



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Kane's return imminent for bedraggled Sabres' offense

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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When you peruse the NHL offensive statistics, it's an ugly story for the Buffalo Sabres. But in the interest of fairness and democracy -- and what better day to provide that? -- there is some good news to provide on the horizon for the bedraggled corps of Buffalo forwards.

Winger Evander Kane's return appears imminent, coach Dan Bylsma said Tuesday. Kane, out since cracking four ribs during a collision with the end boards during the season opener Oct. 13 against Montreal, is scheduled to take the morning skate prior to Wednesday's game against Ottawa in KeyBank Center.

The Sabres then have a home-and-home series with New Jersey, here Friday and Saturday in Prudential Center, before playing Tuesday in St. Louis. It seems likely Kane will return in one of those three games. Kane had 20 goals for the Sabres last year and is averaging 22 over his last four full seasons in the NHL.

"Evander has been putting in a lot of work and he's really progressed quite well," Bylsma said during his weekly appearance on WGR Radio. "He's had four days now of some physical contact, some heavy contact. He skated here at home real hard and it's a good possibility to see him here in the short future."

The Sabres certainly need the return of Kane and Jack Eichel to help their stumbling offense. But they're going to have to wait quite a bit longer for Eichel, who still is not close to skating after suffering his high ankle sprain the day before the opener.

"Hopefully we see him keep progressing. He's done real well," Bylsma said of Eichel, who is limited to heavy bike and cardio work. "We're not looking at him in the near future right now. We're still talking weeks, not immediately here."

The Sabres were off Tuesday and have plenty to ponder after Monday's 4-0 loss in Boston. The name of the game is putting the puck in the net and they simply haven't been able to do it nearly enough.

GOALS PER GAME

(Entering Tuesday's play)

OVERALL

Rank	Team	GP	GF	Avg.
1.	NY Rangers	13	55	4.23
26.	Los Angeles	12	27	2.25
27.	San Jose	12	27	2.25
28.	Buffalo	12	25	2.08
29.	Colorado	11	22	2.00
30.	Vancouver	13	21	1.62

HOME

Rank	Team	GP	GF	Avg.
1.	NY Rangers	9	42	4.67
26.	San Jose	6	13	2.16
27.	Boston	5	10	2.00
28.	Colorado	4	8	2.00
29.	Vancouver	7	11	1.57
30.	Buffalo	4	5	1.25

Buffalo entered Tuesday's play with just 25 goals in 12 games, 28th in the 30-team NHL in total goals and per-game average (2.08). And the Sabres' numbers are skewed upward by their 6-2 win Oct. 16 in Edmonton, which is proving an aberration. Take that game away and Buffalo's per-game scoring average drops to a ghastly 1.72.

Monday's loss was the seventh time in 12 games the Sabres have been held to two goals or less, and the drought is deepening as the Sabres have just five goals in the last four games. Only because of stellar work from goaltender Robin Lehner is Buffalo 2-2 in that stretch.

The Sabres have just 17 even-strength goals in 12 games (24th in the league). Meanwhile, the power play scored eight times in the first seven games but has gone 0 for 8 in the last five.

Things are particularly acute at home heading into Wednesday's game. In going 1-3 downtown, the Sabres have just five goals. It's no surprise that total is last in the league. Three of those five are on the power play, leaving fans to hear "Let Me Clear My Throat" just twice thus far for an even-strength tally.

Overall, Kyle Okposo leads the Sabres with five goals while Ryan O'Reilly and Matt Moulson have four apiece and captain Brian Gionta has three. No one else has more than two. O'Reilly and Gionta both scored twice in Edmonton; in the 10 games since, O'Reilly has two goals and Gionta only one.

"Scoring goals has been an issue for us as of late and again tonight," O'Reilly said after the Boston defeat. "We need to get on the board early. It changes the momentum, gives us some energy. It's got to start with me. I've been struggling these last few games and have to find a way to put the puck in the net.

"I've got to be one of the key guys that creates. When I'm not putting it in and putting it in early, it's tough for us to get going. It's tough for myself to open up not having that confidence. It's just frustrating right now."

O'Reilly is notoriously hard on himself but he has plenty of company in Struggle City. Gionta was stymied by Tuukka Rask on a breakaway during the second period, failing to put a dent in Boston's lead during a period where the Bruins tallied three goals to take over the game.

"I put that on myself," Gionta said. "Short-handed breakaway there at 2-0, it could be a 2-1 game and change the momentum and the outcome."

