



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres look to continue hot streak vs. Maple Leafs

Associated Press

November 2, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Buffalo Sabres will look to extend a rare three-game winning streak on Thursday when the rival Toronto Maple Leafs come to town.

The Sabres (4-3-2) haven't had many winning streaks in recent years. Buffalo had only two three-game win streaks all season.

The Sabres picked up their third win in a row on Tuesday by grinding out a 2-1 road victory over the Minnesota Wild, the same team that shut them out days earlier in dominant fashion.

The winning goal came from Johan Larsson with 6:26 remaining after the forward drove to the net. It resulted in Minnesota's first loss at home this season.

"We're a part of the shutout streak. We're a part of (Devan Dubnyk) stopping 39 shots in two periods against us in Buffalo," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said after the victory. "Knowing the run they're on, knowing the run he's on, we talked about it and felt like we needed to get some traffic in front of him. It was going to have to be a longer shot and then pick up the pieces afterward, and that's exactly what it was.

"It felt good to see that puck find the back of the net against a guy that's been playing so well."

Robin Lehner made 27 saves in the victory for Buffalo for his second consecutive win. Lehner is back between the pipes for the Sabres after missing three games due to illness.

"It's fun to play when we play the right way and we work together," Lehner said, according to the Sabres' team website.

Buffalo may be without defenseman Zach Bogosian when the Maple Leafs come to town. Bogosian left in the first period of the win over Minnesota after injuring his knee.

"It was unfortunate," Bylsma said. "He went down on the wall and his skate got caught in a rut. He had a tweak of the knee, so I don't have any idea of the prognosis right now."

The rebuilding Maple Leafs (3-4-3) are coming off a 3-2 overtime win over Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers. Center Nazem Kadri had two goals, including the winner 12 seconds into overtime.

"There are a lot of people coming in here thinking it's easy to play the Leafs," Kadri said. "That's part of the identity we're trying to create here -- hard to play against. Coming into Toronto it's going to be a tough building to play against. We did a pretty good job and were able to find a way to get two points."

After a slow start to the season, Frederik Andersen made 44 saves in the win over the Oilers.

The Maple Leafs continue to get strong contributions from their top young prospects.

William Nylander was named the NHL's Rookie of the Month for October with 11 points (four goals, seven assists) in nine games.

Top overall pick Auston Matthews is right behind him with 10 points (six goals, four assists) in nine games.

The new faces of the NHL take center ice when Matthews and the Leafs visit Buffalo

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

November 2, 2016

The last time Auston Matthews was in the big arena in downtown Buffalo, it was still called "First Niagara Center" and the 19-year old was taking center stage as the league's overall No. 1 draft pick, by the Toronto Maple Leafs.

He returns, now to KeyBank Center, as part of the new face of the National Hockey League and gets his first taste of the cross-border rivalry between the Leafs and the Buffalo Sabres as the teams meet at 7 p.m. Thursday.

Matthews made headlines in his NHL debut, scoring four goals in a 5-4 overtime loss to the Ottawa Senators on Oct. 12. He went on to rack up 10 points in his first six games, but the scoring pace slowed. Matthews enters Thursday on a four-game pointless streak. He was held off the score sheet Tuesday in the matchup hockey fans had been waiting for: Matthews and the Leafs vs. Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers.

Wayne Gretzky held court in Toronto touting the talents of both the young, potential superstars.

"Two of the premier young players in hockey," Gretzky told the media earlier this week. "Throw that in with a bunch of other kids who are playing really well ... it's exciting for both Toronto and Edmonton, not just Auston and Connor. Both those kids seem to understand their scenario and their responsibility to not only the team and the league, but to the cities. They're both really mature kids. It's great for hockey and it's great to see."

What fans did not see on Tuesday was a point from Matthews or McDavid. Instead it was Nazem Kadri who scored in overtime, his second goal of the game, to give the Leafs a 3-2 win.

But when Gretzky referred to the "bunch of other kids playing really well" he pointed toward a host of other players, including others on the Leafs and a handful on the Sabres, who have the potential to shape the next generation of pro hockey.

While Auston Matthews was handling two media scrums in Toronto on Tuesday, his linemate, William Nylander, created his own headline. The 20-year-old (and older brother of Sabres top draft choice Alexander Nylander, currently in Rochester) was named the NHL's Rookie of the Month for October, leading all rookies with seven assists and 11 points in nine games.

So can the youth of the Leafs end their string of losses in Buffalo?

The Sabres have won seven straight against the Leafs at home, tied for the longest home streak ever against the Leafs. The Sabres are 17-1-1 in their last 19 home games against the Leafs.

And Toronto hasn't been playing well on the road. The team is 0-3-3 away from Air Canada Centre.

