



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Lehner takes responsibility for Tuesday's "half-Hollywood movie"

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

January 19, 2017

Here's the scene:

Robin Lehner allows three goals to the Toronto Maple Leafs in a 10-minute span in the second period, giving up the lead the Buffalo Sabres worked so hard to build in the first period. Coach Dan Bylsma pulls Lehner, who skates to the bench, angry and frustrated, spiking his helmet before taking a seat.

Cut back to video of Lehner earlier in the game, skating to the bench during a timeout. He sees a woman making a FaceTime phone call with her son and he waves.

Unleash social media fury.

Thursday afternoon, Lehner addressed the sequence of events that happened Tuesday night in the Sabres 4-3 loss to the Leafs in the Air Canada Centre.

The goaltender takes responsibility for his actions, which were a bit too aggressive in a public venue. But he also notes that since it all happened in Toronto, it was bound to blow up into a big deal.

"We all know that and it's fine," Lehner said when asked if the buzz was because it happened in the hockey media fishbowl of Toronto.

"I take responsibility. I don't want to do the whole sequence of things that they built up to the little half-Hollywood movie that they clipped together. I understand where it's coming from. It's all entertainment to them but it's a real-life reaction for me and I accept the responsibility of it."

The first thing to hit the social media airwaves were images of Lehner looking angrily at the Sabres bench then slamming his helmet. Toronto media reported he was yelling at Bylsma.

This is how the incident played out for Lehner:

"I got mad and yeah, I let in three goals in 10 minutes. Our team didn't play the way we wanted," Lehner said. "I let in a bad one. I wanted to stay in. I'm a competitive guy and you know I come over to the bench and people are putting up like I'm staring my coach down and this and that.

"I get mad. ... I didn't have a hallway to go down. I had a bench to go and sit on. I asked my coach why. And he responded, 'We needed a change.' It happens but you look through the Toronto clip of things and commentators don't know what they're talking about. I understand. They're saying I'm taking selfies. I mean that's not a selfie. I guess when you get older you don't really keep up with the social media thing and it's all good. I'll take the responsibility. People can think what they want. You know what, I am who I am."

Ah yes, the selfies. It wasn't a selfie, but a wave to fan sitting next to the Sabres bench who was FaceTiming her son. Turns out it was Naomi Parness, a former reporter for CTV News in Toronto who later tweeted she was talking with her son who was home sick.

Lehner said of that clip: "It's this mom with a 5-year-old kid waving in his pajamas all happy and you know what, I'm going to wave back."

"I accept the fact that it looks bad but it doesn't affect my game," Lehner said.

Lehner also said he and Bylsma talked afterward about the decision to pull him out of Tuesday's game in Toronto.

"He said what he thinks and I totally respect everything he thinks. He's our coach," Lehner said. "I don't want to portray this organization like that. Again, the team needs something else. I'm not helping the team by showing my emotions and I've got to learn from it ... but at the end of the day I represent this organization, which I really like and put a lot of time and a lot of effort into this team, and I really like this team.

"I'll make adjustments but at the same time it's hypocritical to apologize for who you are. I'm a competitive guy who doesn't want to get out of the net. I don't want to leave the net. I want to sink with the ship or be able to stand in there and come back."

It was the first time this season Bylsma pulled the goaltender for performance. The game was Lehner's 29th start. He has a 10-12-5 record, after getting a no-decision Tuesday, with a 2.54 goals-against average and a .920 save percentage.

"I don't know of any goalie that likes to get pulled," Bylsma said Thursday afternoon. "It's part of playing the position but it's not something any goalie likes to have happen. And Robin wasn't happy. He and I have talked about it. We're moving forward."

Sabres Notebook: Ennis expected back, Ullmark with new mask

By Amy Moritz
The Buffalo News
January 19, 2017

It was some time before Tyler Ennis could talk with the media after practice in KeyBank Center late Thursday morning.

The forward was in the training room getting treatment. And more treatment. And a little more after that.

Returning from his sports hernia/groin surgery has been a long process. It requires patience and precaution. That's why Ennis, who returned on Monday after missing 30 games, was scratched on Tuesday in Toronto.

"It's a complex area. There's a lot going on down there," Ennis said. "Optimistically I wanted to play every game here on out but you know, like I said it's complex down there. I've just got to make sure I'm able to do what I can out there, that I'm able to play how I can out there so I'm going to stay getting treatment. It takes a lot of time and it's a lot of work.

"It's a horrible feeling because all I want to do is play. It's frustrating just being out and everything that goes along with it. The worst is feeling you're letting people down, letting the team down and all I want to do is get back."

Coach Dan Bylsma expects Ennis back in the lineup Friday when the Sabres host Detroit in KeyBank Center. It's a good chance he will play again Saturday in Montreal. Bylsma said he anticipated Ennis not being ready for back-to-back games earlier this week.

"It's more likely that he'll play this back-to-back than the first one," Bylsma said. "I kind of anticipated the first one but planning right now for him to play the Detroit game and hopefully he can go forward with Montreal."