There's plenty of other droughts going on across the Buffalo roster. Derek Grant has no goals in 12 games. Tyler Ennis and Zemgus Girgensons have just one each and that's nothing new for Girgensons, a former first-round pick who has just 12 goals in his last 100 games dating to the 2014-15 season. Marcus Foligno has just two goals while Moulson had four goals in the first five games but has not tallied in seven straight.

In addition, the Sabres remain the only team in the NHL without a single goal from a defenseman.

"You talk about secondary offense from your third and fourth lines, it's no different than your defensemen," Jake McCabe said in Boston. "We can't rely on just our top guys to get goals for us. We need to start contributing more from the back end, for sure."

"It's something you constantly have to work on and change," O'Reilly said. "We have to keep a beginner's mind and find a way to grow. Every night is going to be different. Right now, we're too inconsistent."

Sabres' Kyle Okposo already paying dividends

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
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BUFFALO – Kyle Okposo's quick acclimation and productive start have been welcomed by the Sabres, whose previous high-priced free agents quickly turned into disasters.

Remember Christian Ehrhoff? How about Ville Leino? Both lasted three seasons before the Sabres exercised buyouts. Both are out of the NHL, now cautionary tales for the dangers of free agency.

The rest of Ehrhoff's 10-year, \$40 million contract is being paid through 2027-28. The remainder of Leino's six-year, \$27 million deal – a contract widely regarded as the *worst ever* – is being paid through 2019-20.

The team's old regime, it should be noted, committed those mistakes.

Then there's Okposo, 28, quietly one of the NHL's most consistent and productive forwards. If he replicates his usual numbers – that's an average of 22 goals and 61 points over the last three seasons – the seven-year, \$42 million contract he signed July 1 might look like a steal.

It's early, but Okposo's on track for a career season. He has five goals and eight points, both team highs, in 11 games entering tonight's tilt against the Ottawa Senators inside KeyBank Center.

That's a 37-goal, 59-point pace over a full season. Okposo scored a career-high 27 goals in 2013-14 and had 64 points last season with the New York Islanders.

"His leadership, his play on the ice (and) his goal-scoring ability is everything we want to have in our lineup," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said last week. "He's ... proved that every time he's stepped on the ice this year."

Why has the affable Okposo meshed so quickly?

"It's a fun-loving group of guys, an easygoing group," he said Sunday. "I'm not a huge personality. I just kind of go about my business and do the right things."

The American has produced from the get-go. He scored 2:37 into his debut Oct. 16 in Edmonton, a 6-2 win, adding an assist five minutes later. He ended his longest pointless stretch – only two games – by scoring the tying goal late in Saturday's 2-1 win in Ottawa.

"I think you always want more," Okposo said of his production. "You can't be satisfied with your production. You always want to get to the next level."

That next level, perhaps 30 goals, would be significant. The Sabres haven't had someone reach that mark since Jason Pominville in 2011-12.

Given Okposo's consistency and the talent surrounding him, it's an achievable milestone.

What would be growth for Okposo, who has scored 18 or more goals six times and 45 or more points five times? He wouldn't mention a number.

"I try to take inventory every game I play," he said. "I just want to grow as a player. Obviously, when you're playing well, it seems like points, production goes up. ... I feel like there's just opportunities for more. ... Once you get satisfied in your game, that's when you stop getting better as a player, you start to regress."

Okposo has been playing beside No. 1 center Ryan O'Reilly, who also has eight points. As a first-liner with the Isles, Okposo often skated with John Tavares. That helped Okposo develop a greater appreciation for O'Reilly, the Sabres' only NHL All-Star last season.

"We were out there on the ice against him a lot," Okposo said. "He just made a lot of plays, made life difficult for us. When you play with him, you realize how good he is offensively, the little plays he makes.

To Okposo, O'Reilly "plays the game the right way" and "does everything right and does everything well."

"He's such an easy guy to play with," Okposo said. "He's been definitely a lot of fun to get to know."

Notes: Speaking on his weekly appearance on WGR, Bylsma said winger Evander Kane, out since cracking three or four ribs opening night, will skate with his teammates this morning and could play this week. ... The Sabres had Tuesday off.

Gameday: Ottawa at Buffalo

By Ken Warren

Ottawa Sun

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OTTAWA - Ottawa Senators (7-4-0) at Buffalo Sabres (5-5-2), 7:30 p.m., KeyBank Center, Sportsnet, TVAS2, TSN 1200-AM, 94.5-FM

SPECIAL TEAMS

OTTAWA

PP: 12.9 (23rd), PK: 82.3 (14th)

BUFFALO

PP: 20.5 (10th), PK: 79.1 (22nd)

THE BIG MATCH-UP

Ryan O'Reilly versus Derick Brassard: Neither team is an offensive powerhouse, so the attention turns to the club's front line centres. O'Reilly has been kept off the scoresheet in the Sabres past two games – Saturday in Ottawa and Monday against Boston. Brassard went into Tuesday's game against Nashville without a point in his past four games.

