



Buffalo Sabres

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Eichel, Sabres brace for Rangers

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Jack is back.

Young superstar Jack Eichel made his long-awaited return for the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday, and he didn't wait very long to make his presence felt. Eichel had a goal and an assist in the first period to lead the Sabres to a 5-4 victory over the Ottawa Senators.

He'll look to build off that commanding performance in his home debut Thursday night against the New York Rangers. Eichel missed the first 21 games of the season because of a high ankle sprain.

"That's the kind of the spark we were looking for when we need a little bit more offense," center Sam Reinhart told the Sabres web site. "I think it elevated a bunch of guys' games; it just kind of gave us that little more confidence out there that we can play with the puck and make plays."

Indeed, Eichel's presence caused a ripple effect throughout the entire Sabres' roster against the Senators. The NHL's lowest-scoring team scored two goals or fewer in its previous 13 games before erupting for five against the Senators.

Eichel's goal was a beauty. The 20-year-old ripped a quick one-timer on the power play 6:16 into the game.

"I think it adds a big dimension to our team, right from the beginning on our power play," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma told the Sabres web site. "A different level of execution, a different level of speed. He gets the power-play goal, the first one's a great pass play and the second one is something we've sorely missed on our power play, the one-time from Jack."

Ryan O'Reilly had two goals, including the game-winner, for Buffalo (8-9-5) against Ottawa.

Backup goaltender Anders Nilsson is expected to start after No. 1 Robin Lehner suffered a hip injury against the Senators. Lehner is considered day-to-day.

"I don't have any further update other than what we gave (Tuesday) night, it's hip and it's day-to-day," Bylsma said. "He's lobbying to backup tomorrow but he's going to see how it is in the morning."

The Rangers (16-7-1) are coming off a 3-2 victory over the Carolina Hurricanes on Tuesday night. New York came from behind and scored twice in the third period to pick up the victory.

Power forward Rick Nash was the standout against Carolina with a goal and an assist.

"There's no doubt that Rick tonight was the leader of this team by his play," coach Alain Vigneault told the Rangers web site. "He made some great defensive plays, obviously that first shift in the third where he tied it up for us and then made that great play on the power play. He played the type of game that we needed against a tough opponent."

The Rangers are looking to win two games in a row for the first time since mid-November. New York is 3-3-1 in its last seven games. Before that, the Rangers won eight of nine.

Boston boys Eichel and Vesey meet for the first time in Buffalo

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2016

The boys from Boston could have played on the same team in the National Hockey League. But Jack Eichel and Jimmy Vesey had different paths to take.

Eichel played one season at Boston University before moving to the NHL after the Buffalo Sabres drafted him second overall in 2015.

Vesey was drafted by the Nashville Predators 66th overall in 2012 and elected to play out his four years at Harvard. When it became clear Vesey was unlikely to sign with Nashville, the Predators traded his rights to the Sabres in June.

Vesey let time lapse without signing with the Sabres, making him a free agent in the summer. In late August he signed with the New York Rangers.

Expect very different receptions for Eichel and Vesey as both make their Buffalo debut this season in KeyBank Center on Thursday night when the Sabres host the Rangers at 7 p.m.

Sabres faithful will likely cheer wildly for Eichel, who plays his first home game after a triumphant return to game action on Tuesday in Ottawa. Eichel, who missed the first 21 games with a high ankle sprain, had a goal and an assist in his first game back.

Vesey, who ranks sixth among NHL rookies with 14 points, will likely hear boos from Sabres fans after the perceived snub when he elected free agency over signing to play in Buffalo.

"I mean, I'm not really sure why," Eichel said when asked about the prospect of fans booing Vesey. "He was a free agent. It's his own decision to make a decision where he wants to play. If any of us were in his situation I'm sure a lot would go into a decision like that. Obviously would have loved to have him in Buffalo but he made a decision and obviously he's happy with that one. Can't blame a guy for that."

It's hard for Sabres coach Dan Bylsma to blame Vesey as well, even though he really wants to.