Linus Ullmark was back with the Sabres Thursday, recalled from Rochester after Anders Nilsson came down with illness.

Ullmark sported his new goalie mask. Gone are the movie-inspired Minions. They're replaced by a tribute to Swedish goalies Stefan Liv and Pelle Lindbergh. Liv died at the age of 30 when the plane he was on with his Kontinental Hockey League team crashed on Sept. 7, 2011. Lindbergh died at age 26 after he crashed his car on Nov. 10, 1985 in Somerdale, N.J.

"First of all I wanted to pay tribute to these fallen heroes," Ullmark said. "They put Sweden on the map for goalies and for the hockey community. Especially Pelle was the first European goalie to win the Vezina and then you have Stefan, who was one of the best guys off the ice, on the ice and also when it comes to winning, especially those tight games. Once the playoff started, he was a monster.

"They both passed away too soon. It echoed through the whole Swedish community when both these guys lost their lives. ... For me, they've been persons I've looked up to very much. I want to become the kind of persons they were."

Bylsma was unsure if Nilsson would be able to dress for Friday's game against Detroit.

"Don't know that for sure just yet," said Byslma, who added he got a text after the team returned from Toronto that Nilsson was sick. "He's gone through a cycle so to speak yesterday and he has kept some food down today but not so it's too early to tell whether he'll be available."

Bylsma also said that Josh Gorges was seeing the doctor on Thursday and getting an MRI for a hip injury that has caused him to miss the last six games. He noted that Dmitry Kulikov was skating on his own and added some physical contact to his sessions. Kulikov has missed 10 games with a lower back injury.

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It was an unusual atmosphere at the Sabres practice Thursday morning as more than 2,500 local students were in the KeyBank Center lower bowl to watch the 40 minute-long practice.

The students are part of the NHL and NHLPA Future Goals program that focuses on using hockey to teach science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). On Thursday they heard from former NHL players Kevyn Adams and Marty Biron, broadcaster Brian Duff, equipment manager Dave Williams and director of game presentation Kelsey Schneider as they talked about how hockey teaches fundamental STEM concepts.

The Future Goals program, launched in 2014, consists of more than 6,500 students from 96 schools in Western New York. The free program is open to middle schools and teachers can learn more by contacting Katie O'Donnell kodonnell@everfi.com.

Sabres' Evander Kane one of NHL's hottest scorers

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 19, 2017

BUFFALO – Looking back, Sabres winger Evander Kane acknowledges that, yes, he probably rushed back to the lineup after breaking four ribs opening night.

Following an 11-game absence over three weeks, Kane returned and generated almost nothing. Seven weeks ago, he was one of the NHL's biggest disappointments, still goalless in 12 appearances as the calendar turned to December.

But these days, Kane is scorching, having scored 12 times in the last 21 games entering tonight's tilt against the Detroit Red Wings at KeyBank Center.

Over 82 games, that's a 47 goal-pace.

Since getting his first Dec. 3, Kane, 25, is tied for third in the NHL in goals over that span. A team-high 11 scores have come at even strength.

"I felt I could play and was able to," Kane said Thursday about returning so quickly. "I think it just took me a little longer to get back to feeling 100 percent confident with my body and kind of get back in the groove of things a little bit."

The eight-year veteran found that groove without the benefit of consistent action beside top centers Jack Eichel and Ryan O'Reilly. Sabres coach Dan Bylsma usually plays Kane on the third line and the second power-play unit.

"I haven't really played with Jack at all," Kane said. "I haven't really played with O'Reilly at all."

That means Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson and Sam Reinhart have all pivoted Kane recently. He played with Girgensons and captain Brian Gionta in Tuesday's 4-3 loss in Toronto, scoring Buffalo's second goal on a one-timer.

"I guess I've been a bit of a rover for Dan," Kane said. "I guess I just kind of come to the rink and see where I am in the lineup and try to make the most of that opportunity."

So does Kane care who he plays with?

"Of course you do," he said. "But at the end of the day, it's not your decision. I just come with the attitude, whoever the coach puts you with, that's what I'm getting. You want to make the most of that opportunity. Maybe if I got some more, I'd be able to do more."

Is Kane, who averages 18 minutes, 42 seconds of ice time a game, saying he wants to play more?

"It's not more ice time, different things," he said. "It's all about the opportunity you get. I think I've been doing a pretty good job of making the most of it. I think I feel I can do more."

He added: "I could score more than I am, produce more. That's kind of my role. That's the way I look at my role. That's not going to change in my mind."

While Bylsma often talks about his "top six," he said Thursday the coaching staff doesn't label lines.

"With Zemgus now and when it was Lars earlier, it's a good hockey line," Bylsma said. "That's where he's gotten a lot of his scoring from. He gets opportunities to play with different guys at different times, depending on the game and the situation."

Kane scored 20 goals in 65 games last season, his first with the Sabres. His penchant for shooting the puck – he often lets it loose from anywhere in the zone – is well-known.