The Sabres, meanwhile, are on a three-game win streak. With 10 points they have a one-point lead over Florida and Toronto in the Atlantic Division standings but health may be a concern heading into Thursday's game. The team was off on Wednesday so there was no update on the injury to defenseman Zach Bogosian, who left the game in Minnesota with a knee injury after his skate got caught in a rut. There also was no update on forward Hudson Fasching who missed Tuesday's win with a groin injury.

Six things to know about the recent history between the Sabres and Leafs

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

November 2, 2016

Six things to know about the recent history of the Buffalo Sabres-Toronto Maple Leafs rivalry as the teams prepare for their first matchup of the season at 7 p.m. Thursday in KeyBank Center.

1. The Sabres have dominated the series in Buffalo. Seriously. While the Sabres have struggled at times to play well in front of their home crowd, the team has a seven-game winning streak against the Leafs in KeyBank Center. The Sabres are 17-1-1 against the Leafs in the last 19 games in Buffalo.
2. Both teams have plenty of top draft choices in the lineup. The bright side of a bad regular season is a high draft position and both Toronto and Buffalo have used that to their advantages the last few years. Among the first-round draft picks on the Maple Leafs roster are Auston Matthews (first overall, 2016), Mitch Marner (fourth overall, 2015), William Nylander (eighth overall, 2014), Morgan Rielly (fifth overall, 2012) and Nazem Kadri (seventh overall, 2009). While Jack Eichel (second overall, 2015) is injured, the Sabres still boast second-overall pick Sam Reinhart (2014) and first-rounders Rasmus Ristolainen (eighth overall, 2013), Zemgus Girgensons (14th overall, 2012) and Tyler Ennis (26th overall, 2008).
3. Tyler Ennis has big points against the Leafs. Ennis has 17 points (eight goals, nine assists) in 17 games against Toronto dating back to the 2011-12 season. Johan Larsson, who scored the late game-winning goal for the Sabres in their 2-1 win in Minnesota Tuesday, has six points (three goals, three assists) in six career games against the Leafs. Meanwhile Matt Moulson is looking to avoid going pointless in three straight games against Toronto for the first time in his career. Moulson has 25 points (16 goals, nine assists) in 28 games against the Leafs.
4. Settle in for free hockey. In the last 20 meetings between the Sabres and Leafs nine have been decided in overtime or in a shootout. It's been more prevalent in recent history as three of the last six meetings have gone to a shootout with Buffalo winning the last two. The Sabres have a 5-4 edge in those OT/shootout games.
5. For what it's worth, it has been a while since they met in the playoffs. The last time the two met in the playoffs was the Sabres famed 1998-99 run to the Stanley Cup Finals. Buffalo defeated Toronto in the best-of-seven series (4-1) in the Eastern Conference Finals.
6. The last meeting was a win for the Sabres. The last regular season meeting between the teams was a 4-1 win March 31 in KeyBank Center. Cal O'Reilly scored twice, including a power play goal, while Johan Larsson also added two goals, including an empty-netter to secure the win. Chad Johnson made 25 saves.

Leafs' Auston Matthews ready for Sabres, Buffalo debut

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 3, 2016

BUFFALO – Auston Matthews first experienced the heated rivalry between the Sabres and Maple Leafs here at the NHL Draft, when the Toronto contingency wildly cheered the first overall pick and the hometown fans mercilessly booed their enemy.

"It's a lot of booing," Matthews told reporters Wednesday in Toronto after the Leafs prepared for tonight's game inside KeyBank Center, the rookie's first appearance here since getting selected June 24.

Expect another loud, bipartisan atmosphere throughout Toronto's first visit with Matthews, who, thanks to an astonishing four-goal NHL debut, has scored six goals and 10 points in his first 10 games.

Matthews, 19, knows he will likely be the No. 1 target of Sabres fans for years to come.

"I was actually thinking about that the other day," the center said of more booing. "It'll be nice. I think the guys were saying there's usually a pretty good crowd, a lot of Maple Leafs fans that go."

Still, while tonight should be fun, Sabres center Jack Eichel, Matthews' friend and teammate at recent international competitions, is sidelined. Eichel, 20, sustained a high left ankle sprain Oct. 13.

The game won't be the same without Eichel's presence.

On Tuesday, Matthews' first-ever NHL matchup against Edmonton Oilers superstar Connor McDavid was hyped as the start of a rivalry between the two ultra-talented youngsters.

Toronto's 3-2 overtime win was must-see TV across Canada (the game wasn't televised in the U.S.). Legends Wayne Gretzky and Bobby Orr, whose agency represents McDavid, even flew in to watch.

In reality, Eichel, the mega-prospect drafted after McDavid, might become Matthews' main rival. The Americans play on emerging teams in the same division – that's four or five meetings a season – two hours from each other. It would be a natural rivalry, even if Eichel and Matthews are really friendly foes. Besides, McDavid's Oilers play in another conference and only face Atlantic Division teams twice a year.

