

# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips** 

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# Sabres coach says it's possible Eichel plays at Ottawa

By John Wawrow Associated Press November 28, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Sabres center Jack Eichel declared he's cleared every hurdle in recovering from a sprained left ankle, and coach Dan Bylsma said there's a possibility the center will make his season debut at Ottawa on Tuesday.

"We'll see," Bylsma said Monday, giving no guarantees that Eichel will play against the Senators. But Bylsma noted he was impressed by how the player performed during consecutives days of rigorous practices.

"Jack looks good on the ice," Bylsma said. "It was a big test for him yesterday and seeing how he came in today was a big step for whether we're going to see him tomorrow."

Eichel practiced with his expected linemates, Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart, and also assumed his familiar role on the team's top power-play unit.

The next test is seeing whether Eichel experiences any setbacks overnight before determining whether he'll play.

Eichel has been out since hurting the ankle during practice on Oct. 12, a day before Buffalo's season opener against Montreal. He began practicing with the team last week and was scheduled to board the Sabres flight for a road trip for the first time this season.

"It's a step in the right direction just being able to head out there and put my best foot forward, but who knows what will happen tomorrow night," he said. "The patience is starting to wear thin, but you've got to make sure you're being smart."

Eichel, college hockey's top player during his freshman season at Boston University, was selected with the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft. He led the Sabres in scoring 24 goals and finished second among NHL rookies with 56 points in 81 games,

Eichel's pending return has the potential of providing the Sabres a boost, particularly on a sputtering offense.

Buffalo (7-9-5) has scored one or fewer goals in regulation 12 times this season, including eight of its past 12 outings.

Injuries have played a factor. Center Ryan O'Reilly returned last week after missed five games with a strained oblique, while Evander Kane missed 11 games with broken ribs.

Buffalo is still playing without forward Tyler Ennis (sports hernia) and defensemen Zach Bogosian (sprained knee) and Dmitry Kulikov (lower back).

Eichel's mere presence in practice provided the Sabres a lift, with several teammates notably tapping their sticks each time Eichel scored.

"I think you see that's a little bit of relief for everybody," Bylsma said.

Eichel is eager to come to the rescue for a team that's 2-1-1 in its past four since ending a 0-6-2 skid.

"These are my best buddies, these are my teammates. You'd like to go through adversity with them and be able to play," Eichel said. "And not being able to do that has been pretty rough."

#### Eichel to make season debut when Sabres visit Senators

Associated Press November 28, 2016

OTTAWA -- The offensively challenged Buffalo Sabres are expected to get a boost with the return of center Jack Eichel to the lineup when they visit the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre on Tuesday.

The 20-year old star missed the team's first 21 games with a high ankle sprain suffered the day before the season opener.

"You just want to get back to playing," Eichel told The Buffalo News after practice Monday. "That's what you trained for all summer. You prepared for it, and it's tough that the season starts a little bit later for me. I'm just excited for it."

The Sabres (7-9-5) have lost their last two games while continuing to have troubles putting the puck in the net, averaging a league-low 1.81 goals per game. Eichel, who scored 24 times and added 32 assists as a rookie last season, will likely take a regular shift between wingers Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart.

The Senators (14-7-1) are not exactly what the doctor orders for teams will scoring deficiencies these days. They're coming off a 2-0 victory in New York against a Rangers team that leads the league with 3.70 goals per game. It was Ottawa's fourth win in a row, all with goalie Craig Anderson working between the pipes.

Anderson allowed just five goals in the four games to capture the NHL's first star of the week honors for the second time this month.

There is a strong chance he'll miss Tuesday's game to be with his wife Nicholle, who is battling throat cancer. That would mean Mike Condon would likely get the start against Buffalo.

"You use (playing) as a moment in time to do something positive with your teammates," Anderson told reporters at Madison Square Garden after Sunday's shutout, the 36th of his career. "Hockey is one of those things where it's the same as if a (person) is feeling frustrated and they go to the gym to get a hard workout in. This is my way to vent and take all my energy and use it to do something good. It's staying in the moment. At that moment time stops and worry about life and other stuff after."