But Kane has started getting inside more frequently this season. Not surprisingly, a chunk of his goals have come around the net.

"You see where he's effective and a good hockey player with his speed shooting the puck," Bylsma said. "But I think he's equaled his total number of goals that he got last year on the inside."

Kane's shooting percentage is 11.8 percent, up from 7.4 percent a year ago.

"You got to try to be multi-faceted with how you score," Kane said.

It was difficult to score any kind of goal coming off the broken ribs.

"It was weird ... I could play, 100 percent," Kane said. "I'm not making any excuses about that. But I think it's more of a mental thing, too. Coming off of an injury like that, you're going to be sore no matter what. ... It took some time to get back into the rhythm of things, especially when the puck's not going in the net for you right away, that makes it a little bit more difficult.

"I think after I got the first one out of the way, I started feeling better."

Sabres goalie Robin Lehner defends wave: 'I don't care what anyone thinks'

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 19, 2017

BUFFALO – Before Robin Lehner threw a fit after getting yanked from Tuesday's 4-3 loss in Toronto, the fiery Sabres goalie skated to bench during a break and waved to a child whose mother was sitting in the first row and face-timing with her son at home.

Not long after that, Lehner was back at the bench erupting after allowing three goals in less than 10 minutes.

Some, of course, will say Lehner's wave as he took a swig of water illustrates a lack of focus and trace it to the Maple Leafs' goal bonanza, which included a weak score that went in under his right arm.

Lehner bristled at that reaction today following practice.

"I understand how it looks," Lehner said inside KeyBank Center. "People that know me, I go up, I'm going to have a drink. It's a mom with a 5-year-old kid waving in his pajamas. You know what? I'm going to wave back. I don't care what anyone thinks. ...

"I have this thing around me and I accept that fact. I accept that fact that it looks bad but it doesn't affect my game. People that know me know that I'm a calm, relaxed goalie. That's why I have a bad goal and bounce back. That's why I can play through these things better mentally than that."

Naturally, Lehner's antics spread on social media and television. The setting, Toronto, certainly played a role in that. The Swede also yelled at his bench as he skated off the ice and threw off his mask and glove.

Lehner called the highlights a "half-Hollywood movie."

"I understand what it's coming from, it's all entertainment to them, but it's a real-life reaction from me, and I accept the responsibility of it," he said. "I got mad. I let in three goals in 10 minutes."

He added: "I'll make adjustments. But at the same time, it's hypocritical to apologize for who you are. I'm a competitive guy that doesn't want to get out of the net. I don't want to get out of the net. I want to sink with the ship or be able to stand in there and come back."

Lehner understands he has "a history of maybe being short-fused."

"You know what? I can't change it," he said. "I will do things differently. I didn't have a hallway to go down. I had a bench to go and sit on. I asked my coach why and he responded we needed a change."

Lehner took exception to some television analysts saying he posed for a selfie.

"Commentators don't know that they're talking about," he said. "They're saying I'm taking selfies. That's not a selfie. I guess as you get older you don't really keep up with the social media thing. That's all good. I'll take the responsibility. They can think what they want. You know what? I am who I am."

Lehner said he has spoken to Sabres coach Dan Bylsma.

"He said what he thinks and I respect everything he thinks," he said. "I don't want to portray this organization like that. But again, social media. The team needs something else. I'm not helping the team by showing my emotions. I got to learn from it."

Bylsma said he and Lehner "talked about it."

"We're moving forward," he said.

In other news, the Sabres recalled goalie Linus Ullmark this morning because backup Anders Nilsson is sick, Bylsma said.

Winger Tyler Ennis also practiced today after resting his groin injury Tuesday. Bylsma said Ennis, who returned from a 30-game absence Monday, will play Friday against Detroit and could play Saturday in Montreal.

"It's more likely he'll play this back-to-back," Bylsma said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Josh Gorges (hip) is seeing a doctor today and defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (back) is skating on his own, Bylsma said.

The Sabres at Midseason

By Andrew Kulyk and Peter Farrell

Artvoice

January 19, 2017

They are a lottery team, not a playoff contender

That was a nice head fake wasn't it? Got our hearts beating just a bit. The Buffalo Sabres, left for dead, and dead last in the eastern conference just two weeks ago, now had to face the powerhouse New York Rangers and then the Chicago Blackhawks on the road. They went into both those buildings and put on their best performances of the season, demolishing the Rangers, and then almost beating the Hawks before losing in overtime. And that only happened thanks to Patrick Kane, being, well... Patrick Kane.

From there the team put together a mini-winning streak, taking 7 of 8 points, and just like that were within five points of the coveted eighth and final playoff spot, albeit in tight contention with several other teams. Felt good, you say? It all came crashing down with two soul crushing losses in Tampa Bay and Carolina, teams the Sabres have to leap frog over if they have any chance to see the post season.

Time for Artvoice to hand out the mid-season grades, and a sneak peek at what may happen as the Sabres head to the meat of the schedule and the most exciting part of the season.

OFFENSE: D

The team isn't scoring. With under 100 goals at the mid point, that ranks them 27th in the league, and they are on pace to match those horrible seasons when the team was (allegedly) deliberately looking to finish dead last in order to land those coveted top draft picks.

Granted, the team was without team leader Jack Eichel for much of the first half of the season. Ryan O'Reilly has lost time, his most recent sideline due to appendicitis. But Eichel's return has definitely turned the team's fortunes around.

Kyle Okposo has been a solid and productive free agent signing, and his offensive output is on pace with his performance as a New York Islander. His being named to the NHL All Star team is well deserved. The troubled Evander Kane has shown flashes of brilliance and could be a terror on the ice given what night he is playing. The disappointments are many... Tyler Ennis has been sidelined with injury and has but two points on the season. Sam Reinhart, and remember, he was a first draft choice and second overall pick during the Sabres' tank, was painful to watch early on in the season, but has been brilliant of late.

Throw Marcus Foligno, Zemgus Girgensens, Brian Gionta and Matt Moulson into the veteran category of players who are simply underachieving. Girgensens has executed well under former coach Ted Nolan, but his play has fallen off significantly.

DEFENSE: C-

Rasmus Ristolainen has some work to do to become an all around defenseman, but remember he is still very young and even then, he has shown some dazzling playmaking skills and will certainly be a future All Star. Paired up with Jake McCabe, they make a great blue line tandem.

It goes downhill from there. Dmitry Kulikov is a bust. He is dead last on the team in the plus/minus category (Note to GMs everywhere: avoid Russians). Zack Bogosian is big and strong and physical, but makes stupid decisions which cost the team.

Cody Franson, Justin Falk, William Carrier... all poster boys as to why the team desperately needs upgrades on defense. A pleasant surprise amongst this pack has been Taylor Fedun, an off season free agent acquisition who has stepped up nicely.

GOALTENDING: B

Robin Lehner came into training camp healthy, buffed, leaner and more focused. Anders Nilsson won the backup job. But it has been Nilsson who has stolen the show, giving coach Dan Bylsma two great options in net.

Bylsma's biggest dilemma is that the expectations are to play Lehner long and hard, with Nilsson serving in more of a spot role. That hasn't happened, and both have pretty much shared the net equally. Demerit goes for Lehner's dismal performance in shootouts. When's the last time a shootout was fun to watch for Sabres fans? Now it brings on foreboding and dread.

SPECIAL TEAMS: D

The Sabres are dead last in penalty kills. That's right. Only 74.2% in successfully killing off shorthanded situations, while amassing 377 penalty minutes this season, putting them in 9th place in the league in that dubious category.

While the power play has had its fits and starts, the team is currently in 10th place in that category. Better production from the point and the ability to carry control of the front of the net is key to making that number even better. Again, Rasmus Ristolainen and Jack Eichel are the guys to lead the charge.

Why this team is so abysmal in shootouts is somewhat of a mystery. The Sabres have now lost 9 games via overtime or shootouts, leaving on the table important points which will most likely come back to haunt them.

COACHING: incomplete

Every time the Sabres' head fake goes into another losing streak, followers of the team start questioning the coach and his "system". Dan Bylsma is no Lindy Ruff or Ted Nolan when it comes to personality. He's more like a Ron Rolston. But offering quips at postgame press conferences does not make for a brilliant coach.

Bylsma has done better at mastering the overtime three on three, and the power play also seems to be getting better. But getting overall production on all levels from this team still proves elusive. Perhaps it just has to do with lack of talent or depth. But getting the underperformers to do better is what makes a coach worth his salt.

TARO SEZ...

What will it take for the Sabres to have any chance? The month of February will be make or break time for the team. With a schedule chock full of western opponents, the team can afford to take games to overtime and surrender a point without hurting their position in the standings. But a sustained winning streak, not just a head fake, is a must if this team has any chance to jump over the competition in what is a very tight race at the bottom of the Eastern Conference. If it doesn't happen, start planning your watch parties for the NHL lottery show in late April now.

Red Wings ride high into road date with Sabres

The Associated Press

January 19, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Detroit Red Wings are flying high after one of their most memorable victories of the season.

On Wednesday, Detroit overcame a pair of three-goal deficits on their way to a 6-5 shootout win on the road over the Boston Bruins. The victory gave Detroit its third straight win after a difficult stretch to open 2017.

Detroit looks to carry that momentum into Buffalo against the Sabres on Friday.

"When you are down 4-1 after the first, to come back is not easy in this league. So that says a lot about our guys," Detroit coach Jeff Blashill told the Detroit Free Press. "Now, our first was not good. We can't spot teams those kinds of periods. I think our guys know that. We can't see another one of those for a long, long time, like next year."

Left winger Tomas Tatar had a goal and two assists while Thomas Vanek and Frans Nielsen scored in the shootout Wednesday.

"We are finding ways to win," Detroit center Dylan Larkin told the Free Press. "This stretch before the All-Star break is important so we can go in and feel good about ourselves and come back and make a hard push and get into the playoffs."

The victory capped a productive three-game homestand for the Red Wings. Detroit picked up a 1-0 win over Montreal on Monday and a 6-3 triumph over the Pittsburgh Penguins on Saturday.

Henrik Zetterberg and ex-Sabre Vanek are tied for the team lead in points for Detroit with 31 (despite Vanek playing 11 fewer games because of injury). Nielsen is third in points with 25 (nine goals).

In Buffalo, all eyes are on goaltender Robin Lehner after a nightmare of an evening against the Toronto Maple Leafs on Wednesday. Lehner was pulled after allowing three goals in the first 10 minutes of the second period.

Lehner stormed off the ice and was seen yelling at Sabres coach Dan Bylsma. This also came after he posed for a picture for a fan sitting near the Sabres bench earlier in the night, which went viral and drew criticism.

"I take responsibility," Lehner told The Buffalo News. "I don't want to do the whole sequence of things that they built up to the little half-Hollywood movie that they clipped together. I understand where it's coming from. It's all entertainment to them but it's a real-life reaction for me and I accept the responsibility of it."

"I got mad and yeah, I let in three goals in 10 minutes. Our team didn't play the way we wanted. I let in a bad one. I wanted to stay in. I'm a competitive guy."

Lehner is having a solid season with 2.54 goals-against-average and a save percentage of .920.

National media believes Sabres are on the right path

By Brayton J. Wilson

WGR 550

January 19, 2017

Heading into the 2016-17 season, expectations for the Buffalo Sabres were the highest they have been perhaps since the shortened 2013 lockout season. One full season of Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart in place, the emergence of Ryan O'Reilly and Rasmus Ristolainen, and the arrival of Kyle Okposo and Dmitry Kulikov had many excited for what was to come from this season. Perhaps the Sabres could contend for a playoff spot or even clinch a spot in the playoffs for the first time since 2011.

44 games into the season, the Sabres are not sitting too pretty in the standings with a 17-18-9 record and 43 points. Buffalo is second-to-last in the Eastern Conference only ahead of the New York Islanders with 42 points. If the season were to end today, the Sabres would end up with the fifth overall pick in the National Hockey League Entry-Level Draft.

While the team has not been able to put up as much offensive production as expected, the team has a good group of young talent for the future ahead. The reaction locally has been concerning with the state of the team, but some in the national media believe that the Sabres are in good hands.

NHL Network analyst and former New York Rangers general manager Neil Smith joined Mike Schopp and the Bulldog on Wednesday, and he says that frustrated Sabres fans need to take a step back and relax.

"I don't think that Sabres fans should be angry about where they are this year," Smith said. "Maybe disappointed, yes, because you always want to think you're on the cusp of making the playoffs or right there fighting until the end. As far as the organizational development goes, as far as where they have come from, where they are now and where they are heading, I think they're in real good shape."

The Sabres have had their issues with injuries to some key players, including a 21-game absence from Eichel with a high ankle sprain. Buffalo has also hit ruts with inconsistency from their offense and defense that has led to the loss of crucial points in the standings.

While this season may be slipping through the cracks for the Sabres, Smith believes the future of the organization is looking up.

"I'm very optimistic in the future for the Sabres," Smith said. "I don't think they're going to make the playoffs this year, but I am optimistic about their future. I think Dan Bylsma is a real good coach. I think they're doing a very good job of rebuilding the club there. When you get a player like Jack Eichel that you can build around... if you can have that one guy you can identify that this is guy you can build around, you've got such an advantage over teams that can never get a guy like that. They stay in the middle of the pack for a decade and can never come up with a guy like Eichel."

Another former general manager sees the Sabres in a very similar fashion to that of Smith is TSN's Craig Button. Like Smith, Button is very optimistic about the future of the Sabres organization.

"When you start to look at their team and you start to think about some of the good, young players they have... this is still a team that's still in transition," Button said with Andrew Peters and Craig Rivet on The Instigators on Thursday. "The youngsters player are getting better with time, and they're going to get better and try to fill in around them."

Button has followed the Sabres ever since the start of the tank years where they finished dead last in the NHL in the 2013-14 and 2014-15 seasons. He has seen how much the organization has changed from the top on down, and has seen the growth of this team from the players on the ice to management upstairs.

"I don't think this is the Buffalo Sabres of a few years ago. I don't even think this is the Buffalo Sabres of a year ago," Button said. "I think that they had a set back with [the injury to] Jack Eichel, they're still maturing

individually, and they're still maturing as a group. I think there's every reason to be optimistic with that... I think the Buffalo Sabres are in a good spot and they're going to continue to improve."

Sabres' Lehner reflects on his difficult night in Toronto

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 19, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Robin Lehner did not have a good night in Toronto on Tuesday. He was pulled by Dan Bylsma in the second period after the third Leaf goal and threw a tantrum at the bench because of course, he was not pleased by it.

Lehner has been crucified up in Toronto and on social media for what was called taking a selfie with a pretty woman sitting next to the Sabres bench. That took place during a TV timeout after the second Toronto goal. Lehner calmly addressed the incident after Thursday's practice. "I understand how it looks, but it's a mom with a 5-year-old kid waving in his pajama's all happy, and you know what? I'm going to wave back, I don't care what anyone thinks."

"If it was Jonathan Toews or Carey Price, they would be the best people in the world and I have this thing around me and I accept that fact, but it doesn't affect my game."

I think everybody who has seen this knows it was blown up because it happened in Toronto. Lehner said, "We all know that and it's fine and I take responsibility. I don't want to do the whole sequence of things that they built up, the little half Hollywood movie that they clipped together. I understand where it's coming from, it's all entertainment to them, but its real life reactions from me."

"I got mad, I let in three goals in 10 minutes, our team didn't play the way we wanted, I let in a bad one, I wanted to stay in, I'm a competitive guy and I come to the bench and people are putting up that I'm staring my coach down and this and that, I mean, I get mad and I have a history of a short fuse and I can't change it."

Lehner realizes that stomping off where folks can see him probably isn't his best move. He said, "I will do things differently, I didn't have a hallway to go down, I had a bench to go and sit on. I asked my coach why and he responded that we needed a change. You look through the Toronto clip of things and commentators that don't know what they're talking about, I understand, they say I'm taking selfies, I mean that's not a selfie, so people can think what they want, I am who I am."

"People can take video and it's not the reality of things and that's the power of the media. He told me what he thinks (Bylsma) and I totally respect everything that he thinks. He's our coach and I don't want to portray this organization like that, I'm not helping the team by showing my emotions and I've got to learn from it, but in the end of the day, I represent this organization, which I really like."

Lehner is going to try to be better, but he also knows what his personality is, "I really like this team and I'll make adjustments, but at the same time, it's hypocritical to apologize for who you are and competitive guys don't want to get out of the net, I don't want to leave the net, I want to sink with the ship or be able to stand in there and comeback."

With Anders Nilsson sick and missing practice on Thursday, there's a real good chance Lehner starts on Friday against Detroit.

Sabres' Ennis appears ready for Detroit

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 19, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Tyler Ennis returned to practice on Thursday and was back on Ryan O'Reilly's left wing. Ennis played Monday against Dallas, but was held out for precautionary reasons in Toronto on Tuesday. Ennis said, "It's a complex area so there's a lot going on down there, so optimistically I want to play every game here on out, so I've just got to stay on it and work at it and get treatment."

"I've got to make sure I'm able to do what I can out there and I'm able to play how I can, so I've got to stay active, stay on it with getting treatment."

You can tell Ennis isn't 100 percent. He was asked how it was in practice today and he said, "It was decent, I had a good session there getting some treatment and I've just got to stay on it."

Dan Bylsma said it's more likely Ennis will play this back-to-back coming up than the last one.

Anders Nilsson missed practice due to sickness. Bylsma didn't know if he'll be able to dress for Friday's game against Detroit. Linus Ullmark was called up.

Dmitry Kulikov is still practicing on his own and Bylsma said he's starting to take a little contact.

Thursday's lines:

Ennis R.O'Reilly Okposo

Foligno Eichel Reinhart

Kane Girgensons Gionta

Carrier (Deslauriers) C.O'Reilly Moulson

Sabres continuing to search for consistency

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 19, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres have been anything but consistent this season, especially when it comes to wins and losses.

It's an issue that players have openly talked about, but one that has lingered since the start of the regular season.

"I think we figured out our game and the way we need to play it and now we have to work on getting the result," Sabres forward Kyle Okposo said on Thursday. "That's a little bit of a tougher thing to do, but once you get it, you don't lose it."

Fellow forward Jack Eichel agreed and said the Sabres need to have more of a killer instinct, especially when they have a team on the ropes like the Toronto Maple Leafs were on Tuesday night. No need to remind you -- but the Sabres squandered a two-goal lead in less than ten minutes.

Bove's take:

Time to start walking the walk. The Sabres have admitted that need to be more consistent but now they have to prove that they can be. At times, like against Dallas earlier in the week, the Sabres look like a very competitive hockey team. Then, they collapse during a ten-minute span it costs them an important game.

It's not easy to play a complete, 60-minute hockey game, but if the Sabres don't start doing that soon then their playoff hopes will vanish sooner rather than later.

Practice notes:

Sabres forward Tyler Ennis returned to practice on Thursday and is expected to play against the Detroit Red Wings on Friday night. Goaltender Anders Nilsson is sick -- his status for Friday's game is uncertain. Linus Ullmark practiced with the Sabres on Thursday to prepare if Nilsson can't play.

Lehner knows that he can have a short-fuse, but don't expect him to change anytime soon

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 19, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - When Buffalo Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner was pulled from Tuesday's game against the Toronto Maple Leafs he was visibly angry -- but do you blame him? Lehner let in three goals on four shots in less than ten minutes. Just like that the Sabres saw a 2-0 lead turn into a 3-2 deficit.

As Lehner got to the bench he slammed his helmet in disgust and instantly the Twitter machines exploded, criticizing Lehner's reaction and how he handled things.

On Thursday he explained his side of the story.

First, watch this video for a better sense at what was being said online about Lehner.

"I get mad," Lehner said Thursday. "I have a history of maybe being short-fused but you know what, I can't change it."

Lehner went on to say "commentators don't know what they're talking about."

Bove's take:

This is pretty simple. The dude had a bad game, it happens, and he was mad. Lehner is a competitive athlete, this won't be the first time he's angry and it won't be the last.

Lehner's right, he probably should've carried himself differently, but this literally happens with athletes all the time. On Monday Dallas Stars captain Jamie Benn was snapping sticks out of frustration on the Dallas bench. He took some heat on Twitter, but not nearly as much, at least from what I saw. In Toronto everything is magnified and when you're a player who has a history of getting hot-headed these mini-tirades won't be overlooked.

This wasn't that big of a deal. I understand by posting this story you could argue that it was -- but after today it won't be something that gets brought up until the next time Lehner gets pulled.

For his sake, hopefully that's not anytime soon.

Notes from Thursday's practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

January 19, 2017

On a morning when 2,500 students filled the stands to watch practice at KeyBank Center as part of the NHL's Future Goals program, Robin Lehner had to defend his decision to wave to a young fan prior to giving up three goals and being pulled in a 4-3 loss in Toronto on Tuesday night.

Lehner was seen on the Sportsnet telecast waving to a woman seated near the Sabres bench as he took a drink of water during a television timeout. The goalie said she was FaceTiming her son.

Amidst suggestions that the interaction might have affected his concentration in the game, Lehner addressed the matter following practice on Thursday.

"This mom with a 5-year-old kid waving in his pajamas, all happy, you know what, I'm going to wave back," Lehner said. "I don't care what anyone thinks. If it was Jonathan Toews or Carey Price or whatever, I'm not anything close to what they are, but they would be [looked at as] the best people in the world.

"You know what, I have this thing around me, and I accept that fact. I accept that fact that it looks bad. But it doesn't affect my game. People that know me know I'm a calm, relaxed goalie. That's why I can have a bad goal and bounce back. That's why I can play through these things. I'm better mentally than that."

Here's what else we learned at Thursday's practice:

Medical Report

Anders Nilsson was sick with the flu and did not practice. Bylsma said he was not yet sure whether the goalie will feel well enough to dress against Detroit on Friday. Linus Ullmark was recalled from Rochester to serve as the second goalie at practice.

"The night after the Toronto game I got the text that he was not feeling well, I guess that was the morning of the next day," Bylsma said in regards to Nilsson. "He's gone through a cycle, so to speak, yesterday and he has kept some food down today so it's too early to tell."

Bylsma said that defenseman Josh Gorges, out with a hip injury, was scheduled to undergo an MRI to determine his progress on Thursday afternoon.

Dmitry Kulikov (lower back) continued to skate on his own on Thursday and had elements of physicality added to his session.

Ullmark's new mask

No more minions, at least for now. Ullmark was sporting a brand new mask on Thursday, and replacing the two large eyeballs we've become accustomed to seeing were two Swedish goaltending legends who Ullmark described as personal heroes: Stefan Liv and Pelle Lindbergh.

Lindbergh, who became the first European goalie to win the Vezina Trophy while a member of the Philadelphia Flyers in 1985, died in a car accident later that year. Liv, a professional player in Sweden for most of his career, was killed in a plane crash while a member of Lokomotiv Yaroslavl of the KHL in 2011.

"I wanted to pay tribute to these fallen heroes," Ullmark said. "Pelle, he was the first European goalie to win the Vezina and all that show that European goalies can play in the National Hockey League and then you have Stefan that was one of the best guys off the ice, on the ice, and also when it comes to winning, especially those tight

games and when it all came down to the trophies and all that stuff. Not being the best regular season player, but once the playoffs started he was a monster."

Thursday's practice

After sitting as a precautionary scratch in Toronto on Tuesday, Tyler Ennis returned to practice and was a full participant. Ennis scored in his return from a 30-game absence against Dallas on Monday, but the Sabres did not want him to play back-to-back games so soon after a long recovery and thus kept him out of the lineup in Toronto.

With the Sabres set to begin another back-to-back set at home against Detroit on Friday, Bylsma said there is a chance Ennis is able to play in both games this time around.

"It's more likely that he'll play this back-to-back than the first one," Bylsma said. "I kind of anticipated the first one. The plan right now is for him to play in the Detroit game and hopefully he can keep going forward in the Montreal game [on Saturday]."

With Ennis back in the fold, here's how the lines looked at practice:

63 Tyler Ennis - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
9 Evander Kane - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 12 Brian Gionta
48 William Carrier/44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 19 Cal O'Reilly - 26 Matt Moulson

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

31 Anders Nilsson
35 Linus Ullmark

Buffalo Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly on the boost he -- and his beard -- got from the World Cup

By Pierre LeBrun

ESPN.com

January 19, 2017

TORONTO -- After Tuesday's morning skate in Toronto, I sat down with Buffalo Sabres forward Ryan O'Reilly for a chat. The 25-year-old star from Seaforth, Ontario, explained what he thinks the Sabres need to do to turn their season around, what it was like to win a World Cup of Hockey championship alongside his idol and -- in related news -- why his beard is longer and lusher than ever.

ESPN.com: About that beard of yours ... I know you spent a couple of weeks with the San Jose Sharks' bearded ones, Joe Thornton and Brent Burns, as part of Team Canada during the World Cup of Hockey. Did they rub off on you?

Ryan O'Reilly (smiling): I don't think I'll let it get that much out of control and that big. What I have now is a little long. I usually like it a little more trimmed down. I'm not going to their level any time soon. Theirs is next-level, for sure.

ESPN.com: Speaking of the World Cup, it was your first best-on-best tournament experience. Looking back on it, did that provide a boost for you?

O'Reilly: Absolutely. And it's funny with how quick it ended. After a couple of days off, you're back with your [NHL] team. That first month, it didn't sink in really that we won a World Cup. But it was awesome. I made the team by injury [he replaced an injured Tyler Seguin]. You never want to see guys go down like that, but to come in and contribute in some sort of way was huge. I really wanted to make that team. It was a confidence boost and a way to say, 'Hey, maybe I am an elite player in this league.'

ESPN.com: Was there a player on Team Canada whom you didn't know well before the tournament but got to know?

O'Reilly: Well, I grew up watching Jumbo Joe. He's one of my favorite players [because of] his playmaking and how he dishes it. And then, after a phone call [from Team Canada], the next day I'm on a line with him and [former Colorado Avalanche teammate] Matt Duchene. It was funny playing with him again.

It was just funny how it came together -- playing with a guy like Thornton and getting to know him, seeing how funny he is, and just talking to him off the ice. And on the ice -- watching him, the way he communicates, what he does and how effective he is. All the little details and how he positions himself. It was really cool to see him up close.

ESPN.com: What has it been like since then to interact with those guys when you're competing against them? Do you exchange a little wink during warm-up or something like that?

O'Reilly: Yeah, it's like, 'Hey, how are you doing?' It's funny, because it's like you're playing against Chicago and you see [Jonathan] Toews again. It's like, 'Hey Jonny, how are you?' Next thing you know, you're taking like 10 faceoffs against him and trying to beat him.

ESPN.com: You mentioned your old teammate in Colorado, Matt Duchene, earlier. I'm sure you've noticed there's a bit going on there these days. It looks like the Avalanche are headed for a rebuild. You were there during another rebuild. Is it surprising to you to see what's happening there?

O'Reilly: Yeah, it was unexpected. In the summer, when [coach] Patty Roy left, that was interesting. It's crazy, looking at the standings to see how far behind they are. It's unexpected for me. When I talk to guys on their team, I don't want to ask them what's going on. They've got enough going on already. But it's definitely surprising.

ESPN.com: You probably thought your current team would be a bit farther ahead in the standings than it is. What's your take on the Sabres' season so far?

O'Reilly: Yeah, we're definitely nowhere close to where we want to be. I think consistency has been a big thing for us. We win a couple of games and we feel good, we feel we're back on track. Going to the next game, we kind of lose our jump.

We're having trouble reinventing ourselves every day. It's a tough thing to do in this league and it's obviously not going to happen every time, but we've had too many ups and downs. And I have to say, it is on myself a bit, as a guy who's supposed to lead the team. We have to find a way to get guys going right away, to have more complete games. Scoring goals has been an issue at times. That's on a select few of us. If we're scoring, that can change the whole momentum of a game, and we've struggled at times.

ESPN.com: We have this Hollywood idea of what it's like in a dressing room during tough times, that players get up and make big speeches. But in today's game, and with the millennial generation -- I know I sound old when I say that -- it just seems like everyone is on their phones these days and nobody talks to each other. What's it like to talk to teammates when things aren't going well?

O'Reilly: Yeah, it is different. The season is long. There are so many different things that come into play. ... So many different times things have to be said, and sometimes nothing needs to be said, something just needs to be done. It's an example. There are so many different ways and moments that you have to find the right way to get something across.

ESPN.com: Your brother, Cal O'Reilly, is back up with the big club. What's that like to share that time together again at the NHL level?

O'Reilly: It's so cool -- especially, I think, for our parents. When he first got called up last season, my mom was just so excited to see both us playing. It's awesome to share with him because I wouldn't be here without him.

We were actually talking about it this morning because he used to let me go play with his friends. They were four-and-a-half years older. I would tag along and play with older guys. That's how I learned the game, against older, stronger guys. I had to play smarter.

So it's cool to share this now together. Last season we both got on a goal together, first time in Sabres history two brothers did that. So that's special. We definitely enjoy it.