



Buffalo Sabres

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Capitals hope to end slide against visiting Sabres

Associated Press

December 4, 2016

WASHINGTON -- The Washington Capitals beat the Buffalo Sabres one day after Thanksgiving. There's been little worth showing thanks for the Capitals ever since while the Sabres won two of their last three.

Washington (13-7-3) lost its third straight game Saturday as Tampa Bay prevailed 2-1. The Capitals had little success against Lightning goalie Ben Bishop, who had 34 saves through overtime.

The latest setback came after a 3-0 home loss against the New York Islanders on Thursday. The Capitals are back in their building for Monday's matchup with the Sabres.

"We're looking for that real precise goal," Coach Barry Trotz told the Washington Post following Saturday's road loss. "Sometimes you've just got to simplify a little bit. Just shoot the puck. We've got some good shooters. Right now, they're a little bit dry."

The Capitals are averaging 2.52 goals, which tied them with the Islanders for 18th entering Sunday. Washington ranked second with 3.02 goals last season.

Stalwart Alex Ovechkin is among the league-leader with 12 goals, but the wing threat hasn't scored since recording a hat trick on Nov. 23 against the St. Louis Blues.

"We need to be more gritty and go in front of the net," center Nicklas Backstrom said. "Instead of all three guys trying to cycle the puck all of the time, we need at least one guy in front of the net for shots and then rebounds. I mean, that's the kind of goals that go in these days. We have to be able to go in front of the net and go to the dirty areas and create second chances."

Daniel Winnik, Marcus Johansson and Brett Connolly scored for the Capitals in the Nov. 25 win over the Sabres.

Buffalo (9-10-5) rebounded with nine combined goals in back-to-back wins before falling 2-1 Saturday against the Boston Bruins.

While the loss wasn't the desired result, the lone goal scored was something of a positive development because of who found the net.

Evander Kane, who missed time this season after suffering four cracked ribs in the season opener, scored for the first time in 13 games this campaign.

"It was just good to get the first one out of the way," Kane told the Buffalo News following the home loss. "When you have multiple games together and you don't score, being a goal-scorer that's a slump. I feel I have an opportunity to score every game, so it was just nice to get it."

The left wing had 20 goals in 65 games in 2015-16. Kane has points in three straight games.

"The one thing we keep working and urging Evander to do is shoot the puck," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Saturday, per the Buffalo News. "He hasn't shot the puck this year the way he normally does, and he's had opportunities to do it."

Buffalo will play without Josh Gorges for several weeks following the revelation from Bylsma that the defenseman suffered a non-displaced foot fracture after blocking a shot Thursday against the New York Rangers. Gorges, a steady part of Buffalo's rotation, sat out Saturday's loss.

Rask stops 35 shots in Bruins' 2-1 win over Sabres

By Jonah Bronstein

Associated Press

December 3, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Boston goalie Tuuka Rask has been hard to beat this season and was at his best against Buffalo again.

"You start thinking, 'how are we going to get one by this guy,'" Sabres coach Dan Bylsma wondered aloud Saturday.

Rask nearly shut out the Sabres for the second time in a month, keeping them off the scoresheet for 2 1/2 periods and making 17 of his career-high 35 saves in the third to help the Bruins hold on for a 2-1 win.

"Every team likes to have these kind of goaltenders and a lot of teams do," Bruins coach Claude Julien said. "We're just fortunate enough that he's been one of those guys that, whenever you slip a little bit, or lose a little bit of momentum, or you're having a slow start, or a tough night, those guys step up and help you win some hockey games."

Over his last 11 starts, beginning with his 4-0 shutout over Buffalo on Nov. 7, Rask is 7-3-1 with a 1.36 goals-against average and a .947 save percentage.

"I feel good," Rask said. "I'm seeing the puck well. Guys are doing a great job keeping them on the outside and clearing the rebounds for the most part, so that helps out."

David Krejci and Patrice Bergeron scored to give Boston a 2-0 lead and the Bruins improved to 3-0-1 in their last four.

"We're getting better as a team, we're getting points and climbing up the standings," said Krejci, who has 10 points in his last 12 games. "Hopefully we can keep it up."

Evander Kane scored his first goal of the season for Buffalo. Robin Lehner returned after missing one game with a hip injury and made 32 saves.

The Sabres combined for nine goals in their previous two wins but the NHL's lowest-scoring team reverted to form from the first 21 games, when star center Jack Eichel was out of the lineup with a high-ankle sprain.

"First two periods, we had a tough time generating some offensive chances," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said. "They kind of just stayed on top."

Krejci got the Bruins on the scoreboard with 5:50 left in the first when he deflected Brandon Carlo's slap shot from the point off the right post and into the net.

The Sabres appeared to tie the game late in the second period but replays determined Brian Gionta kicked the puck into the net.

Bergeron made it 2-0 at 7:44 of the third when he knocked in the rebound of David Pastrnak's missed shot. Bergeron initially hit the puck with his forearm on the left edge of the crease and skated around the net to chase down the puck and flip a backhand past Lehner.

The Sabres answered two minutes later, scoring on Rask for the first time in 109:12 this season. Sam Reinhart's feed off the rear wall set up Kane for a wrist shot from the slot that bounced in off Krejci. Reinhart has five points in his last four games.

NOTES: Bruins F Matt Beleskey was escorted to the dressing room in the final minute of the first period with a lower-body injury and did not return. Julien said Beleskey will be evaluated when the team returns to Boston. ... Sabres D Josh Gorges did not play after injuring his foot blocking a shot in Thursday's win over the New York

Rangers. With Dmitry Kulikov (lower back) and Zach Bogosian (MCL sprain) also out, the Sabres were down three of their top four defenseman and recalled 19-year-old Brendan Guhle from the minors to make his NHL debut. Guhle hustled back to thwart a breakaway by Krejci late in the third period. ... F Anton Blidh became the seventh Bruin to make his NHL debut this season after being recalled from the minors on Friday. ... The Bruins scratched F Jimmy Hayes. D Zdeno Chara, the Bruins' captain, missed his sixth straight game with a lower-body injury. ... Buffalo had just three shots on goal in the first period.

UP NEXT

Bruins: Host Florida on Monday.

Sabres: At Washington on Monday.

Sabres notebook: Caps having similar scoring woes

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 4, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres' lack of scoring has been a seasonlong issue. But the team's bad timing award might be in serving as the opponent Monday night in the Verizon Center.

The Washington Capitals, of all teams, are in a dreadful offensive slump and the clock has to be ticking on that drought to run out. The Sabres, obviously, hope it lasts. Especially when you consider they meet the Caps again Friday in KeyBank Center.

Since beating Buffalo, 3-1, on Nov. 25, the Caps have lost three straight -- and have scored just three goals in those games. While Buffalo remains last in the league in offense at 2.0 goals per game, the Caps are a surprising 18th at 2.52. They were second last year at 3.02.

The Caps have scored just 13 goals in their last seven games and had been blanked for five straight periods before Nicklas Backstrom scored in the third period of Saturday's 2-1 shootout loss at Tampa Bay. Their power play is just 3 for 24 in the last five games. Since netting a hat trick Nov. 23 against St. Louis, Alexander Ovechkin doesn't have a goal in his last four games and remains one power-play goal shy of becoming the 18th player in NHL history to score 200 with the man advantage.

But the Caps are 11-2-2 in their last 15 games against Buffalo. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma, of course, has plenty of history with the Capitals from his days in Pittsburgh so he's wary.

"I didn't like watching their game and hearing that, and other things they were saying about other portions of their game," Bylsma said, referring to the Tampa loss. "At times in my past, the power play is not going well but they still have good players, have the pieces that make it a good power play. They're still an offensive team with all the pieces. They're a scary one."

"They're a good team, no matter what," said Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly. "You look at the players they have and what they can create you have to be prepared as if they're playing their best hockey. They've got players who possess the puck. If you make mistakes, they'll make you pay."

The Capitals' comments after Saturday's game were reminiscent of what you've heard from the Sabres several times this year.

"We're looking for that real precise goal," Coach Barry Trotz said. "Sometimes you've just got to simplify a little bit. Just shoot the puck. We've got some good shooters. Right now they're a little bit dry."

"We need to be more gritty and go in front of the net," Backstrom said. "Instead of all three guys trying to cycle the puck all of the time, we need at least one guy in front of the net for shots and then rebounds. I mean, that's the kind of goals that go in these days. We have to be able to go in front of the net and go to the dirty areas and create second chances."

Rookie William Carrier practiced on the Sabres' top line Sunday with O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo and figures to be there again Monday. He was flipping roles with Matt Moulson at left wing on the fourth line but Bylsma stuck with Carrier most of the way against Boston.

"My role with that line is to bring energy," said Carrier, who has just one goal in 14 games but has a plus-2 rating. "Win my battles down low and try to get those guys the puck, screen the goalie, whatever I need. They just want me to keep playing the same game. I showed what I could do on the fourth line and I think they were happy with that. Then going up, they want to me to find a way to get those guys the puck, give them chances to score."

