



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres looking to take advantage of reeling Flyers

Associated Press

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BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Buffalo Sabres picked up their best win of the season on Saturday against the Winnipeg Jets and are hoping to use it as a stepping stone for the rest of the year.

On Saturday, the Sabres overcame a 3-1 deficit with three third-period goals in a span of 4:42 to come away with a 4-3 victory. They'll look to take that momentum into Tuesday's home game against the Philadelphia Flyers.

"It has the feel of a turnaround game," Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma said after the win. "We needed that in the game and we got it but it's also a big comeback for the boys. It's a big way to respond in the third period and we left it all out there. We played hard in the third period and came all the way back to get the win. It feels like a big game for us."

In that game, defenseman Jake McCabe ignited Buffalo's comeback with a devastating -- and clean -- hit on Jets rookie star Patrik Laine late in the second period. Marcus Foligno, Zemgus Girgensons and captain Brian Gionta scored in the third to put away the Jets.

It was a pleasant change of pace for the Sabres, who have seen several late leads slip away this season and have been dreadful in games that go to overtime.

"It's nice to finish this one out and be on the opposing side of something like that instead of giving up the lead," Buffalo center Jack Eichel said.

Newcomer Kyle Okposo leads the Sabres in scoring with 27 points (12 goals, 15 assists). Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen has been having an excellent season on the blue line and is second in points with 26. Sam Reinhart is quietly third on the team with 24.

"Just how I'm feeling consistency-wise, the consistency has stepped up and in an 82-game schedule that's the most important thing you can have," Reinhart said, according to the team's website.

The Flyers are still looking to regain their form a month ago. The Flyers had a 10-game unbeaten streak from Nov. 27 to Dec. 14 but have fallen on hard times since then. Since the streak ended, the Flyers have lost eight of their last 10 games.

"The games are so tight that the smallest things can determine between winning or losing," Flyers goaltender Steve Mason said last week, according to the team's website. "Even in the games when we were winning 10 in a row, some of those games could have gone either way. It's a tight league and no games are easy. We're going through a tough stretch, (and) it's just a matter of sticking with it here, not getting discouraged and keep pushing forward."

Philadelphia is coming off a 2-1 overtime loss to Columbus on Sunday.

Jakub Voracek leads the Flyers in points with 39 (13 goals, 26 assists). Captain Claude Giroux is second on the team in points with 34 (10 goals, 24 assists).

Confident Reinhart ready to roll alongside Eichel

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 9, 2017

Sam Reinhart's hockey IQ continues to generate compliments, so it's no surprise he was smart enough to see things weren't working with Jack Eichel. The roommates couldn't connect as linemates last month, and Reinhart agreed with coach Dan Bylsma's decision to split them up.

Since then, Eichel and Reinhart have been among the Sabres' hottest players. Reinhart has seven assists and 10 points in the 12 games, while Eichel has five goals and nine points.

Bylsma decided Monday it's time to put them back together.

"I think it was both a smart change going away from it and then coming back to it again now," Reinhart said in KeyBank Center.

Eichel will likely center for Reinhart and left wing Marcus Foligno on Tuesday when Buffalo hosts Philadelphia. The No. 2 picks were a match made in Hockey Heaven last season, but they couldn't rekindle the magic when Eichel returned from his preseason ankle injury. They combined for no goals and two assists in four games before Bylsma juggled the lines Dec. 13.

They've found success with others, but they continued to impress Bylsma with their chemistry on Buffalo's top power-play unit.

"They read off each other probably the best of anybody with the give-and-go and using each other distributing the puck, probably better than any other combination we have," Bylsma said.

Ryan O'Reilly's return to health has also factored into the coach's decision. Eichel, Reinhart and O'Reilly served as Buffalo's top three centers during the last two games, which meant one wasn't skating on the top scoring lines.

"I like those three guys playing more, and sometimes it works better if they're in the top six versus the top nine," Bylsma said. "I've liked Sam at center. He's done a good job and really showed some good things and some improvement in his game with his battle down low and his support and ability to break out.