"I'd like to have ill feelings about Jimmy and the situation but I can't," said Bylsma, who coached both Vesey and Eichel as part of the Team USA staff at the 2015 IIHF World Championship. "I had the opportunity to coach Jimmy for a couple weeks in the World Championships and I can't say I know him well but he's stepped into the NHL and proven that he is a goal scorer, can be a goal scorer. He's been a timely goal scorer for them and I think that's what I knew he was going to be able to do. Now it's on the other side and we have to deal with him."

Meanwhile, the Sabres are more than content to have Eichel, who put an exclamation on his return to hockey with two points in the first period on Tuesday.

"You want to be out there and obviously help contribute and feel comfortable," Eichel said. "I think a lot of adrenaline and energy and pretty anxious to get going. You almost forget about your ankle. It was nice the first couple of shifts to touch the puck and get yourself in the game, get hit a couple of times. I think those are the best ways to find yourself comfortable in a game when you haven't played in a while. Especially to be able to get a couple of points in the first period, I think you're able to build a lot of confidence and put any doubt away."

Eichel's points are important. In his rookie season he scored 24 goals with 32 assists playing in 81 games. But his place on the team is greater than points. The Sabres' power play was largely built around Eichel's creativity and line combinations, with potential matchup problems for opposing teams, were structured with Eichel as a top-two center.

The impact of his return runs deeper than goals.

"It's tough to really put it to words the trickle-down effect of having Jack back," Bylsma said. "His skill-set, his speed, what he can do with the puck and the effect it has on everybody else. To say it has an effect on Ryan O'Reilly who he's not playing with five-on-five is hard to describe but he is.

"He's had an effect on our players' creativity. We've scored more goals in the last two practices than we had in the 10 before that without Jack. It gives everyone a better sense. They're in the right spots but they have a better sense of themselves offensively and it trickles down to every player. We're all benefactors of it."

Among the benefactors – Sam Reinhart, who gets to move back to the wing alongside Eichel. The two hope to find the chemistry they enjoyed at the end of last season.

"I know my game was changed a little bit and right away we familiarized with each other and it didn't take too much to find each other again," Reinhart said. "Playing with him changes things a little bit. Especially coming through the neutral zone, there's a lot of swinging and finding lanes. It's structured but a lot of it is just reading off each other."

Sabres Notebook: Nilsson always ready for the call to the net

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2016

There was just over two minutes left in the first period in Ottawa on Tuesday night when Robin Lehner took the opportunity of a whistle to skate to the Sabres bench.

The move took most people by surprise, but not his goaltending partner Anders Nilsson.

"He kind of gave me a little heads up a little bit before that he wasn't feeling quite 100 percent. So I was ready," Nilsson said after taking an optional skate in KeyBank Center Wednesday afternoon. "Obviously it's not fun to see your friend and goalie partner go down but unfortunately that's part of the game sometimes. As a backup you always have to be ready for stepping in."

Nilsson let in three goals on 29 shots. Not the best performance but good enough to backstop the Sabres to a 5-4 win against the Senators.

"A few plays were difficult for him and he had to battle through it," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said of Nilsson's performance.

Nilsson should start Thursday when the Sabres host the New York Rangers at 7 p.m. in KeyBank Center.

Whether Lehner will back up Nilsson or if the Sabres recall Linus Ullmark from the Rochester Americans is a decision to be made Thursday morning.

"I don't have any further update other than what we kind of gave last night," Bylsma said about Lehner's injury. "It's his hip and it's day to day. He's lobbying to back up (against the Rangers) but he's going to see how it is in the morning. Again, it looks like it's just day to day."

Bylsma said Lehner suffered the injury on the goal scored by Mike Hoffman at 13:47 of the first period.

"He hurt it on the goal and then he was out there for another four minutes," Bylsma said. "He didn't have anything going on for about three minutes and he stepped out to play that puck and it kind of cramped up on him and didn't have any strength at the time. Came out of the game at that point."