"He's been great," O'Reilly said. "You see the presence he brings on the ice with his energy and intensity every shift. He's getting in there and if he's not getting the puck he's making the big hit. It's nice to see the certain life he brings. If we're not creating scoring chances, he's out there creating space and making it tough for guys."

Carrier said he's not frustrated about his lack of goals, a feeling that is normally easy for a rookie to slip into.

"My game is not about points, especially here," he said. "It's about being a plus player for my team and I know points will come. I've had chances the last few games so they'll come."

It's a busy week for the Sabres, who head home immediately after Monday's game to host Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday. Going back to back with Ovechkin and McDavid is a pretty brutal segment of the schedule, especially when you consider the Caps are the opponent again on Friday.

"For us, we're only worried about Washington. That's how we have to be," O'Reilly said. "These are two teams that have a lot of skill and you have to play a compete game. If you try to open it up, they will find a way to put it in the back of he net."

Inside the Sabres: Nilsson proudly waves pride flag

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2016

Anders Nilsson has seen his gay friends struggle to find acceptance. He's waving the flag to help them and others.

The Sabres goaltender has a rainbow pride flag painted on the back of his mask. He's displaying it on the ice to raise awareness of the LGBT community and be a symbol that hockey welcomes diversity.

"I have a couple friends who are gay, and life hasn't been easy for them growing up," Nilsson said. "It's time that hockey starts to pay some attention to that."

The 26-year-old decided to put the flag on his mask, near a portrait of his son, after taking part in an inclusion event while playing for Edmonton. He and the Oilers became the first NHL team to use Pride Tape during their annual skills competition in January. The makers of the rainbow-colored tape aim to stop homophobia in hockey.

"We brought awareness last year in Edmonton," Nilsson said. "We had a skills competition, Edmonton has one every year, and during that game we had rainbow tape. They said they were the first team in North America to do that."

"This summer, I thought why not be the first goalie to put that on the helmet and raise some awareness for that?"

His initiative has earned praise from the You Can Play Project. The NHL and its players' association have partnered with the cause since 2013. You Can Play was co-founded by Patrick Burke, the NHL's director of player safety and the son of Calgary Flames President Brian Burke. Patrick's brother, Brendan, died in a 2010 car accident shortly after announcing he was gay.

Wade Davis, who came out after a career in professional football, is the director of You Can Play.

"Anders Nilsson is courageous beyond the understanding of many," Davis said via email. "He is taking a risk on multiple fronts and is standing up for something that he believes in, knowing the backlash that could come his way. He's my hero."

Davis said Nilsson's decision is meaningful on many fronts.

"For the NHL, it means that they have created an environment where at least one of its players felt safe enough that he could express his views on an issue and that the league would support him," Davis said. "It also means that the education the league has provided to its players is raising awareness around an issue that impacts everyone, not just the LGBT community."

"For NHL fans, it means they will not be able to watch a Sabres game without being reminded that someone in a hyper-masculine sport cares about a marginalized group that many don't associate with hockey."

"For You Can Play, it means that our efforts to educate players and raise their awareness about the impact their voices can have to create bonds between two communities that are often disconnected is working."

"For someone who's LGBT it means they have a friend and brother in Anders Nilsson. It means that if there's a player or front-office person who is LGBT open or not, they can find safety and comfort knowing that Anders Nilsson is someone they can count on."

Jason Pominville, while serving as captain of the Sabres in 2012, filmed a promotional video for the You Can Play Project. Nilsson would also like to help the organization. He is by waving the flag.

"Hockey has gone in huge ways the last couple of years," Nilsson said, "but there's a lot that needs to be done, especially for the younger ages."

Missing the fun

The conversation with Nilsson rekindled an oft-thought idea: The Sabres should bring back their annual skills competition and carnival.

The Sabres' open practice, usually held during the Christmas break, was a must-do holiday experience. The Aud was packed with kids marveling at the players' skills. Adults enjoyed it, too.

The condensed schedule and a mandatory three-day Christmas break limits how many real practices the Sabres can hold, let alone a relaxed on-ice session. But with more than three-quarters of the game tickets held by season-ticket holders and box-office prices too high for many families to afford, a free afternoon of watching Jack Eichel perform breakaway tricks would go a long way toward reinvigorating the fan base.

McCormick helps The Hip

Gord Downie had a story to tell. Sabres forward Cody McCormick helped share it.

McCormick joined other Indigenous Canadian and Native American leaders on Friday night at North Park Theatre for a one-time showing of "The Secret Path." The animated film features music from Downie, lead singer of the Tragically Hip, and tells the story of Chanie Wenjack, a 12-year-old boy who died from hunger and exposure in 1966 while fleeing the Cecilia Jeffrey Indian Residential School in Ontario.

McCormick, who is of Oneida and Chippewa/Ojibway descent, took part in a post-film roundtable. The Sabres' foundation donated items, with proceeds going to the Gord Downie and Chanie Wenjack Fund. For more information, visit SecretPath.ca.

Eichel, the international star

It takes five hours to drive to Ottawa and seven hours to fly because of security and connections, so traveling by car is more convenient. Crossing back into the United States requires going through customs at the Thousand Islands Bridge. That was my point of entry Wednesday after covering Tuesday's 5-4 victory in Ottawa.

"I know you," the border patrol agent said. "How about Eichel last night!"

Quick hits: Bruins 2, Sabres 1

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

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The Sabres finally got a puck past Tuukka Rask. They needed to do it more often.

After shutting out Buffalo in the first meeting, Boston's goaltender kept the Sabres quiet for the opening 49 minutes Saturday. Evander Kane solved him for his long-awaited first goal of the year, but Boston held on for a 2-1 victory.

"You start to think, 'How are we going to get one by this guy?'" Sabres coach Dan Bylmsa said. "We just didn't have enough whacks at it. We needed to keep going."

It was the first time in five games the Sabres failed to get a point in KeyBank Center. They fell to 4-2-1 in their last seven games overall.

Rask stopped 32 shots in a 4-0 victory Nov. 7. He made 35 saves Saturday.

"I don't think we had glaring, clear-cut chances that he kind of robbed us on," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "We got some pucks to the net, and he made the first save. We've got to do a better job of getting the ones after that."

In front: The Bruins took a 1-0 lead with 5:50 left in the first. David Krejci got position in front of the net and reached out to tip Brandon Carlo's point shot. The deflection went past goalie Robin Lehner, rang the post and bounced in. Buffalo entered the day 2-8-1 when allowing the first goal.

Solo effort: Patrice Bergeron put the Bruins up, 2-0, with 12:16 to play. He should have earned an assist, too. He streaked to the left side of the net and bounced the puck off his arm. He skated behind the cage, retrieved the puck on the right side and put it home with a backhand.

In the goal column: Kane's opening goal came in his 13th game. He took a pass from Sam Reinhart at the bottom of the left circle and got help from Krejci. Rask stopped Kane's shot, but Krejci was right on top of him. The puck bounced off Krejci and in with 10:48 left.

Reinhart extended his point streak to four games. He has two goals and three assists during the span.

No power: The Sabres went 0 for 3 with the power play. They generated just one shot on their opening two chances, but they tested Rask three times during their final one with 6:30 to play. Despite the zone time, Boston kept its 2-1 lead.

Guhle debuts: Defenseman Brendan Guhle, selected by the Sabres in the second round of the 2015 NHL Draft, made his NHL debut. The 19-year-old skated in place of injured Josh Gorges (foot) and was paired with Cody Franson. He attempted seven shots while skating 16:20.

Guhle is on an emergency recall from his junior team. The first year of his contract would kick in with a 10th game.

"We felt like we needed to add some speed on the back end, some skating ability, and Brendan is going to provide that," Bylmsa said.

No goal: The crowd had a brief moment of joy during a quiet opening 40 minutes when the goal light flashed for the Sabres. Guhle took a point shot that captain Brian Gionta put into the net with 2:50 left in the second period. Gionta did it with a kicking motion, however, and the referees waved off the goal and disallowed it after video review.

"I was trying to kick it up to my stick," Gionta said. "It wasn't at the net. I was hoping it would stay there. After the review, it kind of looks like a kicking motion. It's a tough break."

Low output: The Sabres managed just three shots during the first period. They had a 3-0 lead with 4:44 gone, but they didn't register anything in the final 15:16. The Bruins put up nine of their 10 shots during the final 10:29.

"I liked our first five minutes of the game, then it dropped off," Bylsma said. "We struggled getting out of the defensive zone. We turned the puck over there and gave them momentum, gave them opportunities. That's how they get their goal."

Turnaround: The Sabres took two shots in the opening minute of the second and finished the period with a 15-11 edge. Rask turned them all aside to send the Bruins into intermission with their 1-0 lead intact.