THREE KEYS TO THE GAME

1-MANAGING ICE TIME: The Senators were expected to arrive in Buffalo early Wednesday morning, following Tuesday's game in Nashville. Energy may be an issue, particularly early.

2-GOALTENDING: Before facing Nashville, Senators coach Guy Boucher wouldn't commit to his netminder against Buffalo, but it could be back-up Mike Condon. The Sabres will likely counter with Robin Lehner, who was outstanding in Saturday's 2-1 win over Ottawa.

3-SENATORS POWER PLAY: Despite their individual skill, the Senators limped into Nashville with a power play efficiency rate of 12.9 per cent, 23rd in the NHL. That must improve if the Senators have any hope for consistent success.

LINES

OTTAWA

Bobby Ryan-Derick Brassard-Mark Stone

Mike Hoffman-Kyle Turris-Tom Pyatt

Ryan Dzingel-Jean-Gabriel Pageau-Zack Smith

Matt Puempel-Chris Kelly-Chris Neil

DEFENCE

Marc Methot-Erik Karlsson

Dion Phaneuf-Cody Ceci

Mark Borowiecki-Freddy Claesson

GOALTENDING

Craig Anderson

Mike Condon

Injuries: Clarke MacArthur, Andrew Hammond

SABRES LINES

Matt Moulson-Ryan O'Reilly-Kyle Okposo

Zemgus Girgensons-Sam Reinhart-Tyler Ennis

Marcus Foligno-Johan Larsson-Brian Gionta

Will Carrier-Derek Grant-Nick Baptiste

DEFENCE

Josh Gorges-Rasmus Ristolainen

Dmitry Kulikov-Casey Nelson

Jake McCabe-Cody Franson

GOALTENDING

Robin Lehner

Anders Nilsson

Injuries: Jack Eichel, Evander Kane, Nicolas Deslauriers, Hudson Fasching, Zach Bogosian.

Lehner, Sabres aim to take care of business vs. Sens

Stats LLC

November 9, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Buffalo Sabres goalie Robin Lehner took care of business against his former team already once this season and will look to do so again when the Ottawa Senators come to town Wednesday night.

Lehner is hitting his stride after missing one week earlier this season due to illness. In the 2-1 victory over Ottawa on Saturday, he was the clear standout with 32 saves -- including several highlight-reel stops.

"He was the one guy that, for the full 60 minutes, he gave it his all and was really a big reason why we won that game," Sabres forward Sam Reinhart said after Buffalo's Saturday win over Ottawa, according to the Sabres' team website.

"He's a battler," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said following the win, according to the Sabres' website. "Early in the season, you could see that his game was coming. He made some really good stops and the last few games that he's played, he's just been battling for us and making big saves. He made so many huge saves and his athleticism is really good. It's allowing him to make some of those saves."

Lehner's best stop in that game came with 5:06 remaining in the first period. The goalie charged out of the net and as Jean-Gabriel Pageau went wide to his left, Lehner sprawled on the ice and extended his arm to stop the puck with his blocker.

The Sabres sent a first-round pick to the Senators to acquire Lehner last summer. In nine games, the goaltender has a record of 4-4-1 and a save percentage of .925.

Buffalo will be looking for a better team performance compared to their last outing. Following the win over Ottawa on Saturday, the Sabres had a clunker against the Boston Bruins on Monday and lost 4-0.

"We've got to keep our cool no matter what's going on out there," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said, according to the Sabres' website. Buffalo struggled with penalties in the loss to Boston. You've got to stay composed, whether you're mad about it or not or you don't agree. We've got to keep our composure. That's what happens. The game gets running from you. You start reeling, you start getting frustrated and you get away from what you need to do to get back in the game."

The Senators are coming off 3-1 loss to Nashville on Tuesday night.

Goalie Craig Anderson has flourished between the pipes for Ottawa while at the same time coping with the news that his wife, Nicholle, had recently been diagnosed with cancer.

"He's a strong person -- him and Nicholle both, and their two boys," Senators defenseman Mark Borowiecki said, according to the Ottawa Citizen. "I can't even imagine some of the emotions that he's feeling and what him and his family have to go through on a day-to-day basis. For him to show the kind of commitment he's not only shown to our team, but to his wife, it's pretty special to see. It's a testament to him as a person."