"I also like seeing Sam playing in our top six with Ryan O'Reilly and Jack Eichel."

By reaching the score sheet in seven of the last nine games, Reinhart has vaulted to third on the Sabres' scoring list. He has eight goals, 16 assists and 24 points in 39 games. Last year, he had 23 goals, 19 assists and 42 points in 79 games.

Reinhart was an assist machine in junior hockey, and the skill is beginning to translate to the NHL level. According to Puckalytics.com, Reinhart is tied for 19th in the NHL with 13 primary assists. His companions include Vladimir Tarasenko, Artemi Panarin and Eric Staal.

"One thing I think he has done a lot better and continues to improve on is his engagement, his battle," said Bylsma, who pointed to Reinhart's assist on O'Reilly's goal Saturday against Winnipeg. "He's in on the forecheck, wins the puck on the forecheck and turns it into an offensive play giving Ryan the pass and the goal.

"He's given himself more opportunity to be a playmaker by the way he's competed, the way he's battled, the way he's gotten to more pucks. You see the result in him getting more assists."

The surge in points has led to a boost in confidence for the 21-year-old.

"It's definitely noticeable when the legs are going and the confidence is going," Reinhart said. "The consistency has stepped up. In an 82-game schedule, that's the most important thing you can have."

The Sabres' next chore is finding team-wide consistency. They're 2-0-1 in the last three games, including Saturday's comeback win that Bylsma termed a "turnaround game." They've continually failed to generate longer streaks, and they needed to get one going.

"It's going to be a test for us to come back and get our crowd into it right from the start of the game," Reinhart said. "It was a little stretch there where for sure it was frustrating. It was tough to battle through that, but we're happy with the last week.

"For us to get back in the race, get back in the hunt, we do have to start stringing some wins together, but in our mind it's just one at a time."

Sabres Notebook: Ennis close to returning; Kulikov still out

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 9, 2017

Tyler Ennis is close to returning to the Sabres' lineup. Once he gets in, he wants to be a lot better.

Ennis, who underwent sports hernia/groin surgery in early November, had his most intense practice since the operation Monday. He jostled with defensemen in front of the net, absorbed their hits along the boards and skated extra laps when the session ended.

He may not play Tuesday when Buffalo hosts Philadelphia, but a return this week appears possible.

"It was a good practice, some hard work," Ennis said in KeyBank Center. "I'm just trying to get the compete level up, get those battle drills in and get the body back to game readiness.

"I'm getting close. I just need a few more sessions like that and just continue to get better. I'm excited to get going."

Ennis alternated with William Carrier as the left winger for center Ryan O'Reilly and right wing Kyle Okposo. Ennis is a three-time 20-goal scorer, so a return could further boost the Sabres' burgeoning offense.

Of course, Ennis first has to rediscover his game. He had one goal and one assist in 12 games before leaving the lineup.

"I've just got to bring a lot more than what I've had," he said. "I've got a lot more to give, a lot more to contribute. I can't wait to get back and play a lot better.

"I don't want to get too excited because there's still work to be done, but it was a good day."

Carrier returned to the ice after missing two games due to illness.

"Back after gaining some of his 13 pounds back that he had lost," coach Dan Bylsma said.

Defensemen Josh Gorges and Dmitry Kulikov were absent. Gorges has missed two of the last three games with a hip injury and is day-to-day. Kulikov hasn't been seen since Dec. 27 following a flare-up of his back ailment.

"I'd like to list him at day-to-day, but it's more than a week now," Bylsma said. "He is improving a little bit and hopefully continues to improve and gets back with us here shortly."

In addition to the O'Reilly line, the Sabres' forwards featured Jack Eichel in the middle of left wing Marcus Foligno and right wing Sam Reinhart; Zemgus Girgensons between Evander Kane and Brian Gionta; and Derek Grant centering for Nicolas Deslauriers and Matt Moulson, with Justin Bailey rotating in.