Letterman: Right wing Kyle Okposo wore an "A" on his jersey, assuming the alternate captaincy vacated by Gorges.

Early exit: The Bruins lost left wing Matt Beleskey to a lower-body injury after first-period check by Taylor Fedun.

Counting the house: The Sabres announced a sellout of 19,070 fans, just their second packed house of the season (though plenty of 100 Level seats were empty). They also sold out the season opener.

The crowd included a sizable number of Bruins fans, who shouted, "Tuuk," for Rask's notable saves.

Next: The Sabres will hit the road to visit the Washington Capitals on Monday night. After the second trip to the nation's capital in 11 days, Buffalo will play four straight at home. The run starts Tuesday when NHL scoring leader Connor McDavid and the Edmonton Oilers come to the arena.

Sabres Notebook: Kane finally scores; Gorges out

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2016

The first goal is finally out of the way. If Evander Kane wants more, his coach has a suggestion.

"The one thing we keep working and urging Evander to do is shoot the puck," the Sabres' Dan Bylsma said Saturday. "He hasn't shot the puck this year the way he normally does, and he's had opportunities to do it."

Kane put two shots on net against Boston, and he scored Buffalo's only goal in a 2-1 loss. He fired from below the left faceoff circle and got help when the rebound of Tuukka Rask's save bounced off Boston's David Krejci and into the net.

Carom aside, Bylsma liked where Kane was on the play.

"This is a goal you typically see from Evander," Bylsma said. "It's a good spot for him, and good to see him get that goal."

Kane, whose season was interrupted by four cracked ribs midway through the opener, was kept out of the goal column during his first 12 games. The 13th was lucky.

"It was just good to get the first one out of the way," Kane said in KeyBank Center. "When you have multiple games together and you don't score, being a goal-scorer that's a slump. I feel I have an opportunity to score every game, so it was just nice to get it."

As Bylsma noted, Kane has been less active in the offensive zone. The left winger was third in the NHL last season with 4.2 shots per game. This season, he's seventh on his own team at 2.4 shots per game.

The goal gave Kane a three-game point streak, boosting his season totals to one goal and five assists. Still, he's on pace for only five goals and 27 points.

Getting power-play chances would help. He's skating on the second unit with Brian Gionta, Matt Moulson, Cody Franson and Taylor Fedun. They haven't scored in six games.

"We've got to find ways to get pucks to the net," Gionta said. "Right now we're not getting them to the net."

Josh Gorges missed his first game of the season with a foot injury, and his absence from the Sabres' blue line could continue. He will be out a "little bit" after blocking a shot Thursday against the New York Rangers, Bylsma said.

Gorges is second on the Sabres in short-handed ice time, averaging 2:46 per game, behind only Rasmus Ristolainen's 3:12. Against the Bruins, defensemen Justin Falk (1:56), Jake McCabe (1:12) and Cody Franson (48 seconds) picked up the slack.

Gorges joined Dmitry Kulikov and Zach Bogosian on the sidelines. Bogosian, who has a sprained knee ligament, is still 10 days to two weeks away.

"Kulikov has now skated two days with some physicality and now been skating for seven days," Bylsma said. "Hopefully, that means we'll see him in practice soon – in the next week hopefully."

The injuries extend to Rochester, where defenseman Casey Nelson is day-to-day with a neck/shoulder ailment.

Forward Hudson Fasching, who opened the season in Buffalo before being sent to the Amerks, hasn't played since Oct. 22 because of a groin injury.

"I think he's doing better and progressing to skating next week," Bylsma said.

The Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly and Boston's Patrice Bergeron are perennial faceoff leaders. O'Reilly dominated his counterpart, winning 11 draws and losing three.

Bergeron played after missing practice Friday with an illness.

"It was one of those where you have to kind of battle through it and drink as much fluid as you can," he said. "It would've been nice to have a 7 o'clock game for once, but it's all right."

Guhle proves he can play in the NHL

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2016

There were most definitely nerves. He had been in Buffalo just 12 hours, an emergency recall from juniors, and at 19 Brendan Guhle was suiting up for his first NHL game.

But in his first shift he had a shot on goal.

"Yeah, that was pretty cool," Guhle said with a smile.

And soon he realized he indeed did belong in the National Hockey League.

"After the first few shifts I was like 'Oh. I can play this,' " he said.

Guhle didn't look like a rookie fresh off a plane from his major-junior team in Prince George, British Columbia. Recalled by the Sabres after Josh Gorges went down with a foot injury, the defenseman was one of the better players on the ice for the Buffalo Sabres in their 2-1 loss to the Boston Bruins in KeyBank Center Saturday afternoon.

Guhle played 16 minutes and 20 seconds, was a plus-one, and had the most shot attempts for either team with seven, including tying for the Sabres lead with four shots on goal.

He blocked two shots and had a key defensive play in the third period.

For a 19-year-old on the blue line, it was about as good as a debut can get.

"He's a great young talent," said Cody Franson, his defensive partner for the afternoon. "He's a good kid. He stepped in and played very well tonight. That's not easy to do coming out of juniors. He did very well tonight. He was very easy to play with."

The most impressive part of his game may have been his calm demeanor.

Franson was most impressed with Guhle's patience. "He didn't show any panic," Franson said. "In puck retrievals in the offensive zone he was moving around like he would be in juniors, it felt like. Coming into D-zone situations he was comfortable and talking. You can't ask more than that for a kid coming out of juniors."

Guhle may have come up from juniors, but he's logged some game time with NHL players. Drafted in the second round of the 2015 NHL Entry draft, Guhle has been to two Sabres training camps and has played in 10 NHL preseason games. So once he was on the ice, he discovered this wasn't so intimidating after all.

"The first couple of shifts I was not really sure what to expect and it was a lot like preseason really," Guhle said. "I've played in a lot of preseason games. I kept working at it, kept trying to get better every shift."

Early in the game, coach Dan Bylsma noticed a few issues for the rookie – communication with goaltender Robin Lehner, defensive puck retrieval, communication coming out of the defensive zone.

"But he certainly wasn't shy about using his skating and jumping into the play and he did that in the second period. Did that in the third period," Bylsma said.

"He was on the bench talking. He's played with a number of these guys in exhibition games and I thought he felt real comfortable stepping right in and playing with those guys."

Part of the comfort came from playing with Franson.

"Playing with him made it super easy," Guhle said. "He was talking to me all game and making good plays and not putting me in bad spots with the puck. If I made a couple little screw-ups we'd talk about it on the bench and we'd just move on."

While there may have been some communication issues and a couple little screw-ups, there were some pretty amazing plays as well.

Like the shot in the second period when he nearly notched his first NHL point. Guhle fired the puck from the blue line through a screen and Boston goalie Tuukka Rask had some trouble handling it. Brian Gionta was at the crease for the rebound and tried to kick the puck to his stick. Instead he kicked the puck in the net and the goal was disallowed.

"I just tried to get it past the first guy," Guhle said of the shot that came about three minutes into the second period with the Sabres trailing, 1-0. "There wasn't too many guys after that I don't think. I thought it was going in at first." Rask "seemed startled when it hit him and Gio was right there."

"In the WHL that's a goal every time. There's no kicking rule. I'm still getting used to those rules."

Guhle had another excellent scoring chance in the third period, jumping into the play and driving in on Rask, who made the save.

But Guhle had some solid defensive plays as well, most notably foiling a break by David Krejci with 8:23 left in the game and the Sabres trailing, 2-1.

Krejci had picked up the puck and was racing down the left side. Guhle used his speed to catch up, flipped his body to get in position, and knocked the puck away.

"He was coming down the left side so I knew, well I had a good feeling he was going to try and pull it to his forehand," Guhle said. "He probably wouldn't get much off a backhand. Just get my stick in the lane and when he tried to make a move I poked him."

How long Guhle stays in Buffalo will largely be determined by the health status of the defensive corps. There was no update on Gorges, who took a puck off his foot against the New York Rangers on Thursday. Guhle can play in nine NHL games before the first year of his NHL contract kicks in.

But the business side will take care of itself for Guhle. First there are memories of his first NHL game that he will savor.

"I'll definitely remember that disallowed goal," Guhle said. "That shot in the third period I had on the rush that was pretty close. First shift, I remember that shot I had. Would have been nice to get the win but I think it was a good game for myself."

Mike Harrington: No rest on defense as injury crisis deepens

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 3, 2016

After a week full of Eichelpalooza and all it looked like it would mean going forward, the brakes have to be applied in a way that will make Sabres fans cringe.

June 1, 2006.

There. Said it. Sorry. You might not automatically remember the date, but you know what happened.

It was Game Seven of the Eastern Conference final. Sabres at Carolina. With the eighth-seeded Edmonton Oilers awaiting in the Stanley Cup final. The Sabres were the best team in the NHL by that point as spring was turning to summer. To this day, it's easy to say they would have finally won the Cup that June.