Former Senators goalie Robin Lehner is expected to get the start in goal for Buffalo. In five games against his old team, Lehner has a 2-0-2 record with a .956 save percentage and a 1.30 goals against average.

This will be the teams' third meeting this month. The Sabres defeated the Senators 2-1 in Ottawa on November 5, when wingers Kyle Okposo and Reinhart scored third period goals.

The Senators won 2-1 in Buffalo on Nov. 9 when winger Bobby Ryan scored the decisive goal in a shootout.

Along with Anderson's sterling play, the Senators have shown a new dedication to playing defense this season. As of Monday, they were third in the league in blocked shots, a stat that pleases coach Guy Boucher to no end.

"When you've got Erik Karlsson, who is the best offensive defenseman in the world, being No. 1 in shot-blocking in the NHL, you know your team is going in the right direction," said Boucher.

#### Eichel's return lifts Sabres on, off the ice

By John Vogl The Buffalo News November 28, 2016

Jack Eichel scored during a power play, and his teammates tapped their sticks. He scored during a line rush with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart, and they smiled near the boards. Eichel scored during a shootout drill, and coach Dan Bylsma's imagination flickered.

It's true that one player doesn't make a team. But one player can make a team feel a whole lot better about itself. Eichel proved that Monday.

The Sabres star practiced fully in KeyBank Center, putting him in position to make his season debut Tuesday in Ottawa. Though no one came right out and said he'll be in the lineup, the signs were positive and the hurdles were out of the way.

"I've cleared them all," Eichel said. "All I can say is I felt good."

The center's skills are enough to make teammates and fans giddy. It's his mere presence that makes Bylsma happy.

If opponents decide to put their best defenders on Eichel, it frees up room for Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Matt Moulson. In turn, that gives lesser defenders to the consistent trio of Johan Larsson, Marcus Foligno and Brian Gionta.

The trickle-down effect is what a goal-starved team needs.

"It's not even one player and it's not even one line benefiting from it," Bylsma said. "Everyone's going to benefit from him getting back into the lineup."

The immediate effect was obvious. There was lightness on the ice, more smiles in the dressing room. The Sabres have been in a funk, but the malaise disappeared with Eichel around. Bylsma termed it "relief."

"It just brings a little more confidence to the group, a little more positive attitude," Foligno said. "We lost something definitely when he got injured. Now we have that piece of the puzzle back. It's a big piece.

"He's a phenomenal player, someone that can just do something singlehandedly. We have the skill in here, but other teams have that individual talent, and that's something we were missing when Jack went down."

Barring a setback – and he hasn't had any yet – Eichel will return right on time. It's been almost seven weeks since he suffered a high-ankle sprain the day before the season opener. The injury was scheduled to take him out for 6-8 weeks.

"This is the toughest part, right?" Eichel said. "I mean, you've sat out for as long as you have. Now that you're getting this close to it, you feel like you can go any day now. The patience is starting to wear thin, but you've got to make sure you're being smart.

"You just want to get back to playing. That's what you trained for all summer. You prepared for it, and it's tough that the season starts a little bit later for me. I'm just excited for it."

Eichel's sly smiles and causal interactions said more than his words did. Gionta's locker is near Eichel's stall. The captain half-jokingly asked the media-relations staff to move Eichel's chat to the conference room to relieve the crowding.

"I'm trying to get some attention," Eichel shot back. "I've been sitting in my house for months."

In addition to his off-ice skills, Eichel is one of the Sabres' comedians. That can't be overlooked when a team is struggling during a back-to-back or grinding through four games in six days.

"He lightens the room," Foligno said. "He brings another energy, another buzz to it."

Eichel is ready to be part of it.

"These are my best buddies," he said. "These are my teammates, so you like to go through adversity with them and be able to play.

"Not being able to do that has been pretty tough, but now that I'm getting back in the swing of things I think it's been a little bit better."

It was a long time coming, but Bylsma finally got to see the power-play unit he envisioned during the summer. O'Reilly skated with Reinhart and Okposo up front, while Eichel and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen worked the blue line.

"That's a power play we never got to practice in preseason," Bylsma said. "Those are the guys we want on the ice and the unit we want to put out there. Those are some reps for Jack to get in that spot, feel comfortable in those spots.