All three represented Team North America, a rollicking squad comprised of elite 23-and-under talent, at the recent World Cup of Hockey.

Matthews said he recently spoke to Eichel and wished him well in his recovery. The two planned to possibly meet up Wednesday night.

Whatever happens tonight, Buffalo will always have special meaning to Matthews.

"It was a big step, a big dream come true right there," Matthews said of getting drafted. "I think Buffalo, the (since-renamed) First Niagara Center, will always have a special place in your heart because you were drafted there."

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The Sabres, who have won three straight games following a 1-3-2 start, had Wednesday off after flying home Tuesday night from Minnesota, where they beat the Wild 2-1.

Center Johan Larsson scored the tiebreaker late, his second game-winning goal in three outings. Incredibly, seven of Larsson's last 12 goals have been game winners. The Swede, 24, only has 18 NHL goals, so a whopping 39 percent have been winners.

"A little bit of luck, I guess," Larsson told reporters Tuesday in Minnesota.

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Following Tuesday's win, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma had no update on defenseman Zach Bogosian, who left early with a knee injury.

"It's unfortunate," Bylsma said. "He just went down ... and his skate got caught in a rut, had a tweaking of the knee."

With Bogosian out, four of the five healthy defensemen skated more than 22 minutes each, including Dmitry Kulikov, who played a team-high 27 minutes, 40 seconds.

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Instead of playing right wing Tuesday, Sabres winger Justin Bailey skated on the left beside center Derek Grant and Nick Baptiste.

Bailey has been playing left wing with the Rochester Americans "for just such an emergency," Bylsma said. The Sabres recalled the Williamsville native with rookie Hudson Fasching day-to-day with a groin injury.

Game Day: Toronto Maple Leafs at Buffalo Sabres

By Kevin McGran

The Toronto Star

November 2, 2016

KEYBANK CENTER

Puck drop: 7 p.m.

TV: Sportsnet Ontario

Radio: TSN 1050

Key matchup: Ryan O'Reilly, Sabres, vs. Morgan Rielly, Leafs. Yes, it's The Life Of ... meeting. O'Reilly leads Buffalo with four goals and four assists in nine games, while Rielly has typically drawn the assignment as the Leafs' chief shut-down defenceman.

Need to know: Buffalo (4-3-2) has won three straight games despite missing forwards Jack Eichel (high ankle sprain) and Evander Kane (cracked ribs) . . . Matt Moulson and Kyle Okposo also have four goals, tying O'Reilly for the team lead . . . The Sabres have the league's sixth best power play (24.2 per cent) and 11th best penalty kill (83.9 per cent). ... They are 19th in scoring 5-on-5 (14 goals) . . . The Sabres have given up 11 goals in the third period, the Leafs 16, the worst period for both teams.

Up next: Saturday vs. Vancouver, 7 p.m.

DUNLEAVY: Some early season thoughts

By Dan Dunleavy

Buffalo Sabres

November 2, 2016

Hello folks, it's been a while since we were in touch. With only one game under my belt so far this regular season, you must forgive me for not having too much of an inside read on the guys yet. But what I can share right now is my inside look at the World Cup and some stories from my travels during the preseason.

Before the Sabres season started, I was offered a job to call the World Cup of Hockey on Rogers Sportsnet Radio across Canada. The flagship station and point of origin for that job came from The FAN590 in Toronto, a station I spent 19 years working at before joining Maple Leaf Sports and Entertainment. From there, the Sabres asked me to sign here to work with and share games with RJ until his retirement.

So needless to say with the FAN calling on me for another international event, I jumped at the chance to call the best players in the world (who were not injured), compete against one another.

I had a wonderful eight-year run calling the World Juniors at the FAN and across Canada as well as the World Cup held in Halifax and Quebec City, and the 2010 Vancouver Olympics. So I had a sense of what top-notch international tournament play could be, but I was, like many, curious as to what this edition of the World Cup of Hockey was going to become and the city of Toronto did a wonderful job of hosting the event.

The one game I will always recall from that tournament was North America vs. Sweden.

Jack Eichel, Auston Mathews and their flashy, talented teammates took control right from the start of the game. Not to be outdone, the comeback by the veteran Swedish side was equally as impressive, and set up the overtime that rocked Air Canada Centre. The winning goal by Nathan MacKinnon was jaw dropping as he took on Henrik Lundqvist and beat "The King."

Ryan O'Reilly and Canada's comeback way of winning against Team Europe in Game 2 of the Final was another great story and moment to remember. On the play that set up the game-winning goal, I could see Brad Marchand come firing off the Canada bench out of the corner of my eye. He would be the trailer into the offensive zone on a shorthanded rush. I made the call, "If they see Marchand coming off the bench, this could be trouble for Europe."

Sure enough, Marchand scores what was the tournament winner for Canada and showed everyone in hockey who thought he was just a pest you wanted on your team but hated on the Bruins that he is also one heck of a talented and clutch player.

The tournament also marked the return to hockey of Montreal Canadiens goalie Carey Price and did he ever impress! If anyone out there doubted who the best goalie in the game today was before the World Cup, Price should have convinced them otherwise.

During the World Cup, I had a Sabres preseason game sandwiched in on a day off so I was off to Penn State University and Pegula Arena to call the action.

What a great facility it is, and I must say the people of Penn State's hockey community were very welcoming to the Pegula family and their extended Sabre hockey family as well. The game ended not so well for the Sabres, falling 2-1 to the Wild, who scored the winner late on the power play.

My Sabres preseason journey would continue with a back-to-back series against Carolina. The first stop was Marquette, Mich. for Kraft Hockeyville USA.

Unexpected (by me anyway) was the reception that awaited the team outside the rink as we arrived. The team bus pulled up for a morning skate right from the flight into Michigan. As we turned the corner onto the street where the renovated rink sat, there were hundreds of people lined up and waiting to greet the team.

The day and night was well received and hosted by the people of Marquette. And the Sabres left feeling good about a 2-0 win.

From there it was off to Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario for a rematch the next night with Carolina.

During my 10-plus year run calling games in the Canadian Hockey league with the Majors organization, I had never made the trek to Northern Ontario and always felt I missed out on something I shouldn't have. So I was excited to get this chance now.

Funny story or two here:

When we landed and got on our buses - the players on theirs and the rest of the staff on ours - we all thought we had taken off in Michigan and landed in Ontario.

Well, quickly I noticed interstate signs and thought, "Canada does not have interstates." But then I thought, "Well I have never been this far north by car anyway, what did I not know?" We did indeed land in Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan and had yet to cross the border into Canada. Later that night by the team room,

I heard players with the same story: "Thought we landed in Canada."

It was a special night for Carolina GM Ron Francis, who was back home amongst family and friends. He had a street named after him and a little pregame party thrown for him at the rink. Now I mention this part of the day because you see, before most games in most rinks, there is a pregame meal available to buy for us non-player types who are there to work for the evening pretty much from 4:30 on until we land back home or in another city.

Well, there was no pregame meal and you can only imagine me walking in with Rob Ray and not finding a meal for the big man to sink his teeth into before faceoff. We walked the lower concourse of the arena and, sure enough, we came upon the latter stages of the Ron Francis reception.

Ron was talking with friends and there sat behind him a nice spread of food.

Rob was a gentleman and said he could not crash Ron's party. I said "Why not?" We are hockey family!

Sure, enough the ladies who were in charge of the food that night called us over and we dug in, met Ron's brother and others, and even had some of Ron Francis' cake! It was the best white-iced cake I think I have ever had!

Rayzor did eventually give in and have some eats himself. I'm glad he did because if Rob is ornery when we go to air, I prepare myself for at least one good shot to the right shoulder as he fires himself up if he's in the booth next to me.

One more preseason date was on my slate and it took the shape of a same-day stop into Ottawa.

The Senators iced what was pretty much their opening night line up versus Buffalo. The Sabres finished the exhibition season on a good note with a 4-2 win, with goals from Evander Kane, Sam Reinhart, Marcus Foligno and Derek Grant, while Robin Lehner made 30 saves.

I really do get a sense from what I have seen from Robin that when he is healthy and focused, he can be THAT guy Sabres fans are waiting for to emerge as the No. 1 goalie the team has been search for since Ryan Miller's departure.

Other thoughts early into the regular season, a season hindered by injuries to key players already:

1. This team, in my opinion, is deep enough that it should be OK until Kane and Jack Eichel return to full health. It will take a commitment from every single player to playing the right way and not cheating themselves or their teammates. I am not saying there won't be nights you curse them, but overall I would not panic, as long as goaltending keeps them in games.

2. Give Dmitry Kulikov some time to find his way. Dmitry's play is already noticeable on the back end and it will only get better as he sees more ice time with his new teammates. Recall that he was at World Cup and had NO preseason to get to know or play with these guys. We may see some flashes of this last night when he played a season-high 27:40.

3. Brian Gionta is the captain of this team in so many ways. You would have to ask players in the room why he is the leader when that door is closed, but on the ice, nobody on this team plays every shift harder, as honestly and smart as Brian. He is already chipping in with offense while Jack and Evander wait out their injuries. Brian is stepping up and showing the younger players by example that they have to do the same.

We are just underway this season but I have to say I am looking forward to another year of growth in the right direction with these Sabres. Also looking forward to saying hello to you at the rink this season. If you see me walking the hallways please say hello, Buffalo, and share your Sabres stories with me!