



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Opportunity lost against Lightning

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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TAMPA -- The great tease of the Buffalo Sabres' season continues.

Just when they raise a few eyebrows and start to make you think a big streak is coming, this team comes up short. Instead of a game that makes you think they could actually sneak up in the Atlantic Division, it's a step back and a sobering dose of reality.

That's how Thursday's 4-2 loss to the Tampa Bay Lightning in Amalie Arena felt. Even with some goofy officiating that put the Sabres in a couple tough spots. Bottom line: Instead of passing an injury riddled team that had lost four straight and was closer to the Atlantic Division basement than a playoff spot, the Sabres dropped three points behind Tampa and saw their four-game point streak end.

It was major opportunity lost. Especially with the way the game started, as Matt Moulson's goal at 2:58 of the first period on the first shot by either team gave Buffalo a 1-0 lead. But Buffalo gave up the next three goals, two by Ondrej Palat, and had little sustained pushback until the third period.

"We start to play desperate in the third, which we really need to play from the start," Moulson said. "Every point is big and we have to play that way all game. We have to realize they're big points and play with that desperation."

This game was lost mostly on special teams as Tampa was 2 for 5 on the power play while the Sabres went 0 for 4. And the situations the Sabres found themselves in were critical.

Within three minutes of Moulson's goal, the Sabres were two men short on two ticky-tack calls: A slash on Kyle Okposo and a dubious hook on Evander Kane in the slot on a play where it looked like he routinely lifted a Tampa player's stick. Palat tied the game on the two-man advantage 25 seconds after Kane went to the box and the Sabres never led again.

"I didn't like going down 5-on-4 with that call and I didn't like going down 5-on-3 with that call," said coach Dan Bylsma. "That's the way the game goes and we did have our stick in there I guess and the referee called it. We had gotten the lead early on and that kind of gave them the opportunity to get back in the game."

Trailing, 3-1, the Sabres were much better in the third period. They outshot Tampa Bay, 12-11, and Kane scored off a Jack Eichel feed with 9:30 left to cut the deficit to one.

"That's what we have to do," Kane said. "Both 'D' pinched down the walls and didn't give them an easy breakout. We were aggressive. Make aggressive mistakes, if you're going to make one. Throughout the whole game, not just when we get down. It's a mindset. It's the way we have to play."

Kane was stopped in front by Ben Bishop a couple of minutes later as he nearly tied the game by grabbing the puck from behind the net and sneaking in front. It was Buffalo's last real chance. With 2:17 left, Kane was in tight to the net again and had his stick lifted while he was shooting. It didn't appear to strike Bishop, but the goalie flailed his head and drew a high sticking call. An irate Kane also got an unsportmanlike conduct penalty and 10-minute misconduct.

"I've only played eight years in the league but I'm pretty sure on a followthrough it doesn't matter if you hit a player or a goalie, especially if the goalie is on his knees," Kane said pointedly. "Your stick comes up, gets lifted by their defenseman. I guess I was a little confused."

"Evander goes to shoot the puck and the act of what happens is a shooting motion. A shooting motion is not a high sticking penalty," Bylsma said. "That's really what I saw. I would have liked to not have that call. Would have liked the opportunity to still have the last 2 1/2 minutes and try to get the tie."

Instead, with no 6-on-5 chance, the Sabres couldn't get much pressure and Anton Stralman's empty net goal with 18 seconds left put the game away.

At the halfway mark of the season, the Sabres are 16-16-9 for 41 points in 41 games. It's an 82-point pace, certainly well short of the playoffs. Given all their injuries to date, perhaps Buffalo is lucky to even be doing that well.

Still, some major improvement has to happen in the second half for the Sabres to sneak into the race. And it's going to have to start against their most common foes. The Sabres are just 4-8-3 within the Atlantic Division -- which means they're 12-8-6 outside it.

The Sabres hit the airport after the game for Carolina, where they will face the Hurricanes Friday night. Now it's about salvaging a quick trip, and not about continuing a climb up the standings.

"That's the biggest disappointment in the game," Bylsma said. "We've won some games recently, gathered some points, have a chance to pass a team tonight and missed that opportunity. That's something we're going to have to put behind us here immediately."

Sabres Notebook: Bolts endure similar injury bug

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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TAMPA -- Just like the Buffalo Sabres, the Tampa Bay Lightning have dealt with a major injury epidemic this season. But the situation here is much different because the Bolts came into the season with huge expectations to make a deep playoff run.

Instead, they entered Thursday's game on a four-game losing streak -- getting outscored, 22-9, in those games - - and were just 9-13-3 since captain Steven Stamkos went out with a knee injury in mid-November. The Lightning actually went 3-1 in its first four games without its captain, including its Nov. 17 win in Buffalo. So that made them just 6-12-3 over a 21-game stretch.

It's low-rent stuff for a team that was in the Stanley Cup final in 2015 and came within a game of returning last year before dropping Game Seven of the Eastern Conference final in Pittsburgh. Most experts picked them to be in Cup contention again this year.

But in addition to Stamkos and goalie Ben Bishop, who returned Thursday after missing nine games, the Lightning were without forwards Ryan Callahan (hip) and J.T. Brown (upper body) . They did, however, see the return of forward Brian Boyle (lower body) and defenseman Braydon Coburn (upper body).

"When you lose players of that caliber, obviously it's mentally tough," coach Jon Cooper said before the game in Amalie Arena. "The big problem is guys who are still in are now playing with different linemates. Guys are continually in and out. We've gone through this the last few months. Get a lineup in, it's two guys back in and two out the next game. One in, one out.

"It's continually changing the synergy of our lines. When the familiarity is not there, you're showing up at the rink wondering who's in and who's out, not based on coaches decisions but based on injuries. That becomes tough as well and it can become disruptive."

Earlier in the week, General Manager Steve Yzerman gave Cooper a vote of confidence while speaking to the Tampa Bay Times

"Our team competes really hard, and I think Coop and his staff have done a really good job," Yzerman said. "I like the way we play. I like the style. We've got to improve in some areas. The type of play our coaches led by Coop want the team to play I'm very comfortable with."

Injuries aside, the Lightning have had serious struggles defensively and Andrei Vasilevskiy was unable to hold the fort while playing all the games in Bishop's absence. Vasilevskiy is 10-9-2 this season while Bishop entered the game 9-10-2 and neither had strong save percentages, with Vasilevskiy just ahead, .907 to .904

The Lightning will retire the No. 26 jersey of former center Martin St. Louis prior to Friday night's game here against Columbus. It will be the first retired number in the history of the franchise, which was born in 1992.

Prior to the gates opening to the public for Thursday's game, former Sabres center and Lightning captain Dave Andreychuk hosted a Q&A session with St. Louis and Vinny Lecavalier for season ticket-holders. Just before the game, St. Louis got a rousing standing ovation when he came to center ice for a ceremonial faceoff between Sabres captain Brian Gionta and Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman.

The BlueJackets were in town practicing Thursday. They were St. Louis' hand-picked choice as the opponent for his night because they are coached by John Tortorella, who directed the Lightning's 2004 Cup victory. Tampa Bay

won the final over Calgary in seven games -- with St. Louis' goal in the first minute of the second overtime providing the Game Six win at the Saddledome that got the Lightning home for the clincher.

Said Tortorella here Thursday: "I'm thrilled. You're not going to be able to get me off the stage."

St. Louis' No. 26 was painted on the ice behind both nets as part of the tribute.

Tampa Bay defenseman Victor Hedman was one of three all-star defensemen named to the Atlantic Division team, along with Montreal's Shea Weber and Ottawa's Erik Karlsson. With only three defensemen named to each division, Sabres star Rasmus Ristolainen was left off.

"You're bucking up against great names," said coach Dan Bylsma. "I think Risto has had an all-star year. He's certainly put up the numbers and been that for our team, but you are going against some great players there. In time, Risto will get his."

Hedman entered Thursday with seven goals, 30 assists and a plus-1 rating. Ristolainen had three goals, 24 assists and was minus-2.

"Hedman is more a skating guy up ice, maybe a little bit better at delivering the puck up the ice," Bylsma said. "But Risto is a heavier defender and heavier guy to play against. Their guy is a guy who drives their team and so is Ristolainen for us."

The Columbus practice allowed Sabres winger Marcus Foligno a quick catchup with his older brother Nick, the BlueJackets captain. They spoke by the Buffalo bench just prior to the start of the morning skate.

"That doesn't usually happen," said a smiling Marcus Foligno. "We just realized it a couple days ago when he said, 'Hey, aren't you going to be in Tampa when we're in Tampa?' Pretty cool."

Sabres winger Tyler Ennis, who is closing in on a return after more than two months out of the lineup due to double hernia surgery, was not with the team on the trip here. Robin Lehner (flu), Josh Gorges (hip) and Dmitry Kulikov (back) also did not make the trip.

Quick Hits: Lightning 4, Sabres 2

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 12, 2017

TAMPA -- Kind to one team and unpleasant to the other, the fortunes of the new year took a quick turnaround Thursday night.

The Tampa Bay Lightning snapped a four-game losing streak and ended the Buffalo Sabres' four-game point streak with a 4-2 victory in Amalie Arena.

Winger Ondrej Palat scored two goals and added an assist for the Lightning, who avoided their first five-game skid since 2014. The Sabres' 3-0-1 spurt to open 2017 went by the boards, as did their bid for their first five-game point run since March, 2012.

The Sabres fell to 3-11-1 in their last 15 games against Tampa Bay since the start of the 2013-14 season.

Quick start: The first shot of the game ended up in the net as Matt Moulson beat Tampa Bay goalie Ben Bishop with a quick snapper from the left circle at 2:58 of the first period to put the Sabres into a 1-0 lead. Taking a sweeping one-handed pass from Zemgus Girgensons, Moulson netted his ninth goal of the season in 41 games -- after he scored just eight in 81 games last year.

Penalty trouble: The lead didn't hold because Kyle Okposo was nailed for slashing at 3:54 and Evander Kane went off for hooking at 5:12 to give the Lightning a two-man advantage for 43 seconds. The Tampa power play converged at 5:37 as Palat banged home Tyler Johnson's diagonal pass to the edge of the crease.

PK problems: The Sabres remain last in the NHL in penalty killing and have given up at least one power play goal in seven of their last nine games. Palat's first goal was Tampa Bay's NHL-leading 37th power play tally of the season.

Pouncing on the puck: Palat gave Tampa a 2-1 lead at 5:18 of the second, taking a fat rebound kicked into the slot by Anders Nilsson on a Nikita Nesterov shot and blasting the puck into the net. The Sabres had been bottled up in their end for several seconds after a Marcus Foligno giveaway near the blue line.

Breathing room: Winger Nikita Kucherov made it 3-1 at 12:58, depositing a slick pass from fellow first-time all-star Victor Hedman.

Closing the gap: Kane cut the Sabres' deficit to 3-2 with 9:30 left by beating Bishop from in tight off a Jack Eichel feed. Eichel alertly saw Bishop had lost his stick and quickly got the puck to the goalmouth to Kane.

The end: Anton Stralman hit the empty net with 18 seconds left, with Kane in the penalty box for high sticking.

Bishop knights Sabres again: The Tampa Bay goalie returned after missing nine games with a lower-body injury and continued his dominance against Buffalo by improving his career record against the Sabres to 10-0-1. Bishop entered the game with a career goals-against average of 1.57 and a glossy .942 save percentage against the Sabres.

Busy man: Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen played 10:18 in the first period, with 3:40 of that coming on special teams. He finished the night at 27:20, but was minus-2 in the game and was on the ice for all three of Tampa Bay's goals.

Up Next: The Sabres headed for Raleigh immediately after the game and will meet the Carolina Hurricanes Friday night at 7:30 in PNC Arena. The Canes entered play Thursday just three points out of an Eastern wild-card and holders of a dazzling 13-4-1 record at home. Buffalo was 0-1-1 in two games against Carolina last month, dropping a 2-1 shootout decision in its first trip to Raleigh.

The next home game is a special Martin Luther King Day matinee Monday at 1 against the Dallas Stars.

Inside the Sabres: Midterm analysis, 'Animal House' style

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

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The movie "Animal House" turns 39 years old this summer, but its central theme makes it timeless. As long as there are college campuses, there will be students who struggle to find their way.

Which brings us to the Sabres' midterm analysis.

It has not been the finest semester at Sabres University. Buffalo has been at or near the bottom of the standings most of the season. Goals and players were absent. Too often, the Sabres were simply boring.

As "Animal House" showed, things can change at the end. Guys who stumbled or crashed became doctors, lawyers and senators. Of course, others went to jail or were despised by their countrymen.

The Sabres have time to rewrite their season. They hit the midway point showing signs of positive change. The big test will be keeping it up for the final three months.

Here's a look at the first half, with "Animal House" as an inspiration. If you've never seen the film, don't worry. The quotes from the movie serve as the guide.

Bluto Blutarisky Award (*"Over? Did you say over? Nothing is over until we decide it is"*): Jack Eichel.

A lot is being made of New Year's Weekend, with good reason. Eichel stood in the dressing room and said losing was unacceptable. He said nothing the Sabres were doing was good enough.

His teammates recognize his talent level. Reverence may be too strong a word, but they certainly respect what he can do. It's clear they also respect what he says. He said a lot.

Eichel is making an impact on the ice, too. He's on pace to lead the Sabres in goals despite missing the opening 21 games.

Robert Hoover Trophy (*"A fine example you set"*): Rasmus Ristolainen.

The defenseman has been the Sabres' most complete player. He hit the 41-game mark leading the team in assists and was tied for the top spot in points. He has dramatically improved his defense.

Ristolainen is also the most competitive player on the Sabres. Just ask any of the teammates who've absorbed a crushing hit from him during practice and watched him skate away with a pleased grin.

Chip Diller Trophy (*"Thank you, sir, may I have another"*): Anders Nilsson.

The goaltender keeps earning starts and victories. He hit the midway point on a 5-1-2 run while improving his save percentage to .930. That was fifth in the NHL, ahead of Montreal's Carey Price and Boston's Tuukka Rask – and way above Nilsson's career save percentage of .900 entering the season.

Professor Jennings Trophy (*"I'm not joking, this is my job"*): Dan Bylsma.

Much like Jennings' teachings of 17th-century authors, Bylsma's words have failed to inspire the audience. The Sabres come out flat too often. They've made the same mistakes repeatedly.

It could be a clash of ideals. The Sabres have added skill and speed the past couple of years, but their system inhibits puck control. Buffalo ranks fifth from the bottom in Corsi at 47.1 percent, according to Corsica.Hockey. Although Bylsma has a Stanley Cup on his résumé, he still has to prove himself in Buffalo.

Eric Stratton Award (*"Rush chairman"*): Sam Reinhart.

It takes passing to get the offense moving, and Reinhart has provided it. He leads Buffalo forwards in assists, nearly matching last year's total of 19 in half the games. He's growing into the smooth, mature-thinking skater that the Sabres expected when drafting him.

Daniel Simpson Day Award (*"Has no grade-point average, all courses incomplete"*): Dmitry Kulikov.

The defenseman has been seen almost as often as Taro Tsujimoto, the fictional player drafted by the Sabres in 1974. Kulikov suffered a bad break during his preseason debut – how often does a bench door open during a check? – but it doesn't change the facts. The Sabres expected him to be a top-pair defenseman who could do it all. Instead, he's done nothing. He has no goals, one assist and a minus-10 rating in 20 games.

Doug Neidermeyer Award (*"A vicious mother, isn't he"*): Jake McCabe.

The defenseman gets this honor for delivering the hit of the season. His blast of Patrik Laine concussed the Jets' Rookie of the Year candidate and showed the Sabres can be physical.

Kent Dorfman Trophy (*"I hope I score, oh boy, oh boy"*): Derek Grant.

Given up on waivers Wednesday, Grant floundered through 35 games with the Sabres and failed to find the net. It's a common occurrence. He didn't score in his opening 75 career games with Buffalo, Calgary and Ottawa. Only two forwards in NHL history have played more without a goal: Gord Dwyer (108 games) and Tim Sestito (101).

Otis Day Award (*"You make me want to shout"*): Tim Murray.

If owners Terry and Kim Pegula need money, they should forget the oil wells and charge people to sit with the Sabres' general manager. His blunt commentary during games is amazing. Like "Animal House," however, it's for mature audiences only.

Mayor Carmine DePasto Trophy (*"It gives me great pleasure to present this ceremonial gold-plated whistle"*): Tom Ward.

One of two new assistant coaches, Ward has established himself as the vocal member of the group. Every team needs a coach who can yell positive and negative comments, and Ward eagerly handles the job during practice.

Larry Kroger Trophy (*"I've never done this before"*): William Carrier, Justin Bailey, Nick Baptiste.

The rookies scored their first NHL goals, collecting a treasured memento. However, they've also looked like first-year players at times. Buffalo has used seven rookies (Casey Nelson, Hudson Fasching, Brendan Guhle and Evan Rodrigues are the others), and they had combined for just five goals and two assists in 64 games.

Donald Schoenstein Award (*"OK, OK, now I'm really mad. Come back and fight"*): Robin Lehner.

It's always fun to watch goaltenders get involved in scums. Lehner enhanced his reputation as a battler by manhandling Winnipeg's Bryan Little before attempting to go toe-to-toe with 6-foot-5, 260-pound Dustin Byfuglien.

Unfortunately, Lehner has also fought the puck during shootouts. He's failed to stop any of the six shooters while falling to 0-3 in the breakaway challenge. His save percentage is a very respectable .921, but his losses combined with Nilsson's victories have hurt his standing.

Omega Pledges (*"Everybody I talk to says Omega's the best"*): Kyle Okposo, Ryan O'Reilly.

In his first year with the Sabres, Okposo is the team's lone All-Star. He led Buffalo in goals during the first half and was tied at the top in points. He's also been as consistent as advertised, with his effort rarely fluctuating from shift-to-shift.

O'Reilly is on pace to lead Buffalo in points despite missing time with a midsection injury and appendectomy.

Double Secret Probation (*"The time has come for someone to put his foot down"*): Zach Bogosian, Josh Gorges.

Bogosian hasn't settled in at either end of the ice, recording just three assists and a minus-8 rating. It's not what Buffalo had in mind when it acquired him in the big trade with Winnipeg.

Much of Gorges' problems stem from misuse. At this stage of the 32-year-old's career, he shouldn't be on the top pair and playing upwards of 20 minutes per night. He has the tenacity to skate in lesser duty, but he isn't being put in a position to succeed.

Dean Vernon Wormer Trophy (*"You'll get your chance, smart guy"*): Penalty killers.

Not only does the opposing power play get a chance, it gets a glorious opportunity to capitalize. Buffalo was dead last in penalty killing at 73.9 percent, allowing at least one goal in 21 of the first 40 games. It's reminiscent of an exchange in "Animal House" between Stratton and Blutarsky:

"This situation absolutely requires a really futile and stupid gesture be done on somebody's part."

"We're just the guys to do it."

Bishop returns, Palat gets 2 goals, Lightning top Sabres 4-2

By Mark Didtler

The Associated Press

January 12, 2017

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Ben Bishop provided a much-needed lift for the Tampa Bay Lightning.

Bishop made 24 saves in his return after missing nine games with a lower-body injury, Ondrej Palat had two goals and an assist, and the Lightning beat the Buffalo Sabres 4-2 on Thursday night.

"It's nice to get those competitive juices going," Bishop said. "Obviously, two points makes it better."

Nikita Kucherov and Anton Stralman also scored for Tampa Bay, which stopped a four-game losing streak. Lightning center Brian Boyle (lower body, four games) and defenseman Braydon Coburn (upper body, two games) also came back from injuries.

Bishop, 10-0-1 lifetime against Buffalo, turned aside left and right circle shots by Jack Eichel during the second period. Andrei Vasilevskiy went 3-5-1 over nine starts in place of Bishop, who is a potential free agent after the season.

"He's a big part of our team," Palat said of Bishop.

The Sabres, bidding for their first five-game point streak (3-1-1) since March 2012, got goals from Matt Moulson and Evander Kane. Anders Nilsson stopped 25 shots in his second consecutive start in place of Robin Lehner, who is ill.

"I'm not sure what it is, they're big games for us and we keep coming out tentative," Buffalo right wing Brian Gionta said. "Whether it's nerves or we're just overthinking things instead of just playing, we've got to find a way to get ourselves ready for big games."

After Palat scored on the rebound from the slot early in the second, Kucherov made it 3-1 from the low left circle off a nifty pass across the slot by Victor Hedman midway through the period.

Kane's goal off Eichel's assist got Buffalo within 3-2 with 9 1/2 minutes left.

The Sabres got a power-play 11 seconds after Kane's goal when Bishop was called for delay of game, but failed to capitalize. Buffalo went 0 for 4 with the man advantage.

"We got it to 3-2, that was the time we looked to our power play to step up there," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We had one good shot from Jack (Eichel) that was a good chance to score. Kind of a missed opportunity."

Stralman got a late empty-net power-play goal. The Lightning's second-best NHL power-play unit, converted two of five chances.

Moulson and Palat, during a 5-on-3 power play, both had early first-period goals.

Palat had a short-handed breakaway shot in the third stopped by Nilsson.

"Palat was a beast out there," Tampa Bay coach Jon Cooper said.

NOTES: Hedman has 31 assists this season. ... Moulson stopped an 11-game goal drought. ... Tampa Bay RW Ryan Callahan, sidelined for the third time since offseason hip surgery, missed his second straight game.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Complete a quick two-game road trip Friday night at Carolina.

Lightning: Will hold a pregame ceremony before playing Columbus on Friday night to retire Martin St. Louis' uniform No. 26. "I'm definitely nervous," St. Louis said. "I think a lot of emotions are going to come out when it happens." St. Louis was a key member of Tampa Bay's 2004 Stanley Cup championship team.

Lightning end skid with win over Sabres

By Greg Auman
The Sports Xchange
January 12, 2017

TAMPA, Fla. -- Ben Bishop was back for the first time in three weeks, and the goalie's healthy return helped the Tampa Bay Lightning end a four-game losing streak, beating the Buffalo Sabres 4-2 on Thursday night at Amalie Arena.

"It was nice to get the competitive juices flowing," said Bishop, who had 24 saves after giving up a goal on Buffalo's first shot. "Taking care of this home ice before we go on the road is big, against a team that was right on our heels, and we're chasing teams, too. Any way you can get points is important."

Tampa Bay (20-19-4) got two goals from Ondrej Palat, rallying from an early deficit to cool off the Sabres (16-16-9), who were 3-0-1 in their last four.

Tampa Bay put the game away with an empty-net goal from defenseman Anton Stralman -- his second this season -- with 18 seconds left.

"We bent a little bit but we didn't break, and I thought Bish had a lot to do with that," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "The saves he made, the way he played the puck, obviously, it's good to have him back."

Buffalo trailed 3-1 in the third but got within a goal with 9:30 left on Evander Kane's 11th goal of the season, shooting a rebound past Bishop. The Lightning had two chances while short-handed, but Palat missed two chances at a hat trick, missing on a 2-on-1 and then on a breakaway within the same penalty kill.

A fight with 4:33 left in the game gave the Lightning a power play -- the Sabres' Brian Gionta was called for two minutes for roughing and Buffalo's Marcus Foligno and Tampa Bay's Cedric Paquette each five minutes for fighting. Buffalo killed off that penalty, but with 2:17, another power play came for Tampa Bay when Kane was called for high-sticking and unsportsmanlike conduct. Buffalo didn't get a shot in the final 4:33 as a result of their extended short-handed play.

"We weren't moving our feet. We weren't doing a good job of accepting their speed and couldn't get anything going on our forecheck," Buffalo's Brian Gionta said. "When we got the puck, we weren't moving, supporting each other. We just could never get our feet moving."

Both teams have back-to-back games ahead, with Buffalo traveling to face the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday night and the Lightning staying home to face the Columbus Blue Jackets.

The Lightning came in having lost four straight and having given up 22 goals in those four losses. Bishop only faced one shot in the first 10 minutes, but Buffalo scored on it, as Matt Moulson scored his ninth goal of the season just 2:58 into the game for a 1-0 lead.

The Lightning got back on a 5-for-3 power play, with Buffalo taking two penalties 77 seconds apart -- Tampa Bay came in with the NHL's No. 2 power play, facing the league's worst penalty-kill unit in Buffalo. Ondrej Palat converted the 5-on-3 with a goal with 14:23 left in the first on an assist from Tyler Johnson, tying the game and shifting momentum back to the Lightning.

"It was a tough first period in a lot of ways," Kane said. "We got a good goal, and then PK there on some questionable calls. We gave up the 5-on-3 goal, which is tough to kill out anytime."

Tampa Bay dominated the second period, scoring two goals on eight shots against Buffalo goalie Anders Nilsson. Palat scored his second goal of the game -- and ninth of the season -- on a rebound from a Nikita Nesterov shot for a 2-1 lead. With 7:02 left in the second, Tampa Bay extended its lead to 3-1 when Nikita Kucherov scored his 17th goal of the season on an assist from defenseman Victor Hedman. Bishop stopped 14 shots in the first two periods after giving up the early goal.

NOTES: The Lightning got the long-awaited return of G Ben Bishop, who missed nine games with a lower-body injury suffered Dec. 20. Andrei Vasilevskiy had stepped in well at first, going 3-1-1 in his first five after the injury, but lost the next four as Tampa Bay gave up 22 goals in those losses. ... Former Lightning captain Martin St. Louis, who will become the first Tampa Bay player to have his jersey retired Friday night, drew big cheers as the guest for the ceremonial puck drop before the game. ... Tampa Bay played without RW Ryan Callahan, who missed a second straight game with a lower-body injury. ... C Gabriel Dumont, who played in 18 games over four seasons with Montreal, made his Tampa Bay debut after being called up from AHL Syracuse. ... D Luke Witkowski was a healthy scratch. ... The Sabres played without G Robin Lehner, who is battling illness, and D Josh Gorges, who missed a third straight game with a hip injury

Lightning Top Sabres 4-2

WGR 550

January 12, 2017

Ondrej Palat's two goals and Ben Bishop's 24 saves helped the Lightning beat the Sabres on Thursday 4-2.

Scoring

- Buffalo struck first on Matt Moulson's 9th, a wrist shot that sailed over Bishop's shoulder less than three minutes into the game.
- The first of Ondrej Palat's two goals came a short time later during a 5-on-3 power play. Palat scored again at 5:18 of the 2nd period, firing a giant rebound by Anders Nilsson for the 2-1 lead.
- Nikita Kucherov made it 3-1 later in the period with his 17th. Left alone by the side of the net, Kucherov wristed a shot over Nilsson's glove.

Game Notes

- Moulson's goal marked his first in 12 games.
- Rasmus Ristolainen was on the ice for all three Tampa Bay goals.
- Kane now has three goals in his last five games and is one shy of team leader Kyle Okposo (12). His first goal of the season came on December 3.

1st Period

Goals

2:58 - BUF - Matt Moulson (9) (Zemgus Girgensons, Taylor Fedun)

5:37 - TB - Ondrej Palat (8) (PPG) (Jonathan Drouin, Tyler Johnson)

Penalties

3:54 - BUF - Kyle Okposo (2 min., slashing)

5:12 - BUF - Evander Kane (2 min., hooking)

11:08 - TB - Alex Killorn (2 min., slashing)

2nd Period

Goals

5:18 - TB - Ondrej Palat (9) (Vladislav Namestnikov, Nikita Nesterov)

12:58 - TB - Nikita Kucherov (17) (Ondrej Palat, Victor Hedman)

Penalties

13:20 - TB - Ben Bishop (2 min., high sticking, served by Matthew Peca)

20:00 - TB - Victor Hedman (5 min., fighting)

20:00 - BUF - Marcus Foligno (5 min., fighting)

3rd Period

Goals

10:30 - BUF - Evander Kane (11) (Jack Eichel, Justin Falk)

Penalties

0:44 - TB - Nikita Kucherov (2 min., slashing)

10:41 - TB - Ben Bishop (2 min., delay of game)

15:27 - TB - Cedric Paquette (5 min., fighting)

15:27 - BUF - Marcus Foligno (5 min., fighting)

15:27 - BUF - Brian Gionta (2 min., roughing)

17:43 - BUF - Evander Kane (2 min., high sticking)

17:43 - BUF - Evander Kane (2 min., unsportsmanlike conduct)

17:43 - BUF - Evander Kane (10 min. misconduct)

Goaltending

BUF - Anders Nilsson (25 saves, 28 shots)

TB - Ben Bishop (24 saves, 26 shots)

Power Plays

BUF - 0 of 4

TB - 2 of 5

From The Locker Room: Sabres-Lightning

WGR 550

January 12, 2017

Evander Kane scored a goal on Thursday, but also took two questionable penalties. Read Kane's thoughts on the calls against him, plus quotes from Brian Gionta.

Evander Kane

"Tough 1st period in a lot of ways. We got a good goal to get the lead and then we got put on the PK there on some questionable, I would say, calls. Gave up the 5-on-3 goal which is tough to kill at any time."

"I'm very aware I lifted his stick. It was very clear. Like I said, tough call. Tough to kill off a 5-on-3 when that stuff happens. Lot of game left after that though."

"I've only played eight years in the league, but I'm pretty sure on a follow-through it doesn't matter if you high stick a player or the goalie, especially when the goalie's on his knees. Your stick comes up and it gets lifted by their defenseman. Like I said, I was a little confused."

Brian Gionta

"I'm not sure what it is. They're big games for us and we keep coming out tentative. Whether it's nerves or we're just overthinking things instead of just playing, we gotta find a way to get ourselves ready for these big games."

"Same trend...we had a tough two periods to start the game. We turned it up in the third and it's just too late. We can't keep relying on that. We gotta come out more desperate early on."

5 Observations: Lightning storm past Sabres 4-2

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 12, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres had a chance to do something they hadn't done since 2012 on Thursday -- earn a point in five straight games. The Tampa Bay Lightning spoiled Buffalo's efforts, knocking off the Sabres 4-2.

Five observations from Thursday's loss:

This line isn't fetch, stop trying to make it a thing

I hate that Jack Eichel spent a big chunk of Thursday's game centering a line with Brian Gionta and Marcus Foligno. Yes, Sam Reinhart and others were shuffled into the mix, but the Sabres need a new combination.

Don't get me wrong, I've liked Gionta and Foligno this year -- but they shouldn't be on a line with the most talented player on the team. I understand that injuries require Reinhart to play center -- but something needs to change.

How is the teams most talented player supposed to thrive without upper tier talent on the wing? The good news - Sabres head coach Dan Bylsma shuffles his lines like crazy, so maybe this combination will be split up sooner rather than later. It should be noted that Eichel wasn't on a line with Gionta and Foligno in the third period.

Possible solution

I don't hate the idea of a Foligno-Girgensons-Foligno line. In the third period, this trio looked good and created some solid pressure. If this combination shows some chemistry than the Sabres can move Reinhart onto a full-time line with Jack Eichel and Evander Kane. The latter trio also had a fantastic third period and generated a lot of pressure, nearly tying the game multiple times.

Bishop's back

The Buffalo Sabres just can't figure out how to beat Ben Bishop. To be fair, most other teams can't either. In the last four seasons, Bishop has 121 wins -- the third most during that span leaguewide. Unfortunately for the Sabres, Bishop returned to the lineup on Thursday after missing Tampa Bay's last ten games.

As expected Bishop was dynamite in his return. There's a reason he's one of the best goaltenders in the league. Bishop is now an incredible 10-0-1 against the Sabres in his career.

Side note, how brutal was that high-sticking call on Evander Kane at the end of the game. Maybe you didn't know, but Bishop is also apparently an award winning actor.

Sabres didn't do themselves any favors early on

You know how you beat an elite goaltender like Ben Bishop? You pepper him with an absurd amount of shots and hope for a weird bounce or a rebound.

The Sabres didn't do that in the first two periods-- finishing with only 15 shots after the first 40 minutes. Of those 15 shots, only a few of them were quality scoring chances.

In the third period the Sabres adopted the get everything to the net philosophy, and oh look at that, it was their best period of the game.

***air quote* Power *air quote* play**

The Buffalo Sabres had several chances to get back into Thursday's game but just couldn't take advantage of Tampa Bay penalties.

The Sabres finished the evening 0-for-4 on the power play and failed to really get much of anything going with the man advantage.

Buffalo had a golden chance to tie the game in the third period when Bishop took a delay of game penalty but instead surrendered multiple Lightning odd-man rushes. Buffalo has had one of the better power plays in the league this season, but they've also been incredibly streaky and on Thursday they struggled.

Midseason Buffalo Sabres Report Card

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 12, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - After Thursday's matchup with the Tampa Bay Lightning, the Buffalo Sabres will officially be halfway through their 2016-2017 season campaign. Time flies, doesn't it? The first 40 games have been filled with ups, downs, and injuries, but who have been the Sabres top performers thus far?

Only players with more than 10 games played will be graded

Honor roll:

G - Anders Nilsson -- Grade: A

Nilsson has been very impressive in the Sabres first 40 games, sporting a 7-3-4 record with a 2.37 goals against average and .930 save percentage. Remember, before the season Nilsson was expected to be just another run of the mill backup goaltender.

Early on he's proven to be far more valuable, and some, including myself, have argued that he deserves more games. I won't go as far as saying that Nilsson needs to be the Sabres starting net-minder, but I think a 50/50 split is fair until Nilsson cools off -- but who knows, maybe that never happens.

No, this doesn't mean that Nilsson is the Sabres best or most valuable player, it just means he's performing better than I think anyone anticipated.

D - Rasmus Ristolainen -- Grade A-

Sometimes we forget that Ristolainen is still only 22-years-old. He's cooled off a bit as of late but has some of the most impressive numbers for a Sabres defenseman in a long time. In 40 games Ristolainen has *27* points (3G, 24A) and a -2 plus/minus.

For some perspective -- only Brent Burns (44), Victor Hedman (37), Erik Karlsson (32), Duncan Keith (31) and Shea Weber (28) have more points than Ristolainen. You'll notice that three of the players ahead of Ristolainen are also in the Atlantic Division, which is the only reason I think Buffalo's young blue-liner isn't an all-star this season.

Ristolainen still needs to clean up his game in the defensive zone, but he's exceeding expectations and proving that he can be a defenseman a team can build around.

Norristolainen.

RW - Kyle Okposo -- A-

"Okposo only put up good numbers because he played with John Tavares in New York," -- every troll on July 1st.

Oh really?

2013- 69 points (nice)

2014- 51 points

2015- 64 points

2016 (so far) - 27 points, on pace for 57

Like Ristolainen, Okposo has cooled off a bit lately but leads the Sabres in both points and goals (12). He's played very well for most of the season in a brand new system with new players and is proving, at least to me, that he was worth the seven-year contract he signed in the off-season, at least now. Kudos to Okposo on his first all-star game, well deserved.

C -- Ryan O'Reilly -- A-

He's battled injuries early in the season, but it's very apparent that Ryan O'Reilly is one of the Sabres most important players. In only 30 games he has 24 points (8G, 16A) and an impressive +4 plus/minus rating. It says a lot that he's almost averaged a point per game when he's been in the lineup -- but what's more impressive is how he makes the other players on the ice better.

I know that this isn't a super fair way of looking at things (deal with it) but at his current pace in an 82 game season, O'Reilly would be on pace for 66 points with 22 goals and 44 assists. I know he hasn't scored as many goals as you'd probably like, but I have a feeling that'll change in the second half of the season.

C -- Jack Eichel -- B+

I can't think of a more crushing way to start a season than the high-ankle sprain Eichel suffered the day before the Sabres first game. Since returning, Eichel has been the Sabres most explosive player and has 14 points (8G, 6A) in 19 games played (61 point pace over an 82-game season).

With Eichel in the lineup, the Sabres are 9-6-4, compared to a 6-10-5 record without the 20-year-old. Who says one player can't make a difference?

Merit Roll:

C/RW -- Sam Reinhart -- B+

Same grade as his roommate, but Reinhart finds himself on the Merit Roll because of his slow start to the season. That being said, Reinhart is on a tear with 12 points in Buffalo's last ten games.

In 40 games played Reinhart is tied for the Sabres lead in points with 27 (9G, 18A). Assuming he stays healthy, Reinhart is on pace to finish the year with 55 points (19G, 37A) -- not bad when you consider his slow start. Sure, Reinhart's goal production has been down, but I think he'll pick up his pace during the second half of the season. For reference, Reinhart had 42 points last season, so he's definitely made progress.

D - Jake McCabe -- B+

In 40 games McCabe only has eight points, but he's not a player who will light up the scoreboard. McCabe makes up half of the Sabres best pairing with Ristolainen and has been very consistent for the blue and gold.

It's also important to Remember that McCabe is still only 23-years-old. With McCabe and Ristolainen the Sabres have two defensemen they can build around moving forward.

LW -- Evander Kane -- B

When the Sabres traded for Kane general manager Tim Murray hoped he would flirt with 30 goals like he did in 2011-2012. He's only scored 10 goals this season -- but he's accomplished that in 29 games. Kane, like so many others, has missed a large chunk of time (11 games) with an injury he suffered in Buffalo's first game of the season.

The 25-year-old winger returned from injury and had a very hard time finding the back of the net -- but has picked things up drastically with 10 goals in the Sabres last 17 games. Even with his cold start, Kane would be on pace for 29 goals if he played an 82-game season. Kane's biggest bugaboo is his struggles in the defensive zone,

and while at times he looks fine, he needs to improve without the puck. I'm not a big plus/minus guy, but Kane's -9 plus/minus rating is pretty bad.

LW -- Marcus Foligno -- B

In the off-season, Foligno signed a one-year 'prove it' deal with the club and has put together one of his best seasons with the Sabres. In 40 games Foligno has 15 points (7G, 8A) and is one pace to demolish his point total from last year.

Barring a rough second half or injury, Foligno should set a career best point total in 2016-2017. He's solid at both ends of the ice and is a player I think the Sabres should bring back next season.

G -- Robin Lehner -- B

Robin Lehner has been a solid goaltender for the Sabres this season. Of all the Sabres problems, goaltending *usually* hasn't been one of them.