"Hopefully, we see him in those spots soon."

Considering the Sabres didn't bring any extra forwards on the flight to Ottawa, they should see Eichel in those spots Tuesday.

"He's a game-breaker," Gionta said. "He can open up the game at any point in time. There's not many guys that can do that. When the game's not going your way, he can take over and make something happen."

## Sabres' Lehner not just letting his play do the talking

By John Vogl The Buffalo News November 28, 2016

During Ryan Miller's decade in Buffalo, he carved out a reputation as one of the NHL's most cerebral goaltenders. Not only could he read plays, he could describe why they happened and offer advice on how to improve the situation.

Robin Lehner is following suit. The Sabres goalie has become a key deliverer of data in the dressing room. Healthy and confident with his role on the team, he's comfortable enough to point out mistakes, both his teammates' and his own.

He's certain the Sabres will learn from them and become the playoff contender everyone hoped they'd be.

"We're not happy when we lose," said Lehner, who will likely start Tuesday in Ottawa. "We're trying to find the answer. It's not like we're sitting back and not doing anything. This is not the same. We're going to do everything we can throughout the season. We're going to try and get better with our game.

"We have a lot of team meetings. We're looking over things on video with the coach. Everyone's doing personal stuff with the coaches. We're really trying to get better and be all-in, and I think that's going to be the key to our success. That's really what I think."

As the Sabres' offense has struggled mightily, the team has relied on its goaltenders. They've delivered. The .926 save percentage provided by Lehner and Anders Nilsson is tied with Ottawa for third in the NHL, behind only Minnesota (.937) and Montreal (.932).

"Robin came in in good shape, and you can see the effects of that in his practice, you can see the effects of that in the game," coach Dan Bylsma said. "I don't know if we knew exactly what we were getting in goaltending from Anders, but from Day One he's worked extremely hard. He's super consistent in his work ethic.

"It's made for two guys in our net that have given us some great numbers to this point in the year."

It hasn't resulted in victories. The Sabres are 7-9-5, with their six regulation victories ahead of only the five recorded by the New York Islanders.

Lehner is confident the wins will come. There's a decent chance he'll deliver one against his old team. He's 2-0-2 against Ottawa with a .956 save percentage and 1.30 goals-against average.

No matter the numbers, he'll need help. He says he got plenty in his last start, a 2-1 shootout loss to Detroit on Wednesday, and he hopes it continues with Jack Eichel expected to return.

"You look at the overall game we had that game," Lehner said. "We're the better team. We're the better-structured team. We have the most speed that game, I feel. The tightness of our team, I didn't have a lot of shots. They did have some opportunities, but we were in place to disrupt those opportunities and getting a stick on it, forcing them to shoot outside.

"They got some good point shots with some tips. That's what they got. When we play like that, we're going to win games."

Lehner has been vocal with his desire for Buffalo to play tighter. He's seen progress during the last four games with the Sabres going 2-1-1.

"We're emphasizing our third guy high in the offensive zone, and it's helped both offensively and defensively," Lehner said. "With everyone not being 100 percent on the same page, one jumps in and the other one not covering up, it's just not been in sync. The third guy high has been a problem for us. That creates that our D

does not have the gap that they should have because they don't feel like they have the security to do that. It means the opponents break out and come with a lot more speed than they probably should have every game.

"It adds on. It's a snowballing effect when you miss a few crucial things."

The constructive criticism was reminiscent of Miller's talks. Lehner doesn't want credit for being a crease genius, however.

"It's pretty much black and white when you're on the ice," he said. "As a goalie, we see when the mistakes happen because that's when we start to get ready, when we see the certain red areas when things aren't happening. We try to observe a lot."

What makes Lehner smart is pointing out the things he sees.

"We have good communication with the D-men," he said. "I'm a very vocal goalie out on the ice. I think we're synchronized that way."

His teammates are more apt to listen because they're seeing Lehner daily. The ankle injuries that limited him to 21 games last year made him a mystery. He's a regular this season, so players see what he can do and hear what he says.

"It's a lot more fun this year," Lehner said. "Being injured is probably the worst thing you can be as a professional athlete. You're not around the team. It's not the same routines. It's just miserable.