Tuesday's game in Ottawa was the first time this season Nilsson had to spell Lehner during the game. In seven appearances, Nilsson has a 2.20 goals against and a .939 save percentage.

Nilsson has two career games against the Rangers. In those games he is 1-1, allowing a total of eight goals on 54 shots.

Ullmark has played in 14 games for the Amerks with a 2.99 goals against and a .909 save percentage. The Amerks play at Utica Wednesday night.

The New York Rangers come to town after a come-from-behind 3-2 win over Carolina in Madison Square Garden Tuesday. The Hurricanes took a 2-0 first-period lead before the Rangers came back with unassisted goals from Nick Holden and Rick Nash while Jimmy Vesey scored the game-winner on the power play.

The Rangers entered Wednesday with the lead in the Metropolitan Division with a 16-7-1 overall mark and a 6-3-1 record in their last 10 games. They have not won back-to-back games since winning three straight from Nov. 12-15 beating Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver to sweep a western road trip.

When Ryan O'Reilly scored his first goal in Ottawa, he was without his helmet. It was a good look for O'Reilly and Bylsma had some fun with it on Wednesday.

"I think he should get the Craig MacTavish exemption and play without the bucket the whole time," Bylsma said.

MacTavish, who last played in 1997, was the last NHL player to not wear a helmet during games.

Eichel return propels Sabres to season-high TV rating

By Alan Pergament

The Buffalo News

November 30, 2016

This is what I'm thinking:

Jack is Back and so are the viewers for Buffalo Sabres games.

The return of Buffalo Sabres star Jack Eichel, who had a goal and an assist in a 5-4 victory over the Ottawa Senators Tuesday night, led to a season-high 9.8 rating on MSG.

That is well above the 5.5 rating the Sabres have averaged to this point in the season.

To put the rating in further perspective, the rating for the Sabres game beat the popular NBC entertainment program "This is Us" (8.4) on Channel 2 and the annual favorite "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" (8.1) on Channel 4.

NBCSN's plans to highlight the game between Toronto rookie Auston Matthews and Edmonton star Connor McDavid took a hit Tuesday when the game before it between Boston and Philadelphia went to an extended shootout. The shootout, won by Philadelphia, didn't end until there was 3 minutes and 37 seconds left in the second period of the following game won by the Maple Leafs, 4-2.

Needless to say, the delay in joining the Matthews-McDavid game in progress didn't help ratings. The game between the superstars averaged a 0.4 rating from 10:45 p.m. to midnight in Buffalo, hitting a peak of 0.6 in arguably the best TV market for hockey in America.

I wish people would quit picking on Thanksgiving football.

On Monday, radio sports talk host Colin Cowherd, now heard on 1270 The Fan, joined the chorus of people saying that the NFL has become overexposed on television by adding Thursday Night Football and Sunday morning games from foreign countries.

But let's not include the three Thanksgiving games as a problem. After all, two games have been played in the afternoon on the holiday for decades. And it is hard to see anything wrong with adding a prime time game after the turkey and the apple and pumpkin pies were eaten.

It sure beats shopping on Thanksgiving night.

The football ratings in Buffalo prove the popularity of three Thanksgiving games.

Detroit's 16-13 win over Minnesota in the early afternoon game had a 17.7 local rating on WIVB-TV, the local CBS affiliate.

Dallas' 31-26 victory over Washington in the late afternoon game carried on WUTV, the local Fox affiliate, had a 15.4 local rating.

And Pittsburgh's 28-7 victory over Indianapolis in the night game carried on WGRZ-TV, the NBC affiliate, had a 16.5 rating.

In other words, the interest in all three games was pretty close.

To put those ratings in further perspective, the top-rated prime time entertainment program in Western New York this season, "The Big Bang Theory," averages a 17.4 rating and that's for only 30 minutes.

On the other hand, the league should consider dropping Thursday Night Football games for multiples reasons, including player safety.