Bylsma said improved play by Girgensons contributed to the decision to move Reinhart from center to wing. Girgensons has two goals in the last three games. His goal Saturday against Winnipeg was his first at home since Feb. 7, 2015. He went all of last season and nearly half of this year without finding the net in KeyBank Center.

"He's gotten an opportunity at center," Bylsma said. "Just more confidence in his game and his ability, and he's bringing it.

"You never question what he brings to the game in terms of work ethic and desire, and I think you're just seeing a little more confidence in his ability in other areas."

Patrick Kaleta, the Sabres' youth hockey ambassador and longtime forward, welcomed his first child Monday. His wife, Ashley, gave birth to a son named Cooper Patrick Kaleta. He weighed 7 pounds, 11 ounces and was 21 inches long.

Since a 10-game winning streak that stretched from Nov. 27 to Dec. 14, the Flyers have gone 2-5-3.

"They're a team that's desperate to get on the winning side of it here quickly," said Bylsma, whose team is 2-0-1 in its last three. "We should be desperate to keep it going the way we've gone."

The Sabres were last in the NHL at 1.8 goals per game when Eichel returned Nov. 29. They've scored 50 goals in the 18 games since, an average of 2.8. They've boosted their season average to 2.26, which ranks 26th in the league.

"It's always nice to produce," said right wing Kyle Okposo, who has three goals and five points in the last five games. "You want to make sure you're putting up points and helping your team win games. We're just trying to push and make sure we're doing everything offensively that we can."

Sabres' Zemgus Girgensons scoring goals, finding confidence

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 10, 2017

BUFFALO – Almost six minutes into the third period Saturday afternoon, Sabres forward Zemgus Girgensons kicked the puck along the boards and quickly headed to the net.

A second later, he knocked down Matt Moulson's shot in front, skated across the crease and swept a backhand past Winnipeg goalie Connor Hellebuyck, the tying goal in the Sabres' raucous 4-3 come-from-behind victory. Then Girgensons, normally a calm presence, let loose with an emotional celebration, pumping his arms, yelling and banging the glass.

"I don't have big celebrations usually, but I didn't score at home for a while," Girgensons said Monday. "It was a long time. I've been waiting to get that one at home."

How long had the tenacious Latvian been waiting? Try almost *two years*. Incredibly, he hadn't scored at home since Feb. 7, 2015, a whopping stretch of 57 games at KeyBank Center.

"He should've been jacked up," said coach Dan Bylsma, whose Sabres host the Philadelphia Flyers tonight.

Girgensons, 23, scored 12 straight goals on the road, including one in last Tuesday's 4-1 win against the New York Rangers, his fourth goal in three games at Madison Square Garden dating back to January 25.

So in his last 110 contests, Girgensons has scored one-third of his goals in one road rink.

"He's been wishing we played in Madison Square Garden a lot more often," Bylsma joked.

Why does Girgensons, who has struggled for long stretches after his breakout 15-goal season in 2014-15, suddenly start scoring at MSG?

"It's probably more coincidence than something else," he said.

But Girgensons' recent hot stretch, perhaps his best two- or three-week run in two years, hasn't been a coincidence.

"It's definitely been the best I've played in a while," said Girgensons, who has three goals in the last seven games, as many as he had scored in the previous 38. "I feel pretty confident. I feel like I have my full energy. I just feel good out there."

He added: "The past couple weeks ... I started making more plays and holding onto the puck a little bit more, so I would say it's a lot mental."

Girgensons, who often scores pretty goals, has also responded to some terrific opportunities. The 2012 first-round pick spent the last two games as a winger beside top center Ryan O'Reilly.

"You see the battles he wins ... he's always competing first, he's battling," O'Reilly said. "He's tough to play against. You watch him, you see the bounces he gets because he works so hard. You see the puck finds him."

With center Johan Larsson out for the season, Girgensons could keep receiving consistent ice time on the top three lines. He played a season-high 16 minutes, nine seconds Saturday.