"I feel pretty good. I feel like if we play a good game, I'll play solid and hopefully I'll start getting more and more really, really good games."

## Sabres's Eichel declares himself ready

By Paul Hamilton WGR 550 November 28, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Neither Dan Bylsma nor Jack Eichel would confirm that Eichel will play in Ottawa, but all the signs are pointing to his return.

Eichel and Rasmus Ristolainen were on the first power play unit while Matt Moulson and Taylor Fedun went to the second unit. Johan Larsson is no longer on the power play.

Eichel centered a line with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart and later said he has cleared all the hurdles he needed to return. Bylsma said, "Jack looks good on the ice. Yesterday was a bigger test for him in terms of battle situations. He responded well to it and came back this morning feeling good about it and today, I think he looks real good."

In the end Bylsma wouldn't confirm Eichel was playing, but he did say it's a possibility. He also said that if Eichel can't play, then they'll call somebody up from Rochester.

His teammates sure think that he's playing on Tuesday. Bylsma said they're happy to see him doing so well, "He scored some goals and made some plays and I think that's a little bit of a relief for everybody."

Eichel said he feels real good and there are no real restrictions in what he can do. With his first game right around the corner, the excitement is there, "This is the toughest part. I've sat out for as long as I have and now that I'm getting this close to it, the patience is starting to wear thin, but you've got to make sure you're being smart."

When you're injured, you're in the building, but often off on your own. Eichel wants to be part of what is going on and the solution, "You like to be part of that adversity, you like to be in there battling, I mean these are my best buddies, these are teammates and I want to go through adversity with them."

Eichel missed 21 games, but on the other hand, there are 61 more games left to play. He knows there's a lot of hockey left, "You like to look at it that you haven't played all season and you're fresh. Sometimes, you can hit the dog days of the year and now I can just get back to playing."

With Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly back, players like Johan Larsson and Marcus Foligno can get back to playing the minutes and situations more suited to their talents.

Monday's lines were,

Moulson O'Reilly Okposo Kane Eichel Reinhart Foligno Larsson Gionta Carrier Grant Girgensons

It doesn't seem like there will be a call up from Rochester unless Eichel can't go.

## Jack Eichel's presence provides sense of relief for Sabres

By Bill Hoppe Olean Times Herald November 29, 2016

OTTAWA – The smiles told the story. They adorned the faces of Jack Eichel's Buffalo Sabres teammates and his coach, Dan Bylsma, who looked relieved his young star could make his season debut tonight against the Senators.

Eichel, meanwhile, tried to keep his emotions in check following a 50-minute practice Monday inside KeyBank Center. The second-year center said he has passed every hurdle – "No real restrictions," he said – in his recovery from a high left ankle sprain he sustained Oct. 12.

Eichel, who traveled to Ottawa, is officially day-to-day.

"I don't know," Eichel of his status for tonight. "We'll see."

But some quick grins and other little looks accompanied his words. It certainly seems Eichel plans to play his first NHL game since April 9.

"It's a little bit of a relief for everybody," Bylsma said of Eichel's imminent return.

The Sabres have mostly struggled without Eichel, a popular teammate. Whether they admit it or not, his injury on the eve of the season opener – he went down hard late in practice – rocked the team. In 21 games without Eichel, the reeling Sabres have gone 7-9-5, scoring an NHL-low 38 goals. They've scored more than two goals only once while losing eight of their last 10 contests (2-5-3).

Eichel's presence, of course, will provide a boost – on and off the ice.

"You relate it to (Buffalo Bills wide receiver) Sammy Watkins coming back," Sabres winger Marcus Foligno said.

Eichel, like Watkins, is a dynamic talent. Fresh off a 24-goal, 56-point rookie season in which he consistently improved, Eichel, 20, is expected to take another step toward superstar status this year. "Everyone's going to benefit from him getting back in the lineup," Bylsma said.

With a healthy Eichel, the Sabres can field two scoring trios, meaning opponents can't just focus on center Ryan O'Reilly's line. Players bumped up in Eichel's absence can also return to their regular spots. The ripple effect is huge.