Western New York loves to hate New England quarterback Tom Brady. The Patriots' 22-17 victory over the New York Jets Sunday had a higher rating than all of the Thanksgiving games. It had a 21.6 rating on Channel 4 after the Bills victory served as its lead-in.

Sabres' O'Reilly has a great support system

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

November 30, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Before netting two goals and as assist in Ottawa, Ryan O'Reilly had one goal in 12 games. He's now up to six goals and six assists for 12 points on the season. Since he's only played 16 games, that's a 31 goal pace over 82 games.

O'Reilly netted 21 goals and 60 points last season, but had some prolonged slumps back then too. When that happened, he leaned on some people close to him, "I was getting very frustrated not creating and I remember talking to my dad trying to figure out what to do, but I was still getting lots of opportunities and not burying them and sometimes it does happen."

"I lost some confidence and wasn't sure of myself when getting those opportunities, but I got back to doing what I can to win the game."

O'Reilly said his father is a constant source of support for him when things are good or bad, "I constantly talk to him and we still train with him in the summer, so he's always got a voice and helps us get into that internal process so we can find it from within ourselves, so it's huge to have that."

O'Reilly's father isn't the only source of support for him, his head coach helps him through tough times too, "With Dan he's great, he gives me a lot of confidence, uses me in all situations and he can tell when things aren't going well for myself it's the little things he says like 'stick with it' and certain little things that help during a game and it's nice to have that relationship with him."

Bylsma realizes O'Reilly was having trouble, but he said it's not all on him, "It wasn't just a Ryan slump, as much as we were fighting a team slump of not scoring and I think he felt that and put pressure on his game because of it."

Bylsma said Robin Lehner is still day to day with a hip injury. The head coach did say that Lehner is lobbying him to be the backup to Anders Nilsson on Thursday. If he can't go, Linus Ullmark will come up from Rochester.

The team had an optional skate on Wednesday. Many players decided they needed the rest and didn't skate.

Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly ends slump with helmetless goal

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 1, 2016

BUFFALO – In his eight-year NHL career, Ryan O'Reilly has scored 117 times, so the Sabres center has about every type of goal on his impressive resume.

But after O'Reilly recently lost his helmet in the thick of the action and nearly scored, he started thinking – or, perhaps more appropriately, daydreaming – about getting a goal and celebrating without, as hockey players say, his “bucket.”

“We talked about this like two weeks ago,” O'Reilly told the Times Herald on Tuesday in Ottawa. “How sick would it be to score a goal with no bucket on, come through the train (glove taps along the bench) with the guys?”

Sure enough, O'Reilly's helmet fell off again early in the Sabres' 5-4 win against the Senators, exposing his brown hair.

Seconds later, O'Reilly backhanded the puck high past Senators goalie Craig Anderson from in close, ending his six-game goal drought.

“He was pushing to get a goal without the bucket on,” coach Dan Bylsma said Wednesday after the Sabres prepared for tonight's home tilt against the New York Rangers at KeyBank Center.

Who was the last Sabre to score after losing his helmet? No one seems to remember. Clark Gillies was the team's last helmetless player in the late 1980s.

“It's funny the way it works out,” said O'Reilly, who slicked his hair back a bit with his glove before his teammates congratulated him. “I'll have to get a picture of that.”

Forget about a picture, Bylsma joked he wants O'Reilly, 25, to permanently ditch his helmet.

“He should get the old Craig MacTavish exemption and play without the bucket full time,” Bylsma said of the NHL's last helmetless player, who retired in 1997.

Kidding aside, O'Reilly's first goal since Nov. 1 – an oblique injury sidelined him six games last month – was huge for his confidence. He also scored the winning goal early in the third period and created Jack Eichel's power-play goal with a nifty feed.

O'Reilly, like most of his teammates, has struggled offensively at times this season. The Sabres have scored a league-low 43 goals, just 1.96 a game.

Yes, O'Reilly's six goals and 12 points are both tied for second on the Sabres. But he compiled two goals and four points, one-third of his offense, Oct. 16 in Edmonton.