But their defense was ravaged by injury and on gameday morning, workhorse Jay McKee came down with a staph infection in his leg. As the story goes, it came from wearing the same shinpads that he did as a teen-ager.

Remember the immortal six the Sabres fielded on defense that night? Brian Campbell and Toni Lydman, no problem. But then there was Rory Fitzpatrick (look in your feet for the puck, Rory!). Doug Janik and Jeff Jillson. And Nathan Paetsch, making his NHL debut in a game to decide a trip to the Cup final.

The Sabres lost, 4-2, and have never been closer to the Cup since. This Sabres team is obviously nowhere near the level of that one but the story is relevant because they're going down that road again.

Zach Bogosian (knee) and Dmitry Kulikov (back) are both out, and neither has played since Nov. 9. And now veteran Josh Gorges is out after taking a shot to the foot Thursday night against the New York Rangers. Even Casey Nelson is sidelined in Rochester with a neck/shoulder issue. Judging from coach Dan Bylsma's downcast mood, although there's no concrete information yet, Gorges may be out a while.

Already playing with decent Rochester callups Taylor Fedun and Justin Falk as a third pair, the Sabres dipped into the junior ranks so Brendan Guhle could make his NHL debut during Saturday's 2-1 loss to Boston in KeyBank Center. Guhle certainly didn't look out of place, again showing why he's nearly made the team out of training camp two straight years.

More than ever, you're going to have to use bubblewrap on Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe and Cody Franson. The thought of another injury on defense is too much to bear.

"You take three defensemen out of your lineup and you get thin," Bylsma said. "We all knew we were not deep and a little bit thin at the start of the season as an organization. Getting three injuries accents that position."

Indeed, there's not much left at Rochester at this point. Tyson Strachan was serviceable while playing for the Tank Sabres two years ago and Bylsma insists free agent signee Erik Burgdoerfer, a 27-year-old who has never played an NHL game, would be suitable for a callup if the team needed a right-handed shot. But let's get real if you're trying to win games at this level.

During a weekly radio appearance last month, General Manager Tim Murray said the trade market was pretty static at this point in the season and noted cryptically that "I think I can get a fourth liner from a team or a sixth or seventh defenseman from a team."

He was probably right at the time to send out the why-bother aura. Times are different now. He needs to do it. There aren't enough healthy NHL defensemen in this organization. Murray needs to flip somebody (Zemgus Girgensons?) for an NHL depth blueliner.

Look what the Sabres have to deal with this week. Alex Ovechkin Monday night in Washington, Connor McDavid here Tuesday and Ovechkin again here Friday. A move today would be a fine idea.

Bylsma was hoping in preseason to monitor Ristolainen's minutes tightly this season. No chance. He played 29:09 in this one, just the second time this season he broke 29 minutes in regulation. He's going to be in that range for the immediate future.

"Personally, I love it. More ice time, I feel great," Ristolainen said. "But you've got to earn it too. I made a couple soft plays and there were their goals. I have to step up even more."

"With the injuries that keep coming, he's most likely going to be going against what we talked about in the beginning of the year with his minutes," said Bylsma, raising an eyebrow as he looked at the stat sheet. "I'm not surprised to see the total up there. Paired with Jake, he's going to get out there in most situations for us."

During the pregame warmups, Ristolainen and Zemgus Girgensons did a playful leaping shoulder bump. You almost cringed watching. Franson was hit and got up slowly in one sequence in the second period. McCabe took a hard, high hit from Dominic Moore late the in the second and appeared stunned, going to the bench slowly and shaking out the cobwebs.

"You have to give even more when a guy likes Josh goes down," said McCabe (23:58). "With these injuries on the back end, everyone has to step up to a larger role than we're all used to. These guys we've brought in have stepped in and played well."

"I'm comfortable in this situation," added Franson (19:04). "Obviously, we're hoping guys will come back soon but in the meantime we'll try to take care of business as best we can and I think we've done a decent job of it so far."

Can't argue with that. Until they showed up in mid-November, I'm sure only a handful of Sabres fans even remembered Falk and Fedun were in the system after being signed over the summer. They've played a combined 19 games and have a plus-1 rating.

There were no issues with the D, as it turned out Saturday. The reinforcements haven't proven to be a huge problem thus far. It's goal scoring, or lack thereof, that reared its ugly head again Saturday as DJ Kool got to clear his throat no more than once for the eighth time in 12 games downtown this year.

Eichel didn't do much Saturday but his return clearly gives the offense hope most nights. But how long can this situation really last on the back end before it disintegrates? It's a situation few teams ever deal with, and certainly not for the long term because it looks another couple weeks at least before you can figure on seeing either Kulikov or Bogosian back in the lineup.

Here's hoping Ristolainen, McCabe and Franson are playing with clean shin pads.

As Gorges sits, Kulikov nears return

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 4, 2016

Even when they get some good news on the injury front, the Buffalo Sabres' bedraggled defense corps can't seem to go a day without finding more trouble.

The scenario continued Sunday in HarborCenter, as Dmitry Kulikov returned to practice for the first time in nearly a month -- just as veteran Josh Gorges was declared out for weeks with a non-displaced fracture of a bone in his foot.

Kulikov is listed as day to day, with a return to the lineup likely coming this week after he has missed 11 games with a back problem. Kulikov is not expected to play Monday night in Washington, but could return when the Sabres host Edmonton Tuesday or stage a return engagement against the Capitals Friday in KeyBank Center.

And there's more on the injury front. Taylor Fedun, who has been reliable on the No. 3 pair and on the power play since his promotion from Rochester, also missed practice after he was banged up on a hit in the third period Saturday against Boston. He's questionable for Monday's game, meaning another recall is likely coming. That is expected to be either the return of Casey Nelson or the NHL debut of free-agent signee Erik Burgdoerfer.

The Sabres dipped into Rochester for just one callup last year, and that was a one-game stint by Chad Ruhwedel. They have already used 10 defensemen this season and could be looking at their fourth recall.

The blueline's tenuous status means that rookie Brendan Guhle, up from juniors on emergency recall, is certain to get into his second NHL game Monday after an impressive debut against the Bruins.

"You don't want to get too far ahead of yourself. You take it one shift at a time and keep enjoying it," said Guhle, who played 16 minutes, 20 seconds in his debut. "It's been a lot of fun. I had a good practice today and I'm excited for tomorrow."

Kulikov's sudden appearance rates as a surprise. He had been skating on his own for about a week and there was no indication his return was close but he looked normal during practice Sunday. He said his condition improved after he received an injection in his back in early November.

Kulikov was injured when he fell into an open bench door during a Sept. 30 exhibition game against Toronto. He played the first 12 games of the regular season, collecting no points and a minus-4 rating before the pain simply became too great to continue.

"It's been bothering me since training camp and it's been getting worse to the point where it's been interfering with day to day life," said Kulikov. "I made a decision to get an injection and it works sometimes right away. Sometimes it takes a couple weeks to work and that's how it was for me. It was just frustrating to wait. I didn't want to miss that much time. I just wanted it to get better so it doesn't affect me in the long run."

Kulikov, who had missed a combined 18 games the last three seasons with Florida, said he has never had back issues during his eight-year NHL career.

"Going through this for the first time, I didn't know how to handle it," he said. "Sometimes it felt good, the next day I woke up and it was worse than ever. There were up and downs but gradually it got better. I've had a tough week, started skating almost eight days ago and making good progress. This is the next step, getting in practice and it feels good. It's day to day now, just getting some practices with the team and getting in the rhythm."

Kulikov skated with Cody Franson in practice Sunday, moving Guhle to the third pair with Justin Falk

Said coach Dan Bylsma of Kulikov: "He's had two good practices off the ice, physicality-wise, and today with the team, which is a great sign."

Bylsma did not have similar good news about Gorges, who was struck by a shot during Thursday's win over the New York Rangers. Gorges tried to skate prior to practice Friday but left the ice and went for multiple sets of X-rays before the fracture was found.

"That's a good thing it's non-displaced," Bylsma said. "That should allow him to get back in a boot when he can tolerate the pain."

Gorges has one assist and a minus-3 rating in 23 games while averaging 19:27 per game.

Sabres lose Gorges, but Kulikov is improving

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 4, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Josh Gorges is going to be out awhile with a broken foot. The defenseman blocked a shot against the Rangers and missed the Boston game. Dan Bylsma said, "He has a non-displaced fracture in his foot, so roughly speaking its weeks right now."

Dmitry Kulikov has been on the ice working with skills coach Dennis Miller for about a week. Sunday was his first time back on the ice with his teammates and he said his back is progressing well, "I've had a tough week, it started with skating eight days ago and I've been making good progress. I think this is the next step getting in practice with the team and it feels good."

Both Kulikov and Bylsma said the defenseman is day-to-day. The Head Coach said, "He's had two good practices off the ice physicality wise and then today with the team which is a great sign."