Remember, though, the Sabres only scored 199 goals last season with Eichel, so don't expect him to single-handedly ignite an anemic offense.

Eichel practiced between his regular linemates, Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart, on Monday. Eichel also manned a point during power-play drills.

When Eichel scored, some teammates tapped their sticks.

"We lost something definitely when he got injured," Foligno said. "Now we have that piece of the puzzle back. It's a big piece."

The Sabres originally said Eichel could miss six to eight weeks. Today is 48 days since he was injured, or six weeks and six days.

High ankle sprains are notoriously tricky injuries, but his recovery has essentially gone down without a hitch.

"He's been better pretty much every step of the way than maybe can be expected," Bylsma said.

Naturally, the last few days of the recovery are the toughest.

"Now that you're getting this close to it, you feel like you can go any day now," Eichel said. "The patience is starting to wear thin, but you got to make sure you be smart."

In addition to skating on his own, Eichel has practiced with his teammates four times – three off-day sessions and one morning skate. On Sunday, he participated in more arduous work than Monday, battling with teammates. "(Sunday) was a bigger test for him ... and he responded well to it, came back (Monday) morning feeling good about," Bylsma said. "His skating's good. He's beating guys, stepping off guys, creating room and separation. Looks good to me."

Eichel said last week he had a return date in mind. Given he hadn't practiced much, home dates Thursday against the New York Rangers and Saturday against the Boston Bruins seemed like his possible targets.

But if Eichel feels well enough to play, why not let him?

"Who knows what will happen tomorrow night, it's more than 24 hours away," Eichel said. "All I can say is I felt good today, I felt good the last few days. I think I'm just getting more comfortable on the ice."

Teammates have missed some of the comfort Eichel provides away from the rink.

"He's a joker," Foligno said. "He's an easygoing kid. But the best thing is when he plays, he works hard. He brings it. Off (the) ice, dinners and stuff with him, you got comedy for as long as dinner lasts. It's always a good time with him."

If Eichel can't play, the Sabres will recall a forward, Bylsma said.

# Late turnovers, penalties lead to shootout loss

By Jourdon LaBarber Associated Press November 28, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - It has been 47 days since Sabres forward Jack Eichel went down in practice with a high-ankle sprain. But now there's light at the tunnel, and the return for Eichel seems imminent.

"I feel good," Eichel said Monday at practice. "You know moving, no real restrictions so I feel pretty good right now."

Eichel wouldn't confirm whether or not he'll be in the lineup on Tuesday against the Ottawa Senators, but he is making the trip, which is surely a good sign.

"You just wan't to get back to playing, more than anything, you know?" Eichel added. "That's what you train for all summer and prepare for. It's tough that the season starts a little bit later for me but I'm just excited for it."

Sabers head coach Dan Bylsma also remained tight-lipped and wouldn't confirm if Eichel would return Tuesday, but said he's been very impressed with the 20-year-old.

"I think he looks real good," Bylsma said. "His staking is good, he's beating guys, stepping off guys, creating room and separation — he looks good to me."

Without Eichel, the Sabres and are currently in last place in the Atlantic Division with a 7-9-5 record (19 points). The good news for the Sabres is that the difference between third and second in the division is only ten points.

"I just want to come in and try and help it as much as I can," Eichel told reporters.

And help he will. In 21 games the Sabres have an abysmal 39 goals, averaging 1.86 goals a game. While Eichel won't solve all the Sabres scoring problems, he will provide a much needed boost.

"This is the toughest part. You've sat out for as long as you have and now that you're getting this close to it, it's getting, you feel like you can go any day now and the patience is starting to wear thin but you've gotta make sure you're being smart."

# Sabres' Eichel may play in Ottawa

WGRZ

November 28, 2016

BUFFALO, NY- There's a chance, and it sounds like a pretty good one, that Jack Eichel plays his first game of the season for the Sabres at Ottawa Tuesday night.

After practice Monday, Eichel said he is traveling with the team. "I feel good, no real restrictions."

Head coach Dan Bylsma said, "There's a chance Eichel could play tomorrow." Bylsma added, "He's responded well every step of the way. He looks really good." Bylsma said when Jack does return to the game action "you just think about the matchups, everyone's going to benefit from him getting back in the lineup."