So take away that game and Tuesday's, and O'Reilly has two goals and five points in his 14 other appearances.

O'Reilly had 21 goals and 60 points in 71 games last season, numbers that helped him earn a spot in the NHL All-Star Game.

Of course, O'Reilly is notoriously hard on himself, even in good times. The team's scoring woes, Bylsma said, made him heap more pressure on himself.

O'Reilly, however, has already relaxed a little with Eichel back after a high left ankle sprain sidelined him 21 games. Now someone else can help carry the offensive load.

Eichel, 20, returned Tuesday, recording two points in the opening 9:31.

"He took a lot of pressure on himself in his game," Bylsma said. "I think even going back to Sunday (in practice) some of that pressure was relieved by having Jack back on the ice with us. I think you saw it last night in the game."

Eichel's presence will greatly help O'Reilly. With another talented center, teams can't just key on O'Reilly and his linemates. O'Reilly said he played more confidently Tuesday.

"I feel like we're seeing different pairing a little bit more, which is definitely nice," O'Reilly said Wednesday. "When you get the same pairings, you don't score, it can be frustrating and tough to generate."

Six frustrating weeks sapped some of O'Reilly's confidence, so he sought advice his father, Brian, something he regularly does whenever a slump arrives.

With his father's help, O'Reilly decided to simplify his game.

"I was still getting nice opportunities, I just wasn't burying them, and ... I lost some confidence," he said. "I wasn't sure of myself once I was in those opportunities."

"If it's scoring a goal, if it's making a good pass, just stay in the moment and do whatever I can in that situation. ... Once I kind of got back to that, I seemed to get a few more bounces my way."

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner still day-to-day

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
November 30, 2016

BUFFALO – Sabres goalie Robin Lehner, who left Tuesday's 5-4 win in Ottawa after injuring his hip in the first period, is still day-to-day, coach Dan Bylsma.

"He's lobbying to back up tomorrow," Bylsma said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center. "He's going to see how it is in the morning."

Lehner was injured on the Senators' first goal. The Swede stayed in the game, but his hip cramped up when he stepped out to play a puck a few minutes later, Bylsma said.

Backup Anders Nilsson subbed for Lehner, stopping 23 of 26 shots.

Nilsson will likely start Thursday against the potent New York Rangers, whose 33 points rank second in the NHL.

Some other quick notes:

– The Sabres held an optional practice this afternoon following their eighth win, a game in which center Jack Eichel scored a goal and an assist his long-awaited season debut.

Eichel's highly anticipated 2016-17 home debut is next. Thursday's game almost feels like a home opener with the young star healthy again.

Bylsma said as Eichel recovered from his high left ankle sprain earlier this week, it started to feel like the Sabres were preparing for a new year.

"Sunday or Monday felt like the last two days of practice before the season started with some anticipation of what type of team we could be and how we could play," he said. "(I) got that sense going back to the two practices before the Ottawa game. In that sense, that was the home opener on the road."

– Bylsma on Rangers winger Jimmy Vesey, whose rights the Sabres owned during the summer before he chose New York as a free agent: "I'd like to have ill feelings about Jimmy and the situation. I can't. I had the opportunity to coach Jimmy for a couple of weeks in the world championship. I can't say I know him well.

"He's stepped into the NHL is a goal scorer, proven he can be a goal scorer and has been a timely goal scorer."

Vesey already has eight goals and 14 points in 24 games.

Recovery for Buffalo Sabres star Jack Eichel could last the entire season

By Joe McDonald

ESPN

November 30, 2016

OTTAWA -- Jack Eichel's painful scream was so loud, it could be heard throughout the rink.

It occurred during the Buffalo Sabres' final practice of the preseason, on Oct. 12, when he suffered a high ankle sprain. The injury forced the 20-year-old forward to miss the first 21 games of the season. Without him, the Sabres wobbled out of the gates at 7-9-5, dead last in the Atlantic.

Eichel's return Tuesday night helped the Sabres to a 5-4 victory over the Ottawa Senators at Canadian Tire Centre. He scored a goal and added an assist and finished the game with five shots and a plus-1 in 17:08 of ice time.

"It was anxious getting out there before the game because I haven't played in a while," the 2015 No. 2 draft pick said.

It was a solid first step for Eichel and the Sabres. He was rusty, but that's understandable given the injury. He worked hard to get back and wanted to have an immediate impact -- which he did -- but his full recovery will be a slow process.

Jack Eichel is back, much to the relief of Buffalo Sabres fans. Fred Chartrand/The Canadian Press via AP Positionally, he was sound. He didn't have his normal explosive first stride, at least on every shift, but that will return in time. His biggest impact came on special teams -- both of his points came on the power play within the first 10 minutes of the game -- which the Sabres have missed most.

"He adds a big dimension to our team," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "There's speed and, right from the beginning on the power play, there's a different level of execution, a different level of speed."

There's a trickledown effect and a better balanced lineup when Eichel is healthy and productive. Offseason transactions by Sabres GM Tim Murray -- signing right winger Kyle Okposo, for instance -- were intentionally made to complement Eichel and the rest of the young talent on the team, so when he went down, it was a difficult way to begin the season.

After Tuesday's game, Eichel admitted he hit a wall in the second period but was able to settle down again in the third. He said the ankle felt good, but he expects to feel discomfort in the morning and in the foreseeable future.

A high ankle sprain is one of the worst injuries for a hockey player. A broken bone would be better in some ways, rather than dealing with the sprain because of the location of the injury. The natural skating motion is not conducive for these types of injuries to heal properly. When a player uses his inside edge to dig in, he's putting direct pressure on that injured ligament. The mechanics of skating put repeated stress on the ligament. Plus, unlike a knee injury, a player can't put a brace on an ankle to prevent the stress that comes with skating.

One longtime NHL trainer said ligaments often take eight to 12 weeks to fully heal.

During 2009-10, then-Boston Bruins forward Milan Lucic dealt with a high ankle sprain the entire season and was limited to 50 games. He had pain and weakness pushing off the entire season and was never right until he had time to rest and rehab during the offseason.

"Even though Eichel is coming back, it's going to take him many months to get back to the player he was before the injury," said the trainer.

If this injury had occurred during the postseason, Eichel could have had a cortisone shot as a short-term fix, but since it happened before the season, the team thought it best to rehab with strength training. Eichel has been able to maintain his fitness during this process, but it will take time to get his powerful stride back to 100 percent.

"It's possible he will retweak it again," the trainer said. "He could set himself back, maybe not to Square 1, but you definitely set yourself back again. You see a lot of players with these injuries come back after six or seven weeks, maybe a little too early, tweak it again and be out for another month. They limp through the season. Eichel will likely limp through the rest of the season with this."

EDITOR'S PICKS

Power Rankings: Blackhawks still guarding top perch

Carey Price continued to stand on his head for the Montreal Canadiens, but the Chicago Blackhawks -- who gutted out their circus road trip -- edged out the Habs to remain No. 1.

Galchenyuk, McDavid top under-24 rankings

Which young players were at their best this week? Who needs to step it up? Alex Galchenyuk and Connor McDavid find themselves leading the way in this edition of our under-24 rankings.

It's common for a forward to return from this type of injury sooner than a defenseman or goalie would. For goalies it's especially worse, given the constant up-and-down motions of the position, particularly the butterfly. Case in point: Tampa Bay Lightning goalie Ben Bishop suffered a high ankle sprain during the Eastern Conference finals last spring. At the time he said he thought he had broken his leg because the pain was so severe.

Eichel will have to deal with this for the remainder of the season.

"It's something you kind of have to get used to," Eichel said. "Talking with guys that have had it before and went through it, it's not going to be 100 percent where you can completely forget about it."

It's a matter of maintaining it and preparing properly in order to be effective. There's a bigger picture here, more than just one game. We're talking about the development of a franchise player.