On Monday, Girgensons practiced as a center between Evander Kane and captain Brian Gionta.

As the Sabres bottomed out two years ago, Girgensons thrived as a top center under former coach Ted Nolan, who gave his players few restrictions on the ice. But Girgensons has often struggled under Bylsma, who has instilled *much more* structure than his predecessor.

A year after playing in the NHL All-Star Game, Girgensons scored only seven times in 2015-16.

The arrival of O'Reilly and center Jack Eichel last season also pushed Girgensons down the lineup and forced him to shuttle between forward positions.

"Everyone knows I can play both," Girgensons said. "I feel comfortable playing both."

Perhaps Girgensons has finally gotten comfortable playing for Bylsma.

"(He has) more confidence in his game and his ability," Bylsma said. "He's bringing it. You never question how he works. You never question what he brings to the game in terms of work ethic and desire.

"I think you're just seeing a little bit more confidence in abilities in other areas."

Sabres' Tyler Ennis tests groin injury

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 9, 2017

BUFFALO – Before Tyler Ennis can return from a groin injury that has sidelined him 27 games, the Sabres must put the shifty winger through difficult practices featuring rough battle drills and bumping from heavy bodies. Ennis, who underwent surgery Nov. 10, responded well to the arduous session today inside KeyBank Center. So, could the Sabres' longest-tenured player be close to returning?

"We're getting close, just need a few more sessions like that," Ennis said.

Ennis, 27, wouldn't rule out Tuesday's home game against Philadelphia, although a return that soon seems unlikely. The Sabres begin a two-game road trip Thursday in Tampa Bay.

"He had some battle in which he needed to get tested in those areas – stress in his midsection, stress in his groins," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "Him saying it went good thinks he responded well to having that pressure."

Meanwhile, Bylsma fresh off Saturday's thrilling 4-3 come-from-behind win against Winnipeg, mixed up his lines today as follows from left to right:

- Marcus Foligno, Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart
- Evander Kane, Zemgus Girgensons and Brian Gionta
- William Carrier, Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo
- Nick Deslauriers, Derek Grant and Matt Moulson

The most notable move, of course, is moving Reinhart from center back beside Eichel. The two have spent much of the last year or so together. Reinhart, however, has been on a tear, compiling nine points in the last nine games. Much of that time was spent in the middle.

Bylsma cautioned today's lines might not last. Still, he wants Eichel, O'Reilly and Reinhart to play on the top two lines.

"I like those three guys playing more, and sometimes it works better if they're in the top six than versus the top nine," he said. "I like Sam at center. He's done a good job. He's really showed some good things and some improvement in his game with his battle down low and his support, his ability to break out."

In other news, Carrier practiced after missing two games with the flu. Carrier lost 13 pounds, Bylsma said.

Defenseman Josh Gorges (hip, day-to-day) and Dmitry Kulikov (back) also missed the session. Bylsma said Kulikov is more than day-to-day.

Sabres' Ennis is getting close to returning

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 9, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tyler Ennis was full go at practice on Monday doing compete drills against defensemen and doing them well. Dan Bylsma feels Ennis is very close to coming back and said, "What I liked was he was able to compete, we had some battles in the corner and some one-on-ones. He had Justin Falk leaning on him and Bogosian leaning on him, so he had some battles which he needed to get tested in those areas, stressing his mid-section, stressing his groins and him saying it went good means he thinks he responded well to having that pressure."

"He's going to continue to get skating in and hopefully move to getting back here with us soon."

Ennis came off the ice with a big smile and felt it was a very successful practice for him. The winger said, "It was a good practice, some hard work just trying to get those drills in, the compete level up and get the body used to game level again."

"I'm getting close, I just need a few more sessions like that and just continue to get better and we'll see. I'm going to go talk to the trainers and get some treatment and have some conversation and go from there."