Eichel skated with the first power play group and on his line with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart.

Eichel injured his ankle October 12 one day before the regular season started.

The Sabres have struggled to score goals. He scored 24 goals in his rookie season. The Sabres are at Ottawa Tuesday night. Face off is scheduled for 7:30 pm.

# Eichel could make season debut Tuesday in Ottawa

By Jason Brough NBC Sports November 28, 2016

Barring a last-minute setback, Jack Eichel is likely to make his season debut tomorrow in Ottawa.

The Buffalo Sabres forward started practicing with his teammates last week, and he's progressed from there.

"He responded well," said head coach Dan Bylsma, per John Vogl of The Buffalo News. "He looks really good."

Eichel, 20, suffered a high-ankle sprain during practice on Oct. 12, the day before the Sabres' season-opener. He was expected to miss 6-8 weeks, so his return tomorrow would be within that time frame.

The Sabres (7-9-5) could certainly use his offense, given they're averaging the fewest goals per game (1.81) in the league.

If Eichel plays, expect him to skate with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart on his wings.

Ryan O'Reilly will center the other top line, between Matt Moulson and Kyle Okposo.

#### **Eichel to travel with Sabres to Ottawa**

By Jourdon LaBarber Buffalo Sabres November 28, 2016

Jack Eichel was willing to admit that traveling with the Buffalo Sabres for their game in Ottawa on Tuesday night was a step in the right direction in his recovery from a high-ankle sprain. That, however, was about all he could say with certainty as it pertains to his return to the lineup following practice on Monday afternoon.

Eichel said he's passed all the physical tests, which ranged from over a week's worth of solo skating sessions to then joining the team for a morning skate last Wednesday and finally participating in a series of practices that ramped up in intensity as the days passed. When asked if Tuesday was the date he had circled on his calendar for a potential return, he smiled and said "Who knows?"

"It's a step in the right direction, just being able to head out there and put my best foot forward," Eichel said. "Who knows what will happen tomorrow night? We're more than 24 hours away. All I can say is I felt good today. I felt good the last few days. I think I'm just getting more comfortable on the ice."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said there is "a possibility" that Eichel can play on Tuesday, but added that it depends on how his body responds to another day of practice. The fact that he was on the ice following a physical practice day on Sunday was a positive sign.

"Jack looks good on the ice," Bylsma said. "I thought yesterday was a bigger test for him ... He responded well to it, came back this morning feeling good about it and today he looks real good, his skating's good, he's beating guys, stepping off guys, creating room and separation. Looks good to me."

Eichel centered a line with Evander Kane and Sam Reinhart, a combination we saw for a brief period last season and again in the preseason. What we haven't seen before is the Sabres' new top power-play unit, which features Eichel playing along with Rasmus Ristolainen, Kyle Okposo, Sam Reinhart and Ryan O'Reilly.

Bylsma said that unit was one he envisioned coming into the season, but never got to see come to fruition due to a number of circumstances in training camp. Eichel, O'Reilly and Ristolainen all arrived at camp late due to their involvement at the World Cup of Hockey, while camp ended early for O'Reilly and Okposo due to injuries.

Brian Gionta, Matt Moulson, Evander Kane, Taylor Fedun and Cody Franson comprised Buffalo's second unit.

"That's the power play we never got to practice in preseason," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Those are the guys we wanted on the ice and the unit we want to put out there and those are some reps for Jack to be in that spot, feel comfortable in those spots. We'll hopefully we'll see him in those spots soon."

Bylsma said that Eichel's return has gone about as well as it possibly could have to this point, not only in the sense that Eichel has progressed right on schedule but in the fact that he's handled being away from the team evan better than Bylsma imagined.

As the clock ticks closer to his potential return, Eichel hopes he won't have to stay patient much longer.

"This is the toughest part, right? I mean, you've sat out for as long as you've have and now that you're getting this close to it, you feel like you can go any day now and the patience is starting to wear thin," Eichel said. "But you've got to make sure you're being smart."

Coverage of the game between the Sabres and Senators on Tuesday night begins with the TOPS Pregame Show at 7 p.m., or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops at 7:30.

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