Lehner has a 9-12-5 record, and while that's not great, his .921 save percentage is a better indicator of how he's played in his 27 games.

Shootouts have been Lehner's biggest problem (no kidding), but I'd expect him to improve once he finally is on the winning end. Don't fool yourselves, hockey can be mentally tough, too.

RW -- Brian Gionta -- B

In 2015-2016 Brian Gionta had only 12 goals in 79 games played. This year the Sabres captain has eight goals in only 40 games. Barring a late collapse, Gionta will surpass last season's goal total -- but he's cooled off significantly and only has one goal in Buffalo's last 12 games.

I like Gionta as a depth player and wouldn't be surprised if the Sabres brought him back for a more years after this season, assuming the 37-year-old doesn't retire.

D -- Taylor Fedun -- B

I'll be real with you -- before the regular season, I didn't know much at all about Taylor Fedun. That being said, I've been very impressed with the defensemen in his 12 games with the Sabres this season. In those 12 games, he has five points (all assists) but has also been solid in his own end.

I know that eventually players like Josh Gorges and Dmitry Kulikov will return to the lineup, but when they come back I'd like to see Fedun stay in Buffalo. He provides an offensive spark and can quarterback the Sabres second power play unit.

Nice start for Mr. Fedun.

LW -- Matt Moulson -- B-

In 40 games Matt Moulson has already matched his goal total from last season (8). That being said, Moulson has cooled off more than any player on the Sabres roster and only has two goals since November 21, with none in Buffalo's last 11 games.

Yes, he's having a better season, but he's starting to look more like the player we saw last season compared to the guy who started the season so hot.

LW -- William Carrier -- B-

Speed kills and Carrier is without question one of the Sabres quickest skaters. Carrier has played in 26 games this season (doesn't seem like that many) and has four points (2G, 2A).

Even with the lack of point production I've liked Carrier and think he gives the Sabres a spark. He's clearly doing something right, there's a reason he's remained in Buffalo for so long. Are there players I'd rather see in the lineup than Carrier? Yes, but right now he's one of their better options.

Needs improvement:

D -- Zach Bogosian -- C+

Bogosian has missed 20 games this season, but when he has been in the lineup he's looked unimpressive. The 26-year-old defender has made a lot of sloppy plays in the Sabres own end of the ice, some of them leading to easy goals by the opposition.

Despite his slow start, Bogosian is an important player for the Sabres because of his versatility and physicality. I fully expect that he'll have a better second half of the season.

RW -- Zemgus Girgensons -- C+

He's playing better lately but had a terrible start. Like many other players on the roster, Girgensons is on a one-year deal. If he continues to play how he has in the Sabres last ten games then maybe he'll be around next season. If not, his time with the Sabres may be winding down.

D-- Josh Gorges -- C

Gorges takes more criticism than possibly any other member of the team on Twitter dot com. He's had some nice games -- but has also at times struggled. I'm not going to completely write him off like some of you, but he hasn't been as consistent as I expected heading into the year.

D -- Justin Falk -- C-

There's a reason Falk wasn't on the opening night roster. He doesn't make that many mistakes but at the same time, he doesn't bring that much to the table, either. I'd prefer to see Fedun than Falk, but I can understand why the Sabres may prefer the bigger, more experienced defender.

D -- Cody Franson -- C-

Franson's numbers actually aren't that bad -- but he just always seems to be a step behind everyone else on the ice. Franson has more points than every defenseman on the team not named Rasmus, but he also takes a lot of dumb penalties.

D -- Dmitry Kulikov -- D+

This isn't meant to suggest that Kulikov is the worst defensemen on the Sabres roster -- but he's really struggled this season. I had high expectations for Kulikov going into the season, but he's been a big disappointment.

Yes, injuries are a big part of that, but even when he has played he has an abysmal -10 plus/minus rating, the worst on the team, in only 20 games.

LW -- Tyler Ennis -- D+

This is solely based on injuries -- Ennis is a talented player and will provide the Sabres with some much-needed offense when he returns to the lineup. In his 12 games before having surgery Ennis had only two points, but I

have to imagine that Ennis was playing through an injury. I'm excited to see what Ennis can do when he's back in the lineup.

LW -- Nicolas Deslauriers -- D+

He's done exactly what you would've expected him to do in the 19 games he's played this season. He's physical, not intimidated by anyone and virtually invisible in the offensive zone.

Ben Bishop wins return to Lightning

By Corey Long

NHL.com

January 12, 2017

TAMPA -- Ben Bishop made 24 saves for the Tampa Bay Lightning in a 4-2 win against the Buffalo Sabres at Amalie Arena on Thursday.

Bishop was making his first start since injuring his groin on Dec. 20. He missed nine games.

"It felt great, it's nice to get those competitive juices going in front of these fans," Bishop said. "Obviously two points makes it a lot better."

Bishop is 10-10-2 this season.

"Give Buffalo credit, they pushed in the third and we bent a little but we didn't break," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said. "Bishop had a lot to do with that. The saves he made, the way he played the puck, how many pucks he stopped behind the net, it just helped our defense. It was good to have him back."

Ondrej Palat scored twice and had an assist, and Nikita Kucherov and Anton Stralman scored for the Lightning (20-19-4).

Matt Moulson and Evander Kane scored for the Sabres (16-16-9). Anders Nilsson made 25 saves.

The Sabres took a 1-0 lead at 2:58 of the first period when Moulson converted a 2-on-1 after Taylor Fedun forced a turnover. The goal came on the Sabres' first shot.

"Yeah, it would've been nice to start with a little easier one," Bishop said. "Not much you can do, guy made a pretty good shot. It was kind of a fluky play, bounced a couple of times. I wasn't too worried about it. It was nice to get a couple saves after that."

Palat tied the game 1-1 at 5:37. On a 5-on-3 power play, Tyler Johnson made a cross-ice pass to the slot, where Palat beat Nilsson.

The Lightning took a 2-1 lead at 5:18 of the second period on Palat's second goal. Nikita Nesterov put a shot on goal, and Palat controlled the rebound around the crease.

"On the first goal I had an open net and [Johnson] made a nice play," Palat said. "The second, again, [Nesterov] made a nice play and the puck just found me."

Kucherov gave the Lightning a 3-1 lead at 12:58 when Victor Hedman sent a pass from the point to the slot.

Kane made it 3-2 at 10:30 of the third period when he scored from the hash mark off a cross-ice pass from Jack Eichel after Bishop lost his stick trying to clear the puck out of the crease.

"I thought we started working better in the third period," Kane said. "Being aggressive. Not giving them any breakouts. That's the way we have to play. We can't sit back because they will take it to us."

Stralman scored an empty-net goal with 18 seconds remaining.

"We didn't do a good job accepting their speed and we just couldn't get anything going on our forecheck," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "When we got the puck, we weren't really moving."

Goal of the game

Hedman set up Kucherov's goal in the second period with a diagonal pass through traffic.

Save of the game

Nilsson denied Palat a chance at a hat trick when he stopped the forward on a breakaway at 12:08 of the third period.

Unsung performance of the game

Brian Boyle had an assist and led the Lightning with four hits in his first game since Dec. 31. He also won both of his faceoffs.

Highlight of the game

Bishop made a crucial save on Kane with 5:19 remaining in the game. The Lightning defense tried to clear the puck but it took a bad bounce off the boards. Kane had a clear look in front of the net but Bishop made a chest save on the backhand shot.

They said it

"It's the same trend. We had a tough two periods to start the game. We turned it up in the third [period] and just too late. We can't keep relying on that." -- *Sabres forward Brian Gionta*

"We've got to win. We've got to win games. We want to win every game, but it's a tough league. There's a team on the other end too, but for us it's about playing through our structure and playing to the way that makes us successful. Today was a step in the right direction." -- *Lightning defenseman Victor Hedman*

Need to know

Kucherov scored his 85th goal to pass Rob Zamuner for 10th place on the Lightning's all-time list. ... Bishop is 10-0-1 against the Sabres.

What's next

Sabres: At the Carolina Hurricanes on Friday (7:30 p.m. ET; FS-CR, MSG-B, NHL.TV)

Lightning: Host the Columbus Blue Jackets on Friday (8 p.m. ET; SN, TVA Sports, SUN, FS-O, NHL.TV)

Sabres left questioning calls following loss to Tampa

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

January 12, 2017

TAMPA BAY - In a way, the Tampa Bay Lightning's 4-2 victory over the Buffalo Sabres on Thursday night began as it ended: with the Sabres shorthanded, and Evander Kane serving a penalty he very well might not have deserved.

Kane was in the box for hooking when Ondrej Palat scored a 5-on-3 goal for Tampa Bay 5:37 into the contest, erasing the 1-0 lead Matt Moulson had already earned for the Sabres. Kane called that penalty "questionable," an opinion supported by the video replay.

In the third period, Kane had scored to bring the Sabres within one goal when he was called for his second, third and fourth penalties all at once, this time for a high stick against Lightning goalie Ben Bishop. Kane received two minutes for the high stick and two more for unsportsmanlike conduct in addition to a 10-minute misconduct.

With 2:17 remaining and the Sabres now shorthanded for four minutes, the call effectively ended their comeback chances in what was then a 3-2 game. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma thought Kane's high stick came on the follow through of his shot, another opinion supported by video replay, and one Kane himself echoed when he spoke after the game.

"I've only played eight years in the League but I'm pretty sure on a follow-through it doesn't matter if you high stick a player or the goalie, especially when the goalies on his knees, your stick comes up and I guess is lifted by one of their defensemen," Kane said. "I guess I was a little confused."

Those controversial calls seemed to bookend the loss for the Sabres, but they weren't the only reason Buffalo saw its four-game point streak snapped on Thursday. After coming out of the first period with a 1-1 tie, the Sabres allowed two goals in the second, one to Palat on a rebound off the pad of Anders Nilsson and another on a 3-on-2 rush play that saw Tampa Bay's two All-Stars, Victor Hedman and Nikita Kucherov., connect.

"Their transition game, their speed in the second period was really evident," Bylsma said. "They capitalize on us on a forecheck where we gave it to the goalie and then they turned it into a 3-on-2 back the other way, Hedman jumps up and that was the type of game we expected them to play."

"We weren't moving our feet," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "We weren't doing a good job accepting their speed and we couldn't conversely get anything going on our forecheck. When we got the puck we weren't moving, supporting each other, but we just could never get our feet moving."

The game followed a familiar narrative, one in which the Sabres struggled to the point of desperation before they finally flipped the switch. You could see the tides turning even prior to Kane's goal in the third period, when Jack Eichel and Marcus Foligno produced two of Buffalo's best scoring chances.

It was Eichel who fed Kane in the slot for his 11th goal of the season with 9:30 remaining, putting Kane one goal shy of the team lead.

"I think we made a few line adjustments and I thought we started working better in the third period," Kane said. "That's what we have to do, that goal starts from both D pinching down the walls, not giving them easy breakouts, being aggressive, making an aggressive mistake if you're going to make one. We need to do that throughout the whole game, not just when we get down. It's a mindset and the way we have to play."

While the Sabres may have been right to be unhappy with the penalties that were called against them, they squandered their own power-play opportunities at pivotal moments of the game. The Sabres were 0-for-4 with the extra man, including one opportunity in the opening minute of the third period and another that came when Bishop was called for a delay of game just 11 seconds after Kane scored.

"We struggled getting it into the zone," Gionta said. "When we did we had some good chances, some good looks. We just didn't capitalize."

A regulation win would have pushed the Sabres past the Lightning in the Atlantic Division standings; instead they now trail by three points, and wins for Ottawa and Philadelphia did them no favors either. In the end, it was that missed opportunity that left the Sabres more upset than anything.

"That's the biggest disappointment of the game," Bylsma said. "We've won some games recently and gathered some points, we have a chance to pass a team in the standings tonight and miss that opportunity. That's something we're going to have to put behind us here pretty immediately and get to the task of playing Carolina tomorrow."

Moulson notches his ninth

The Sabres certainly got the start they wanted when Taylor Fedun, Zemgus Girgensons and Moulson connected for the game's first goal just 2:58 into the contest. Fedun lofted a high-arching pass from the defensive zone, freeing Girgensons and Moulson on a 2-on-1 break. Girgensons, with one hand on his stick, made a perfect feed across to Moulson, who roofed his ninth goal of the season.

"I don't think Zemgus knew where I was," Moulson said. "I was kind of yelling at him telling him I was right in front him."

Up next

The Sabres will conclude their back-to-back road set with a game against the Carolina Hurricanes at PNC Arena on Friday night. It will be the third of three matchups between the two teams, with Carolina having come out as the winner in both of the first two.

Coverage on Friday begins at 7 p.m. with the Tops Pregame Show on MSG-B, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops between the Sabres and Hurricanes at 7:30.