Ennis has been doing a lot of work on his own with Dennis Miller, but he says being out there with his teammates really gives him a boost, "It's totally fun, I mean today was a hard day, but it was fun because this is what I love to do and it's good to be around the guys, especially at a time like this when you have a big win against Winnipeg and everyone's looking forward to the next game."

Will Carrier returned to practice after losing 13 pounds with the flu. Josh Gorges missed practice with his hip pointer and is day-to-day. Dmitry Kulikov still hasn't returned to the ice with the team.

Monday's lines were:

Foligno Eichel Reinhart
Kane Girgensons Gionta
Carrier(Ennis) O'Reilly Okposo
Deslauriers (Bailey) Grant Moulson

Philadelphia is already in town and practiced at the arena on Monday. The Flyers are the next opponent on Tuesday night.

Sabres aren't good for my sanity

By Howard Simon

WGR 550

January 9, 2017

"Just when I thought I was out... they pull me back in". Those words, uttered by Michael Corleone in The Godfather Part Three explain exactly how I feel about the Buffalo Sabres.

Saturday's game against Winnipeg was a microcosm of the season and the latest example of just how crazy this team can make its fans.

Trailing 3-1 after two periods and showing very little signs of life, I was ready to write off the game. What made it even more depressing was the fact that two former Sabres, Drew Stafford and Joel Armia, had scored for the Jets.

But the Sabres dominated the third period, scored three goals, had a highlight reel thundering hit by Jake McCabe on Patrick Laine, and rallied for the all important two points. Actually any win is important when you look at the Sabres current spot in the Atlantic Division.

The win over Winnipeg capped a week where the Sabres went to New York and beat the Rangers (currently 4th in the league standings) and managed to get a point out of Chicago from the Blackhawks (# 2 in NHL in points).

I didn't see that coming after those back to back losses to Boston. Those were two huge games and it couldn't have gone much worse. They left me feeling like the season was over for all intents and purposes. Kind of like how I felt in week two of the NFL season after the Bills were beaten by the Jets to drop to 0-2.

This is just par for the course for the Sabres though. During those nightmare days when Jack Eichel was injured, the Sabres had a stretch in November where they lost six straight games and scored a total of six goals.

It appeared the Sabres would bury themselves before Eichel would get back but somehow they beat Pittsburgh in a shootout and followed that up with a victory over Calgary.

In mid December, Buffalo dropped four in a row which featured back to back shootout losses at Carolina and Florida. The next two defeats came on home ice to the Hurricanes and Islanders with the Sabres managing a whopping two goals!

But they managed to beat Detroit to end the skid and inject a little hope back in the season.

They still don't score enough at even strength, their group of defensemen needs a serious overhaul and there are too many nights where the Sabres appear to be sleepwalking in the first period. But then there are games or parts of games where you think they shouldn't have a problem competing for third place in the division and the corresponding playoff spot.

Ryan O'Reilly is a tremendous player and is already one of my all time favorite Sabres to watch because of the many assets he brings to the ice. O'Reilly has 10 points in his last 11 games.

Sam Reinhart's goal production pace is down from last season but his play making ability is shining through. Reinhart has nine points in his last nine games.

Evander Kane is playing like the player Tim Murray expected to get when he swung the blockbuster deal with Winnipeg. Kane, who didn't score a goal in his first 12 games of the season, has nine in his last 16 games.

Marcus Foligno, who is getting top six time, has three goals in five games. Even Zemgus Girgensons is showing signs of life. The native of Latvia has looked lost in Dan Bylsma's system and had just two goals in 32 games. Girgensons now has three goals in his last seven games.

But the big factor is, of course, the presence of Eichel. In the 21 games he missed due to the high ankle sprain, the Sabres totaled 19 points. If you project that out over a full 82 game season it comes to 74 points.

In the 18 games since Eichel returned to the ice, Buffalo has 20 points. Over a full season that projects to 91 points. Yes, other players have been in and out of the lineup but Eichel's presence makes all the difference.