"Given the fact we play tomorrow and Tuesday, day-to-day probably means a few days."

It seemed like every time Kulikov tried to get back to practice, his back would hurt more. He said that was the frustrating part, "It's been bothering me since training camp and it's been getting worse to the point where it's been interfering with day to day life."

"With that I just made a decision to get an injection which sometimes it works right away, sometimes it takes a couple of weeks to work which is how it was for me." Kulikov added, "It was just frustrating to wait and I didn't want to miss that much time, but I just wanted to get it better."

The injury was a freak accident when the door to the bench swung open. He went back first into it. Kulikov said, "My back has never been an issue for me and since this was the first time, I sometimes didn't know how to handle it. Sometimes it felt good and other days I woke up and it was worse than ever."

Taylor Fedun didn't practice on Sunday. Bylsma said, "Fedun is questionable for tomorrow's game and if that's the case, we'll have to call someone up."

Bylsma confirmed that the injury came late in the game, "I think it was the third to the last shift in the corner. He turned back there in the corner to the right of the benches and got hit. He continued on, he didn't wince or look hurt from the hit."

Casey Nelson returned from injury and did play Saturday for the Amerks.

In practice Sunday, Kulikov was paired with Cody Franson while Brendan Guhle was with Justin Falk. Falk shoots left, but played the right side.

Sabres fall to Boston 2-1

By Pat Malacaro

WGR 550

December 3, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Evander Kane's first goal of the season was not enough as the Sabres lost to the Boston Bruins 2-1 on Saturday afternoon at KeyBank Center.

First Period

19:14 - Brendan Guhle gets his first NHL shift under his belt right away. I am sure there are nerves, but the adrenaline will carry him through the first couple of shifts. After that, his speed and skill will need to show through. He is one of those young prospects that we all have wanted to see get playing time, and I for one am looking forward to seeing him, good and bad, in a blue and gold uniform.

15:48 - Jack Eichel draws the first penalty of the game. That is something he did very well two nights ago, once leading to a goal. We'll see if Buffalo can capitalize on Brandon Carlo's minor.

8:44 - This period has been very disjointed. The first five minutes were filled with icing and off-side whistles, while the last five minutes or so have been up and down the ice, fast paced hockey. Shots are 3-3 each, with Boston collecting all of theirs after Buffalo.

5:50 - BRUINS GOAL. A good shot from the point is deflected amongst a mass of bodies in front of the net, and the period that has tilted in Boston's favor nets them their first goal of the game. David Krejci is able to gain position on Rasmus Ristolainen and tip the shot from the point to net his third goal of the season. 1-0 BOS.

3:32 - It looked like the first was going to go from bad to worse for Buffalo after Brian Gionta took a minor right after Boston's goal. However, despite one good scoring chance by Brad Marchand from the far-side face-off dot, the B's PP unit did not have much going in tight and the Sabres are able to kill off the penalty. Buffalo has been stuck on three shots on goal since about the five minute mark of the game, and trail Boston 8-3 in the shot department.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: none

BOS: 14:10 - David Krejci (4) (Brandon Carlo, David Backes)

Penalty Summary

BUF: 14:24 - Brian Gionta (2 min., tripping)

BOS: 4:12 - Brandon Carlo (2 min., interference)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 3, BOS - 10

Second Period

19:03 - Buffalo gets the first real good chance of the period thanks to Ristolainen pinching down and creating a scoring opportunity for William Carrier. The young forward could not slide the puck between the pads of Tuukka Rask, and the Bruins still lead by a goal. I like that "Risto" used his speed and size to create the chance. Buffalo has played much better since late in the first, they finally look like they have their legs under them finally.

11:30 - For as nice as eight shots in the period is for Buffalo, they have come from low percentage areas. Dan Bylsma does not believe in the quantity over quality philosophy, but that is what his team has this period. They may lead in shots but neither team has done much with them or created substantial offense from it.

9:36 - Bylsma has mixed and matched his lines this period, swapping Sam Reinhart and Zemgus Girgensons on their respective lines. William Carrier has seen time with Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo, although Matt Moulson has been back and forth from that line today as well. We'll keep an eye on all of the switching going on.

5:32 - Not much to say about the last several minutes of game action. The seconds continue to bleed off of the clock with Buffalo holding a 13-7 advantage in shots this frame.

2:50 - Just when you think the Sabres have the game-tying goal, the referees have waved off of a potential goal by Brian Gionta for a kicking motion. Toronto has reviewed the call and upheld the ruling by the four officials on the ice.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: none

BOS: none

Penalty Summary

BUF: none

BOS: none

Shots on Goal

BUF - 14 (17), BOS - 11 (21)

Third Period

16:26 - Buffalo had a nice start to the period with Carrier again right in the mix at the top of the crease. However, Jake McCabe heads to the box for slashing and Boston will look to double their lead.

12:41 - Guhle again unloads another shot, his third of the game. He has played very well in his debut and contributed both on the back end and offensively.

12:16 - BRUINS GOAL. A fluky play by Patrice Bergeron leads to the second goal of the game. It looked like the forward's hand pass to himself was touched by a teammate prior to the goal, but the officials did not see it. The goal counts. 2-0 BOS.

10:48 - SABRES GOAL. It did not take long for the blue and gold to answer. Sam Reinhart makes a very nice pass from below the goal line, something that we have seen several times before, and Evander Kane is there to knock home his first of the season. It has been too long for Kane to go without his first goal of the season. 2-1 BOS.

9:08 - Kane's goal has really energized the Sabres. They have had two or three scoring chances to try and get the game tying goal without avail.

4:01 - Shots are 16-7 in favor of Buffalo this period. They have been better overall while the B's have had pockets of play where they have controlled. I would expect Boston to try and press the pace instead of sitting back.

End of Game

Boston 2, Buffalo 1

Goal Summary

BUF: 9:12 - Evander Kane (1) (Same Reinhart)
BOS:7:44 - Patrice Bergeron (4) David Pasternak, Brad Barchand)

Penalty Summary

BUF: 3:17 - Jake McCabe (2 min., slashing)
BOS: 4:27 - Patrice Bergeron (2 min., slashing). 13:31 - Austin Czarnik (2 min., holding)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 18 (36), BOS - 12 (33)

Guhle nothing short of impressive in his debut

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 3, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- It has been quite the whirlwind week for Buffalo Sabres defenseman Brendan Guhle.

On Tuesday, Guhle scored the game-tying goal for the Prince George Cougars of the Western Hockey League with 42-seconds remaining in regulation. The Cougars would end up winning the game shortly after in overtime.

Guhle was then called up by the Sabres on Friday after the team was struck with another injury on the blue line. The next day, Guhle made his National Hockey League debut against the Boston Bruins.

Guhle looked very comfortable in his first NHL game as if he had been playing in the league for a while. Guhle was able to settle in nicely after some early nerves, and played a solid two-way game for the Sabres.

"One of the main traits in my game is [playing a] simple, easy, not complicated game," Guhle said following a 2-1 loss at the KeyBank Center. "It's easier to do out there with all those good players. You just get them the puck and your job's done."

Guhle finished the afternoon with four shots on goal, two blocked shots, and a plus-1 rating in 16:20 of total ice time. In the first two periods, Guhle played strong in the defensive end with some good physical play and not allowing the Bruins to get good quality scoring chances. His play shifted more towards the offensive end of the ice in the third period when he joined a few rushes looking to get the Sabres on the scoreboard.

"In the third period I jumped up a couple of times," Guhle said. "It's not as easy in the second period because you have the long change. If you get caught then you can be in trouble. In the third period when we're trying to tie the game, you wanna try to jump up almost every time."

Guhle has had a decent start to his season in the WHL with the Cougars and the Prince Albert Raiders. Guhle scored two goals and registered two assists in 15 games with the Raiders before being traded to the Cougars back on November 18. In four games with Prince George, Guhle has three goals.

Guhle nearly made the Sabres right out of training camp this season after playing five games in the preseason. Guhle was a plus-1 in the preseason with five shots on goal and one penalty. The 19-year old Guhle did not seem phased by the difference of play from the NHL preseason to the regular season.

"It was pretty similar I'd say," Guhle said. "You just don't have those players who aren't going to be in the lineup every game. In the preseason there's those players who aren't regular NHLers. Here, everyone's regular. Everyone is super good and skilled."

Before the game, head coach Dan Bylsma was nothing but positive on Guhle and seemed happy to have him in Buffalo. Following the loss, Bylsma was pleased with his young defenseman's efforts in his first game.

"I thought there was a few times in the first period where he [wasn't quite comfortable with] communication, but he certainly wasn't shy about using his skating and jumping into the play," Bylsma said. "He did that in the second and third period. He shot the puck. I think he had six or seven shot attempts from the blue line. He was good in the game."

"It was a bit of a tough situation for him. You saw a bit of the moment of play in the first period with the communication issues with the goalie. But he was on the bench talking. He's played with a number of these guys in exhibition games, and I thought he felt real comfortable stepping in and playing with these guys."

Cody Franson was paired with Guhle for most of the game, and he was impressed with the composure the 19-year old showed in his debut.

"He didn't show any panic," Franson said. "Any puck retrievals in the offensive zone he would be moving around like he would be playing in juniors. Coming into defensive zone situations he was comfortable, he was talking. You can't ask for more than that from a kid coming out of juniors."

"He did very well tonight. He was easy to play with."

Guhle may be in Buffalo for a while with injuries to the left side of the blue line. Josh Gorges injured his foot in Thursday night's game against the New York Rangers. However, Bylsma did not provide an update after the game on Gorges. Dmitry Kulikov is still day-to-day dealing with his mid-body injury, but he could skate with the team at some point next week.

Our own Paul Hamilton confirmed with general manager Tim Murray that if Guhle plays 10 or more games with the Sabres he will burn the first year of his entry-level contract. If Guhle is to be returned at any point this season, he must return to Prince George.

The Sabres will next play on Monday night in Washington against the Capitals. Faceoff is set for 7 p.m. with pre-game coverage on WGR beginning at 6 p.m. with Mike Schopp and the Bulldog.

From the Locker Room: Sabres-Bruins

WGR 550

December 3, 2016

Brendan Guhle logged over 16 minutes of ice time in his NHL debut with four shots on net. Read what Guhle and his head coach, Dan Bylsma, had to say following Buffalo's 2-1 loss to Boston.

Brendan Guhle

"It's one of the main traits of my game is simple, easy, not a complicated game. It's easy to do out there with all those good players. Just give them the puck and your job is done."

"I just tried to get [the puck] past the first guy. I thought it was going in at first. [Rask] kind of seemed startled when it hit him and [Gionta] was right there." (on what would have been his first NHL point - the goal was waved off due to Brian Gionta kicking the puck into the net)

Dan Bylsma

"[Guhle] certainly wasn't shy about using his skating and jumping into the play. He did that in the 2nd period, did that in the 3rd period. I think he had 6 or 7 shot attempts from the blue line. He was good in the game."

"The one thing we keep urging Evander to do is shoot the puck. I think he hasn't shot the puck this year the way he normally does. He's had opportunities too. He's started to get more of those opportunities to shoot the puck. Good to see him get that goal for us."

Evander Kane

"I was going through a slump. That's what...multiple games together and you don't score...being a goalscorer, that's a slump. I obviously feel that I have an opportunity to score every game. Like I said, it was just nice to get it tonight."

Sabres' offense struggles again in loss to Bruins

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 4, 2016

BUFFALO – Back to reality. Following two high-scoring, entertaining wins last week, the Sabres reverted back into their regular form Saturday afternoon, losing 2-1 to the Boston Bruins in a drab affair inside KeyBank Center.

Incredibly, it was the Sabres' ninth 2-1 game this season. They've only played 24 times. It marked the 12th time they've scored one goal or less.

After three early shots, the Sabres went the final 15:16 of the first period without registering one.

"I liked our first five minutes of the game, and then it dropped off," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We struggled getting out of the defensive, turned the puck over there and gave them momentum, gave them opportunities."

Trailing 2-0, struggling Sabres winger Evander Kane, who's earning \$6 million this season, scored his first goal this season 9:12 into the third period, converting Sam Reinhart's nifty pass from behind the net in the left circle.

"I was going through a slump," said a relieved Kane, who has a three-game point streak.

No kidding.

"This is a goal you typically see from Evander, his shooting spot," Bylsma said.

But Kane, who possessed a penchant for blasting the puck from anywhere a year ago, hasn't shot it enough in his 13 appearances this season, Bylsma said.

"The one thing you keep working and Evander to do is shoot the puck," Bylsma said. "He hasn't shot the puck this year, I think, the way he does, and he's had opportunities to do it.

Still, Kane has been more noticeable for the last two weeks.

"He's started to get more of those opportunities to shoot the puck," Bylsma said.

With Jack Eichel, Kane's regular center, finally healthy, he might keep getting those opportunities.

The Sabres thought they had scored late in the second period, but officials reviewed the play and ruled captain Brian Gionta kicked rookie Brendan Guhle's shot from the point past Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask.

Rask, who made 35 saves, shut out the Sabres on Nov. 7. The Sabres pumped 33 shots – 15 and 18 – on Rask in the final two periods.

"You start thinking, 'How we going to get one by this guy?'" Bylsma said.

David Krejci opened the scoring 14:10 into game, tipping Brandon Carlo's shot from the point past Sabres goalie Robin Lehner.

Patrice Bergeron made it 2-0 7:44 into the third period, racing to the other side of the net after the puck deflected off his arm and into the air.

In his third appearance this season, Eichel registered two shots in 19 minutes, 14 seconds of ice time before the capacity crowd of 19,070 fans, the Sabres first sellout since opening night.

Eichel's seven-game point streak dating back to 2015-16 ended. He has three goals and four points this season.

Sabres prospect Brendan Guhle stands out in NHL debut

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 4, 2016

BUFFALO – Early in his NHL debut Saturday afternoon, Sabres rookie Brendan Guhle, like any youngster thrust into the spotlight, said he felt “a lot” of nerves.

Who could blame him? A day earlier, the defenseman was in British Columbia preparing for a junior Western Hockey League game.

On Saturday, after the Sabres made an emergency recall, they threw Guhle headfirst into the action, skating him 16 minutes, 20 seconds in their 2-1 loss to the Boston Bruins.

“First couple of shifts, I really was not sure what to expect,” Guhle, 19, said inside KeyBank Center. “It was a lot like preseason.”

Then, Guhle said, he settled down and realized, “Oh, I can play this.”

The Sabres’ top defense prospect mostly performed like a poised veteran beside Cody Franson. Guhle’s seven shot attempts led the Sabres and his four shots on goal tied for the team lead. The 2015 second-round pick showcased his strong skating, consistently moving into the rush. He was a plus-1 and appeared to earn his first NHL assist before captain Brian Gionta’s goal was called back because he kicked the puck.

“He certainly wasn’t shy about using his skating into the play,” Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

Guhle also defended well, racing back to poke the puck away from David Krejci as the Bruins center zoomed down the left wing in the third period.

Other than a some early communication problems in the defensive zone, Guhle’s play impressed Bylsma.

“He felt real comfortable stepping in and playing with those guys,” Bylsma said.

Skating with Franson “made it super easy,” Guhle said.

“He was talking to me all game and making good plays and not putting me in bad spots with the puck,” he said.

Franson said Guhle never showed any panic.

“He was moving around like he would be in juniors, it felt like,” he said. “Coming into D-zone situations, he was comfortable, he was talking. You can’t ask for more than that for a kid coming out of juniors.”

How long will Guhle stick around? The Sabres have nine games before the first year of his entry-level contract kicks in.

The Sabres recalled Guhle because Josh Gorges blocked a shot in Thursday’s 4-3 win against the New York Rangers.

Gorges’ injury means three regular defensemen – Zach Bogosian (knee) and Dmitry Kulikov (back) – are sidelined. Bylsma said he wanted to talk to the doctor before he gave an update on Gorges.

Guhle never expected to be in the NHL this season. He was warming up with his Prince George Cougars teammates Friday when his coach gave him some unexpected news.

“Told me I was traded to the Sabres,” a smiling Guhle said prior to the game.

He wasn’t aware he could be recalled during the season. He arrived in Buffalo about 1:30 on Saturday morning.

Guhle impressed the Sabres so much early he earned a contract just weeks after the 2015 draft. He has also turned heads in the last two training camps, playing 10 preseason games.

"Two training camps ago you saw great skating ability," Bylsma said. "This year, I thought he showed the skating ability but also showed an increased battle level, an increased intensity playing defense.

"It's just maturation for him and his game. We felt like we needed to add some speed on the back end, some skating ability."

Bylsma said the Sabres considered keeping Guhle out of camp this year with three early Western Conference road games.

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Bylsma said Kulikov has skated for the last seven days, the last two with physicality. The Russian could practice next week. Meanwhile, Bogosian is 10 days to two weeks away.

What about the injuries with the Rochester Americans?

Bylsma said defenseman Casey Nelson has missed two games with a neck/shoulder problem and is day-to-day. Winger Hudson Fasching hurt his groin again and could start skating next week.

Notes: With so many injuries, Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen skated 29 minutes, nine seconds. ... Sabres winger Sam Reinhart, who assisted on Evander Kane's goal, has a four-game point streak for the second time in his career.

Sabres' Dmitry Kulikov nearing return as Josh Gorges leaves lineup

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 3, 2016

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges has a non-displaced fracture in his foot and will be sidelined “weeks,” coach Dan Bylsma said Sunday.

There is, however, some good news for the Sabres’ injury-ravaged blue line, which is missing three regulars. Dmitry Kulikov, out the last 11 games with a back injury, practiced Sunday inside HarborCenter and is day-to-day, Bylsma said.

Still, the Russian likely won’t play in tonight’s road tilt against the Washington Capitals. Later in the week appears to be the likely target time.

And incredibly, the Sabres might have to find another defenseman before tonight’s game. Taylor Fedun is questionable after getting hit in the corner late in Saturday afternoon’s 2-1 loss to Boston, Bylsma said.

“It’s unfortunate,” Sabres center Ryan O’Reilly said of the defense, which is also missing Zach Bogosian. “We can’t seem to get a bounce. It goes back to last month, the amount of games that we played (14), not enough off days, it’s just tough to stay healthy. It just seems like every time we get one guy back, another guy goes down.”

The Sabres dipped into junior hockey last week to boost their beleaguered defense, recalling Brendan Guhle, 19, on an emergency basis after Gorges blocked a shot in Thursday’s 4-3 win against the New York Rangers.

Which defenseman could be summoned next? Perhaps Rochester Americans veteran Erik Burgdoerfer, 27, who has never played an NHL game.

Bylsma has mentioned Burgdoerfer, who signed a two-way contract in July, as a recall candidate all season. Burgdoerfer, a right-handed shot like Fedun, impressed Bylsma during training camp, earning some exhibition appearances.

Meanwhile, Kulikov’s bruised lower back – it endured the brunt of the impact when he was knocked into an open bench door Sept. 30, his Sabres preseason debut – hasn’t healed.

“It’s actually been bothering me since training camp,” Kulikov said. “It’s been getting worse to the point where it’s been interfering with the day-to-day life.”

Kulikov, who said there are no fractures, missed the season opener before playing the next 12 games. But the pain eventually forced him out of the lineup. He has been receiving injections.

“Sometimes it works right away,” he said. “Sometimes it takes a couple weeks to work. ... It was just frustrating to wait.”

Having never experienced the injury before, Kulikov said “sometimes I didn’t know how to handle it.”

“The next day I woke up and it was worse than ever,” he said. “It was up and down and gradually getting better.”

Until Kulikov returns, the Sabres might keep relying on Guhle, who stood out in his NHL debut Saturday, playing aggressively in 16 minutes, 20 seconds of ice time.

“It was an interesting situation for him to come and be able to jump into the fire like that,” Bylsma said.

Guhle, of course, is a familiar face to Bylsma. The 2015 second-round pick almost cracked the Sabres out of training camp the last two years.

“You have to acknowledge that you have to trust the player in the situation,” Bylsma said. “You can talk him being a 19-year-old kid, you can talk about his inexperience, his first NHL game. We called him up because we trust him, we trust him in that situation. He frankly did real well, looked real comfortable ... in the situation.”

Bylsma seems fine with Guhle potentially facing superstar Alex Ovechkin, one of the greatest goal scorers ever, tonight.

"Now you're going and playing the Washington Capitals, and I think you can think about the situations he's going to be in, might be and against who," Bylsma said. "You have to trust the kid. ... With a little bit of play in last game, (he) earned a little bit of that trust."

5 Observations: Sabres fall to Bruins 2-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

December 3, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres couldn't make up for a slow start -- dropping their afternoon matchup with the Boston Bruins 2-1. The Sabres registered only three shots in the first period, but still managed to outshoot the Bruins 36-33, only to find the back of the net once.

Five observations from Saturday's loss:

SLOW start

If you're a fan of slow-paced and boring hockey than you loved the beginning of Saturday's matinee between the Sabres and Bruins. Neither team was able to generate consistent scoring chances and don't even get me started on the sloppy passing.

The Sabres were competitive in the opening minutes of the game, but basically were sleep walking through the remainder of the first period. They finished with only three shots, all of which came early in the period. The team improved in the second, but aside from a disallowed Brian Gionta goal, none of the Sabres 15 shots really seemed like they had a chance of beating Bruins goaltender Tukka Rask. The Sabres were able to apply pressure on the Bruins in the third, but couldn't overcome a two goal deficit.

Golden Guhle

The 19-year-old looked calm, cool and collected in his first NHL game. Quite frankly, you could argue that Guhle was the Sabres most dynamic defender Saturday afternoon. Young defenseman often panic when the puck is on their stick — but we didn't see that with Guhle in his NHL debut.

"First couple shifts not really sure what to expect," Guhle said after the game. "It's a lot like preseason really. I've played in tons of preseason games so I just kept working at it and kept trying to get better every shift."

Guhle finished the night with four shots, with one of his best plays coming on the aforementioned disallowed Gionta goal. Guhle took a cross-ice pass at the point, and fired a quick wrister through traffic on net. The shot handcuffed Rask, and the rebound sat in front of the net. Gionta had his stick tied up by the Bruins defender, but if he didn't, the Sabres captain could've tapped in the loose puck, rather than kicking it in.

Another outstanding play came on a rush when the Sabres were down in the third. Guhle exploded like a rocket out of the Sabres own end, and fired a nice shot that bounced off Rask's shoulder.

"He certainly wasn't shy about using his skating and jumping into the play," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said. "You know he did that in the second period, did that in the third period, and shot the puck — I think he had six shot attempts from the blue line, he was good in the game."

Overall, I really liked Guhle's first game — no glaring mistakes and solid play in both ends — That's definitely a good sign.

Kane finally finds the back of the net

Evander Kane once again had a game filled with up and downs, but in the third he played one of his best periods of hockey this season, and he was rewarded for it.

"I was just in the right area there and went in," Kane told reporters after the game. "I mean I was going through a slump...I obviously feel like I have an opportunity to score every game so like I said it was just nice to get it this afternoon."

Kane heating up could be just what the Sabres need — and while one goal isn't 'heating up' — it's at least a start.

Gorges "going to be out a little bit"

That's all we know about Josh Gorges and his injury right now. Before the game Bylsma said he would elaborate on Gorges' injury after the game but did say the defenseman was "going to be out a little bit."

After the game Bylsma said he still needed to talk to the doctors about Gorges and couldn't provide anything more.

Gorges reportedly had x-rays done on his foot after blocking a shot in Thursday's win and only skated with his teammates for the first few minutes of Friday's practice.

Lehner looks fine

Robin Lehner stopped 31 of the 33 shots he faced Saturday and looked good doing so. Early on Lehner kept the Sabres in the game while they spent almost the entire first period in their own zone.

Boston's first goal came on a beautiful re-direction by Bruins forward David Krejci — nothing Lehner could do about that one.

In his first start since returning from a minor hip injury (left early Tuesday, missed Thursday), Lehner looked like he was healthy and played a solid game.

Sabres lose Eichel touch, fall 2-1 to Bruins

By Nick Wojton

The Daily News

December 3, 2016

BUFFALO – In two games since his return to the lineup, the Buffalo Sabres (9-10-5 overall) have scored nine goals with Jack Eichel contributing on four of them (3 goals, 1 assist) in two wins.

That luster ended on Saturday afternoon as the Sabres lost 2-1 to the Boston Bruins (14-10-1).

David Krejci opened the scoring at the 14:10 mark of the first period on a deflection out front of Sabres' goalie Robin Lehner (31 saves).

The 1-0 lead held until the third period, but the Sabres looked to have tied the score with 2:50 left in the second period. After a review it was determined that Brian Gionta kicked the puck past Tukka Rask (35 saves), keeping it a one-goal game.

In the third, Patrice Bergeron extended the Bruins lead 7:44 into the period jamming in a rebound which bounced over Lehner.

Evander Kane's shot cut the lead to 2-1 just over a minute later, but Buffalo could not muster up much offense past that, as the Bruins escaped with a 2-1 win.

Buffalo's next game is scheduled for Monday at 7 p.m. in Washington against the Capitals.

Buffalo's depth on defense is dwindling

By Joey Alfieri

NBC Sports

December 4, 2016

The Buffalo Sabres aren't known for their depth on defense, so when they have to deal with injuries at that position, things can get complicated.

Well...I guess things are about to get complicated.

On Sunday, the Sabres announced that Josh Gorges (pictured) will miss "weeks" because of a non-displaced fracture in his foot. The injury occurred after he blocked a shot in Thursday's game against the Rangers.

Besides Gorges, Buffalo is also without Zach Bogosian and Dmitry Kulikov.

Bogosian has been out since Nov. 3 with sprained ligaments in his knee, and he's still 10-to-14 days away from getting back into the lineup.

The news is a little better for Kulikov, who returned to practice on Sunday. He's missed 11 games because of a back injury he suffered in the preseason. He tried playing through it, but obviously he was still in some discomfort.

"Kulikov has now skated two days with some physicality and now been skating for seven days," coach Dan Bylsma said, per the Buffalo News. "Hopefully, that means we'll see him in practice soon – in the next week hopefully."

Now, some of the replacements for these guys are starting to get hurt.

Taylor Fedun missed Sunday's practice and it's unclear if he'll be able to play against the Capitals on Monday night. If he can't go, Buffalo will need to call someone up from the minors.

Things got so wacky last week that the Sabres called up Brendan Guhle from junior on an emergency basis. By rule, he can stay on the roster as long as he keeps playing. Once he stops playing, the emergency tag is removed and he has to go back to his junior team.

Guhle, Rasmus Ristolainen, Jake McCabe, Cody Franson and Justin Falk are the healthy defensemen on the roster right now.

Comeback effort falls short in loss to Boston

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

December 3, 2016

For a time, it looked like the stage was set for another third-period comeback. The Buffalo Sabres found themselves within a goal of tying the game when Evander Kane hit the back of the net with 10:48 still remaining in regulation against the Boston Bruins on Saturday afternoon, one of 18 shots the Sabres would record in the third period.

Unlike their come-from-behind win over New York on Thursday, however, the Sabres never did complete the rally. Bruins goalie Tuukka Rask turned in a 35-save performance and the Sabres were unable to make up for their slow first period in a 2-1 loss.

"We had some chances throughout the course of the game that didn't go in unfortunately," Kane said. "We've got to find ways to put those away."

The 18 shot third-period was a far cry from the three shots they put on net in the first, all of which came in the first 4:44 of play. Boston took the lead with 5:50 remaining in that period when David Krejci tipped a point shot from defenseman Brandon Carlo in past Lehner off the crossbar. Krejci was one of four bodies screening goalie Robin Lehner in front of the net, including two Sabres.

"I liked our first five minutes of the game and then it dropped off," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We struggled getting out of the defensive zone, turned the puck over there and gave them momentum, gave them opportunities."

The Sabres got back to the way they hoped to play in the next two periods, outshooting the Bruins 33-23 the rest of the way. Still, it was another defensive zone turnover - this one an intercepted exit pass by Rasmus Ristolainen that led to Patrice Bergeron scoring Boston's second goal in the third period.

Buffalo, meanwhile, was stoned by Rask at seemingly every turn. When they finally did put a puck past him in the second period, it was waved off when it was ruled that Brian Gionta kicked the puck into the net.

"Brendan Guhle had a shot from the point there that I don't think Rask saw at all and it still found a way to hit him," Bylsma said. "The rebound comes to Gio and he's trying to kick it up to his stick to get another whack at it, it goes through there and as I said I was pretty certain they were going to disallow that one ... You start to think, 'How are we going to get one by this guy?'"

Kane nearly ignited the comeback with his goal in the third period, which came on a feed from Sam Reinhart behind the net. The goal was Kane's first since of the season, which has been limited to 13 games due to injury.

"I think he hasn't shot the puck this year the way he normally does and he's had opportunities to do it," Bylsma said of Kane. "This was a goal you typically see from Evander, it was a shooting spot for him and [it was] good to see him get that goal for us."

The loss snaps a two-game winning streak for the Sabres and a departure from their high-scoring performances in those two games with Jack Eichel back in the lineup. Buffalo combined for nine goals in wins over Ottawa and New York this week.

Part of that scoring success has come from the power play, on which the Sabres were 0-for-3 on Saturday, albeit with only 5:10 of ice time on the man advantage.

The Sabres' next chance to rebound will come on the road in Washington, D.C. against the Capitals on Monday.

Guhle's debut

For all of the factors seemingly weighing against Brendan Guhle in his debut - the fact he is a 19-year-old defenseman, or the fact he had been playing in junior this season prior to Saturday, or the fact that he didn't arrive in Buffalo until after 1 a.m. on Friday night - he certainly looked the part of an NHL defenseman.

Bylsma praised Guhle's skating ability prior to the game on Saturday, and Guhle displayed it on both ends of the ice against the Bruins. Guhle led the Sabres with seven shot attempts in 16:20 of ice time. It was Guhle's shot from the point that led to Gionta's would-be goal in the second period.

"On puck retrievals, in the offensive zone, he was moving around like he was playing in juniors," his partner Cody Franson said. "Coming into D-zone situations he was comfortable, he was talking, and you couldn't ask for more out of that from a kid coming from juniors."

There were two plays in the third period that best exemplified not only Guhle's skating, but his poise. The first was a rush in the offensive zone, when Guhle blew through the neutral zone past the Boston defense to shoot alone on Rask.

"He certainly wasn't shy about using his skating and jumping into the play," Bylsma said. "He did that in the second period, did that in the third period ... He was good in the game."

The second play came in the defensive zone, when David Krejci appeared to have a clear lane for a breakaway. Guhle sped back from center ice, got in front of Krejci and calmly poked the puck away before Krejci could take his shot.

"He was a righty coming down the left side so I knew he was he was going I knew he was going to try to get it to his forehand," Guhle said. "He probably wouldn't get much off his backhand."

Guhle admitted there were "a lot" of nerves when he took the ice early in the game, but you wouldn't know it by looking at him.

"That's one of the main traits of my game is simple, easy, not a complicated game," he said. "It's easier to do out there with all of those good players."

Up next

The Sabres will hit the road for a rematch with the Washington Capitals at Verizon Center on Monday night. The Capitals took the first meeting between the two teams by a score of 3-1 on Nov. 25.

Coverage on Monday begins with the TOPS Game Night pregame show at 6:30 p.m. on MSG-B, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops in Washington at 7 p.m.

With Gorges out 'weeks,' Kulikov returns to practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

Associated Press

December 3, 2016

With one left-handed defenseman out for the foreseeable future in Josh Gorges, another returned to the ice for the Buffalo Sabres' practice at HarborCenter on Sunday morning. The returnee was Dmitry Kulikov, who skated with the team for the first time since Nov. 11 after missing the last 11 games with a lower-back injury.

Kulikov will not travel with the team for their game in Washington, D.C. on Monday and is day-to-day, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. With the Sabres set to host the Edmonton Oilers on Tuesday night, Bylsma hinted that Kulikov's return might come after those back-to-back games.

Kulikov originally sustained his injury in training camp, forcing him to miss the season opener against Montreal on Oct. 13. He returned for Buffalo's second game in Edmonton on Oct. 16 and played 12 games, but said that the pain eventually began to affect his day-to-day life.

"It was just frustrating to wait," Kulikov said. "I didn't want to miss that much time but I wanted to get it better so it didn't affect me in the long run."

Gorges, meanwhile, will miss weeks of ice time with a non-displaced fracture in his foot. He sustained the injury while blocking a shot during Buffalo's game against New York on Thursday and was a scratch against Boston on Saturday.

"It is non-displaced so that's a good thing," Bylsma said. "It should allow him to get back in his boot when he can tolerate the pain."

The good news for the Sabres is that so far, their replacements on defense had proven to be more than capable. Justin Falk said when he was recalled from Rochester that he wanted to provide a reliable veteran presence on the back end, and so far he's done just that. Falk has posted an even rating or better in his last seven games.

"My whole mindset stepping in was to try and get some quality minutes and be reliable," Falk said. "For my sake, I'm seeing some games here and just trying to go out there, play with confidence, play aggressive, assertive, and like I said, be that reliable guy back there."

Falk is one half of what's been a dependable duo for the Sabres in him and Taylor Fedun. The two were partners on the back end to begin the season in Rochester and were reunited when Fedun was recalled to replace an injured Zach Bogosian in the Buffalo lineup.

"I think we complement each other really well," Falk said. "He's a good puck mover and shows poise and all that. I'm kind of the guy that's bigger and takes up space and tries to shut things down quickly in the corner so he can get the puck and get on the move and do what he does best."

Fedun was absent from practice on Sunday due to an injury he sustained in the third period against Boston and is questionable to play on Monday. If he is unable to go, Casey Nelson and Erik Burgdoerfer would be the likely candidates to join the Sabres on a recall.

In the meantime, Falk skated on a pair with Brendan Guhle at practice, the left-shot defenseman who joined the Sabres on an emergency basis out of junior hockey to replace Gorges in the lineup on Saturday. Guhle was exceptional in spite of his age (he's only 19), showing poise while tracking pucks in the defensive zone and putting his skating ability on display on both ends of the ice.

"To be totally honest, I wasn't really surprised at all," Falk said. "I saw him a few times at training camp there. When you can skate well and have a good hockey IQ then things don't seem to overwhelm you, and that's exactly what he can do."

By rule, Guhle must continue to play as long as he's on the team, which depends on the time it takes for enough players to return so that the Sabres are no longer in their emergency situation. But if the injury bug continues to bite, replacements like him and Falk have shown that the Sabres have the depth on defense to fill in.

Lines at practice

48 William Carrier - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
82 Marcus Foligno - 22 Johan Larsson - 12 Brian Gionta
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 27 Derek Grant - 26 Matt Moulson

29 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
77 Dmitry Kulikov - 6 Cody Franson
45 Brendan Guhle - 41 Justin Falk

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson