matt Moulson who have scored at a high rate in the NHL.

Sooner or later bounces will start to go the Sabres way, at least you'd like to think. Buffalo plays their next four games at KeyBank Center which sounds like a good place to get back on track -- However, this season the Sabres have only win on home ice.

Sabres look to regroup during 4-game homestand

By Chris Ryndak

Buffalo Sabres

November 16, 2016

Wednesday served as a day off the ice for the Buffalo Sabres. After a tough loss to the Blues in St. Louis the night before, the Sabres reconvened for a team meeting at KeyBank Center as they prepare for a four-game homestand that begins Thursday against Tampa Bay.

The Sabres have struggled to put the puck in the net during their current five-game winless streak. They're 0-3-2 over that stretch and have only scored five goals.

"We've got to find a way to create second and third opportunities. We've got to bear down on the opportunities we do get," captain Brian Gionta said. "But it's collective as a group. It's not on one guy. It's not on one line. We all need to be better and find ways to score more goals, for sure."

Over the last five games, the Sabres have been outscored 16-5.

"I don't think there's any real reason or answer as to why or what has happened. We're playing teams where we're in tight-matched games and we get ourselves in situations where we're making mental lapses," alternate captain Josh Gorges said. "We're not making clean play when we need to. We're not making the smart plays when we need to."

"Part of it is, the confidence to make the right plays and to do the things - we need to get back to believing in what we do, sticking together and playing the right way throughout the whole game."

Two of the games during the current winless streak ended 2-1 and the loss in St. Louis was a 1-1 game heading into the third period. Then, as Gorges referenced, the Sabres made some costly mistakes that St. Louis was able to capitalize on in the third period. Buffalo is 2-2-4 in one-goal games this season.

"I think all the games have felt pretty similar. The ones we've won 2-1 and the ones we've lost 2-1 - we're in the game, we're battling in the game, it's a tight game," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

"That's really where we need to play every game at this point in time with the team that we have. That's what they feel like. You feel the same thing again yesterday. We're 1-1 going into the third period and you've got to try to slug out a win with one or two goals. That's kind of how they've felt now for a couple weeks."

Injury updates

When Bylsma mentions "the team that we have," it's referencing in large part the injury replacements that are currently up with the club. Buffalo is currently without forwards Ryan

O'Reilly, Jack Eichel, Tyler Ennis and Nicolas Deslauriers, and defensemen Dmitry Kulikov and Zach Bogosian.

O'Reilly skated on his own before the team meeting and while Bylsma said his condition is progressing, it's unlikely that he will play tomorrow. Kulikov is "not better than day to day" according to the coach and Ennis, Deslauriers and Bogosian are all out at least a few more weeks.

Bylsma said that Eichel is upping his skating regimen and is making progress, but still has some work to do as he recovers from a high ankle sprain sustained the day before the season opener.

The Sabres might get a break Thursday night because it doesn't look like Steven Stamkos will be available. The Lightning captain sustained a lower-body injury early in the team's game last night and returned to Tampa today for further evaluation, according to the team.

Whether Stamkos is playing or not, Gorges knows they have a big task in front of them. The Lightning are third in the division with 21 points and have won two in a row.

"That's a really good team that we're facing tomorrow and we've got to come with our best effort," Gorges said. "When we get ourselves prepared for tomorrow, we've got to focus on what we do best. We've got to come and be willing to compete, be willing to grind out a game. We want it to be a close-scoring game. We don't want to play run and gun with a team like that."

Home sweet home?

The four-game homestand the Sabres are about to embark on is the longest of the year (they'll also play four in a row at home from Dec. 6-16).

It's a good opportunity for them to improve on their 1-3-2 record at KeyBank Center. Buffalo has yet to have a stretch of more than two-straight home games this season.

Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. tomorrow night with the TOPS Gamenight pregame show starting at 6:30 on MSG. The game can also be heard live on WGR 550.

Roster move

The Buffalo Sabres today announced the team has assigned defenseman Casey Nelson to the Rochester Americans (AHL).

The Amerks host Albany tonight at The Blue Cross Arena.