In the Golden Age of young talent in the NHL, Eichel is in the class of future elite players, joining the likes of the Edmonton Oilers' Connor McDavid, Calgary Flames' Johnny Gaudreau, Winnipeg Jets' Mark Scheifele, New York Rangers' Jimmy Vesey and Toronto Maple Leafs' Auston Matthews. Eichel's return is timely for a number of reasons.

The Sabres need him. The NHL needs him.

It was almost impossible to hear his jubilation after his first goal of the season Tuesday night, but you can bet it was just as loud as his painful scream seven weeks ago.

Power play reached "another level" in win over Sens

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

November 30, 2016

Success on the power play was a hallmark of the Buffalo Sabres' win in Ottawa on Tuesday night, with three of their five goals having come with the extra man. Buffalo had entered the contest already ranked 11th in the League at 20 percent on the power play, yet their performance against the Senators gave reason for even more optimism moving forward.

For the first time this season, the Sabres were able to utilize their complete top unit of Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Rasmus Ristolainen. It took a mere seven seconds into their first power play of the night for Eichel to feed Okposo for a goal, which set the tone for how they'd perform the rest of the night.

"From bringing the puck up the ice, the plays we made, the execution on the entries on the power play was at another level for us and in zone as well," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "If you want to watch the three power-play goals, you're going to see another level of execution moving the puck from Rasmus to Ryan to Kyle to Jack."

Reinhart said after the game on Tuesday that he thought Ristolainen moved the puck on the power play as well as he had all season, and Ristolainen finished the game with two assists to show for it. It marked his first multi-point outing since a three-assist performance in Edmonton on Oct. 16.

Eichel was involved on both of Ristolainen's assists. Ristolainen fed Eichel coming off of a faceoff on their first power play, which led to Eichel's pass across to set up Okposo for a goal. On the second power play, Ristolainen drew the attention of the penalty kill before passing to O'Reilly at the point, who in turn fed Eichel for a one-time goal.

"He's a world-class player," Ristolainen said of Eichel. "He can make things happen and that's what he showed last night. On the power play last night, I tried to get the puck to him. He wants the puck, he's good with the puck and like I said he can be the difference maker."

Still, success isn't given, and Ristolainen was sure to point out Buffalo's power play in the second period as an example of why they must continue to make the right decisions with the puck. On that power play, the Sabres struggled to gain offensive zone time and the top unit didn't put a shot on net. They rebounded with another goal from O'Reilly late in the third period.

"We've got to remember that we've got to keep it simple," Ristolainen said. "That power play in the second period, that was awful. We need to keep it simple, that's how we make things happen and that's how we score."

A new D-pair

Off of the power play, Ristolainen played on a pair with Jake McCabe for the first time this season on Tuesday after previously being paired with Josh Gorges. Bylsma said he was particularly pleased with Ristolainen's ability to breakout the puck and like him and McCabe as a pair overall.

"I can play with whoever the coaches want me to play with, all the [defensemen] are great and it's easy to play with anyone," Ristolainen said. "Jake is kind of similar to how I am, a two-way D-man that's good with the puck. We had some good shifts there. Still, there's a lot of work to do."

The Sabres won't have much time for Ristolainen and McCabe to grow accustomed to each other. They host the League's highest-scoring offense in the New York Rangers on Thursday.

"We don't have the luxury of time," Bylsma said. "We've got the Rangers coming down the pike and they're gonna have a big task in front of them."

Lehner remains day-to-day

Robin Lehner is still day-to-day with the hip injury that forced him to exit the game in the first period on Tuesday. Bylsma said that Lehner sustained the injury on the only goal he allowed to Mike Hoffman in the first period.

"I don't have any further update other than what we gave last night, it's hip and it's day-to-day," Bylsma said. "He's lobbying to back up tomorrow but he's going to see how it is in the morning."

Bylsma did not rule out a call-up from Rochester to serve as the backup to Anders Nilsson against the Rangers.