Now we need to see some consistency. Hopefully the Sabres team we saw in the third period against Winnipeg, that aggressive, hard skating, energy filled group, shows up more often than not.

Tyler Ennis nearing return to Sabres lineup

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 9, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - Buffalo Sabres forward Tyler Ennis is nearing his return to the lineup. He doesn't know when that return will be, but he does know when it happens he needs to be better.

"I just have to bring a lot more than what I have, you know since my start," Ennis said. "I have a lot more to give and a lot more to contribute so I can't wait to get back and play out there."

Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma wouldn't commit to a possible return day for Ennis. After practice, Ennis didn't rule out playing against the Flyers at home on Tuesday when talking with reporters -- which leads me to believe that a return could absolutely happen this week.

Ennis, 27, had only two points (1G, 1A) in 12 games played before missing the Sabres last 27 games with a groin injury. The most startling stat was his -6 plus/minus in only 12 games. Defense has never been one of Ennis' strong suits, but his start was pretty lackluster.

Statistically Ennis' best season came in 2010-2011 when he finished with 49 points. Since Ennis has two seasons with more than 40 points:

2013-2014: 43 points

2014-2015: 46 points

Ennis has struggled with injuries, missing 69 games last season, along with the 27 he's already missed this year.

If he can stay healthy from here on out his impact moving forward could prove to be valuable to a Sabres team looking to make a playoff push.

Bove's Take:

I'm not ready to drink the Tyler Ennis Kool-Aid just yet.

There's no denying that he is a talented player who has proven that he can score in the N.H.L., but he hasn't done that since the #EmbraceTheTank season. Ahh the memories.

Not that I need to remind you, but that season the Sabres were basically playing with an AHL roster. Ennis got oodles of minutes and played more than he ever has, which may have inflated his numbers at least a bit.

Don't get me wrong -- Ennis' return will help give the Sabres a spark, but I don't expect him to put up massive numbers. However, I do think Ennis gives the Sabres more depth, which in turn leads to more production, so that's at least something to be optimistic about.

You shouldn't read too much into this because lines change all the time -- but at practice on Monday Ennis was rotating in on a line with Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo. If that's where he'll play when he's able to return I can see the line thriving, especially when you consider how responsible O'Reilly and Okposo are in their own end.

Ennis return should also help give the second power play unit a nice boost -- his hands and playmaking ability are something that unit is missing.

This is just an estimate -- but if Ennis can finish the second half of the season with 15 goals then I'm sure the Sabres would be happy -- and while that may be a little lofty, he has the talent to get it done if he can finally stay healthy.

Reinhart's assist total shows growth as a playmaker

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

January 9, 2017

The numbers don't lie: With nine points in his last nine games, Sam Reinhart is currently in the midst of the most productive stretch of his young NHL career. Whether or not he felt it's been his best stretch was another question altogether, and he took a second to think before answering that question on Monday.

"Yeah, probably," Reinhart said. "I, mean, numbers-wise sure, yeah, but just how I'm feeling consistency-wise, the consistency has stepped up and in an 82-game schedule that's the most important thing you can have."

At age 21, Reinhart is on pace to score 50 points this season, up from the 42 he scored as a rookie in 2015-16. How he's gotten those points, however, has changed significantly. Reinhart had 19 assists in 79 games last season; he already has 16 in 39 games this season.

Reinhart said he's always thought of himself as more of a distributing playmaker - an "assist guy," as he put it - than a goal scorer, and he chuckled at the idea that there's been any change in his game to lead to the dramatic spike in his numbers from a year ago.

"There's no reason for it," he said. "I don't think it's anything that's changed, anything I've done differently. I'm still doing the same things, having the same mindset offensively and obviously guys are putting it into the net."

It's not as if Reinhart's helpers have been a matter of luck, either. Thirteen of his 16 assists have been primary, a number that leads the Sabres and, according to puckalytics.com, is tied for 19th in the NHL.

Reinhart's last few games alone shows the number of ways he's able to create, whether it's intentionally shooting off the goalie's pad to create a rebound as he did in New York last Tuesday or waiting for a passing lane to open through the middle of the ice as he did on the goal below against Winnipeg on Saturday.

Before Reinhart makes his pass to Ryan O'Reilly on that goal, he gets back as the first forward into the offensive zone which allows him to steal the puck from Winnipeg defenseman Jacob Trouba on the forecheck. It's this area where Reinhart's coach believes he's made the most dramatic improvement since his rookie season.

"The one thing I think he has done a lot better and continues to improve on is his engagement, his battle," Bylsma said. "Ryan's goal at the end of the first period is a great example of that. He's in on the forecheck, wins the puck on the forecheck there as F1 and then turns it into an offensive play giving Ryan the pass and the goal there. I think he's given himself the opportunity to be a play maker by the way he's competed, the way he's battled the way he's gotten to pucks."

With that being said, perhaps it's no coincidence that a good dose of Reinhart's helpers this season have come from behind the net. Below, you can watch two instances in which Reinhart retrieves the puck behind the goal line and makes a quick pass under pressure to feed an oncoming forward from the month of December alone:

"I think guys are kind of finding lanes," Reinhart said. "It's nice being behind there. You're seeing everything. The defenseman, they're kind of turned around, everyone's turned around, so it's hard to defend back there."

Where Reinhart plays going forward remains a consideration for Bylsma. On one hand, playing him at center allows Bylsma to spread his talent throughout the lineup with Jack Eichel and O'Reilly also playing down the middle. On the other hand, playing Reinhart on the wing alongside either Eichel or O'Reilly allows Bylsma to get more minutes out of one of his more talented playmakers.

The answer in the last game was a bit of both. Reinhart played the majority of the game at center, but took the ice as a top-six wing in some situations, like his goal-scoring shift with O'Reilly in the final minute of the first period. He was used alongside Eichel as well, a duo that Bylsma said reads off each other as well as any two players on the team.

Reinhart and Eichel shared a line at practice on Monday, which you can find more on in a new edition of Sabres in :90 with Brian Duff.

As to whether he stays with Eichel or plays center, Reinhart himself is indifferent. As long as he stays consistent, expect the assists to keep coming.

Ennis continues to progress

Tyler Ennis has been skating with the team while they've been at home since Dec. 29, but his involvement in practice on Monday saw him take another step forward in that he competed in battle drills along the wall.

Ennis said afterward that he feels close to 100 percent, but added that he'd need to have further conversations with team doctors before speculating on a potential return to the lineup. He's missed 27 games since undergoing surgery on his groin on Nov. 10.

"What I liked what I saw was that he was able to compete," Bylsma said. "We had some battles in the corner and some 1-on-1's in the D-zone there; he had Justin Falk leaning on him, and [Zach] Bogosian leaning on him, and [Cody] Franson leaning on him so he had some battles. He needed to get tested in those areas, stressing his mid-section, stressing his groin, and him saying it went good means he thinks he responded well to having that pressure."

Monday's Practice

William Carrier returned to the ice after missing the last two games with an illness and, according to Bylsma, regaining the 13 pounds he had lost in the process. He skated on a line with Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo.

Defensemen Josh Gorges (hip) and Dmitry Kulikov (lower back) both were absent. Gorges, who has missed two of the last three games, remains day-to-day while Kulikov's timetable has been extended into the range of weeks.

Bylsma didn't commit to the idea that the lines at practice will be the same as the ones we see against Philadelphia on Tuesday; he said they were made with the possibility of some forwards being absent due to illness. Having said that, you can take a look at Monday's lines below.

82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
9 Evander Kane - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 12 Brian Gionta
48 William Carrier/63 Tyler Ennis - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
44 Nicolas Deslauriers/56 Justin Bailey - 27 Derek Grant - 26 Matt Moulson

29 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
47 Zach Bogosian - 6 Cody Franson
41 Justin Falk - 38 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson