



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Overtime pays for Sabres, not for Stars

Associated Press

January 25, 2017

DALLAS -- When the Buffalo Sabres and Dallas Stars meet on Thursday night at American Airlines Center, overtime may or may not come into play.

For the Sabres (20-18-9), who won 5-4 in overtime at Nashville on Tuesday, their third consecutive overtime victory, that would be a good thing considering they seem especially comfortable playing bonus hockey.

Against the Predators, Jack Eichel scored twice for Buffalo, who is 9-10-6 overall away from home but 3-1-0 during its current six-game trip.

Eichel's final goal was the game-winner in overtime.

"I don't think we played our best in the first period," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said postgame. "The way we managed the puck and turned over the puck gave them a lot of opportunities in the first period.

"We were able to minimize the damage in the first and got back in the second, and had two big goals in the second. I just think our team showed a huge amount of character and stayed with it."

Buffalo, 9-3-2 against the Western Conference this season, also got a boost from the return of defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, who was back on the ice after missing the previous 12 games because of a lower back injury.

The Sabres are 7-3-1 in January and sport a plus-7 goal differential for the month.

For Buffalo's man of the hour Tuesday night in the Music City, that comeback win was the latest example of a positive trend he sees with the Sabres.

"It's great to see the way we played," Eichel said. "We stuck with it for 60 minutes. We go down two goals on the road against a really good hockey team and were able to find a way to get it into overtime

and win it. It says a lot about the resiliency of this team."

Dallas (19-20-10), however, sits on the other end of the overtime spectrum. The Stars have dropped their last three games and are 3-5-2 in their past 10 games.

On Tuesday, the Stars lost 3-2 in a shootout to Central Division rival Minnesota, a game in which Dallas had ample opportunities to prevail, including a 3-on-0 in overtime on which Cody Eakin fired the puck high over Wild goaltender Devan Dubnyk.

And for a team floundering barely below .500, missed chances like that can and usually do come back to haunt.

But Stars coach Lindy Ruff isn't attaching any added importance to this game simply because it's the last one for Dallas before the start of the NHL All-Star break.

"I don't put a lot of significance in it except for the fact we'd like to win the game tomorrow going into the break," Ruff said. "We've worked extremely hard these last couple games to only get two points.

"We've missed two or three great opportunities in overtime and the shootout to get the extra point (Tuesday against the Wild)."

Dallas is 12-7-6 at home, but the Stars are only 3-8-4 against the Eastern Conference this season, including a 4-1 loss at Buffalo on Jan. 16.

However, those struggles against the East don't matter to young Dallas defenseman Patrik Nemeth because he echoes the entire room in saying that time is drawing short of the Stars are to make a run at securing their second consecutive playoff spot.

That's especially troublesome less than a year after Dallas held the top record in the West before losing in the second round of the playoffs to St. Louis.

"Yeah, we got to rack up some wins here," Nemeth said. "I think we're still under .500. The playoff train is starting to leave the station a little bit.

"We need to rack up some wins and build some momentum here toward the last couple months."

Of course, Dallas has to hope, at least in the back of its collective psyche, that this game doesn't reach overtime, especially since the Stars are only 2-9 in overtime this season.

But Ruff isn't one to dwell on his team's overtime problems this season. Instead, he focuses on the bottom line each team tries to be on the right side of following each game.

"Well, there's missed opportunities," Ruff said. "You look at the 2-on-0, you miss that you're not going to win overtime. Like I said last night, my story hasn't changed, we're one save away probably.

"We got the lead in the shootout and didn't hold it. When you get a 2-on-0, you can't say anything but if you don't put it in, you feel like something's going to come back to haunt you."

Sabres' defense finally getting the points

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 25, 2017

FARMERS BRANCH, Texas – The Sabres' defensemen have found a pretty cool hangout spot lately.

The score sheet.

After being one of the more unproductive units in the NHL for most of the season, Buffalo's blue-liners have started racking up points. They have combined for two goals, seven assists and nine points during the last three games, and it's no coincidence the Sabres have won all three.

"We've had that almost snake-bit feeling from the back end for a long time this season," defenseman Cody Franson said Wednesday. "We've put good shots in, and we'd hit our own guy coming through the lane. We'd block our own shots or we'd tip pucks and they'd hit crossbars. Ones that were going in would get tipped wide.

"The dots weren't lining up, and the last few games they've lined up for us, which has been nice."

As the Sabres look for a fourth straight win Thursday in Dallas, they're getting a well-rounded performance from the defense. There have been highlight-reel goals like Zach Bogosian's overtime winner in Montreal. There have been smart plays like Franson purposely hitting the right pad so Jack Eichel could get a rebound on the left side.

There have even been easy assists, like Taylor Fedun's helper when he was simply the last player to touch the puck before Eichel went coast-to-coast and beat Nashville in overtime Tuesday.

"We've had a number of those assists just be movement with the puck and good execution with the puck, not necessarily offensive plays," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said in a practice facility north of Dallas. "We had some good puck movement. We've started to move the puck north and quick a lot better for our forwards, and that's resulted in us getting more opportunities to score and more goals."

Fedun has helped the Sabres' transition game in the absence of Jake McCabe. Franson has taken advantage of minutes vacated by injured Josh Gorges. Bogosian has played better.

"Anytime your blue line can help chip in offensively, it makes a big difference in your team game," said Franson, who has one goal and four points in three games. "You get the chance to play big minutes more consistently, you start to feel better about your game and confident in what you're doing. I've felt pretty confident for a while now.

"Luckily, it's starting to get those bounces, and guys are burying those rebounds that are there."

Actually, there wasn't much luck involved in the second of Franson's two assists Tuesday. During a conversation on the bench, Franson told Eichel he would create a rebound for him. It worked.

"I knew he was planted off to the side and we had a good screen, so I just tried to throw it off that right pad so it would go to his area," Franson said. "Probably 90 percent of the time I'm shooting, I'm not trying to score from up there. I'm just trying to put the puck in an area where our guy in front can get a tip on it, or if we've got traffic coming from the left, I'm going to try and put it off his right pad so it kicks out to our traffic.

"Now I've had a couple that went to the right spot, and we were able to bury them."

Even with the nine-point surge during the past three games, the Sabres' blue-line numbers are pedestrian. The defensemen have combined for seven goals and 61 assists in 47 games. Rasmus Ristolainen has a big chunk of that with three goals and 25 assists.

"All year long we would have liked to be contributing a little bit more offensively, but it's nice," said Fedun, who noted four of the seven goals by defensemen have been game-winners. "The D haven't scored many goals, but they sure they have been big ones."

Bogosian's winner Saturday allowed the Sabres to go for three straight. Assists by Franson, Bogosian and Fedun on Tuesday helped secure a 5-4 win in Nashville. If the defensemen can continue their run against the Stars, the Sabres might set a season high with a four-game winning streak.

"When you win games, everything is more fun," Fedun said. "The energy in the locker room, the energy in practice, the energy of games, it's just one of those things that goes hand-in-hand with winning. Hopefully, we can have a snowball effect here and just keep rolling."

Sabres Notebook: Supporting Lehner; O'Reilly clan on trip

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

January 25, 2017

FARMERS BRANCH, Texas – As the Sabres celebrated their latest overtime victory, Robin Lehner's mind drifted back to the last time he allowed four goals and won.

"It's a long time ago," he said.

That's for sure.

Lehner hadn't picked up a win in a run-and-gun affair since Feb. 4, 2014, when Ottawa earned a 5-4 shootout victory in St. Louis. The only other time was the first start of Lehner's career on Jan. 13, 2011. The Senators downed the New York Islanders, 6-4.

He can finally add a third game to the list with Buffalo's 5-4 overtime win Tuesday in Nashville.

"This is a great feeling," Lehner said. "I kind of like it better."

All goaltenders love goal support. Lehner got it when Buffalo struck twice in the final six minutes of regulation and rallied past the Predators in OT.

"What a game," Lehner said. "I've got to give the guys a lot of credit."

Lehner improved to 12-12-5. While this win came on an off night, he's suffered losses during solid outings. Here are his records this season:

*He's 4-0-2 when allowing one goal.

*He's 4-4 when allowing two.

*He's 3-4-2 when allowing three goals.

*He's 1-4-1 when allowing four.

"Robin has had a number of games where he's played well and we haven't given him the run support," coach Dan Bylsma said. "He hasn't gotten the wins, and at times that has weighed on Robin, weighed on his game. This is a game where the guys really support him."

There were a couple of questionable goals allowed Tuesday. Nashville made it 2-1 when Cody McLeod shot from below the goal line and watched the puck bounce up Lehner's skate and hop inside the post.

"It looks like a bad goal," Lehner said. "It is a bad goal. I go in and look at it. I played the post like I did my whole career. I'm usually pretty good at my post work, and it goes on top of my skate and rolls on my skate and in. It was a little bouncy."

The Predators made it 3-2 when Viktor Arvidsson slipped home his own net-front rebound.

"I tried to poke the rebound and got a little out of synch," said Lehner, who stopped 35 of 39 shots. "Those goals don't feel good, but it was small margins and I still felt like I made a lot of good saves. They came and bailed me out, and it was a really good feeling."

The Sabres will visit the Dallas Stars on Thursday in the final meeting of the season. The first game was just last week, and Buffalo rolled to a 4-1 victory in KeyBank Center.

"We played a great game, shut them down a lot," Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly said Wednesday in a practice rink north of Dallas. "I think they were very frustrated, and they'll take it out tomorrow. It's definitely going to be a gritty game."

It's the final game before the All-Star break. With the exception of right wing Kyle Okposo, the Sabres will take the weekend off and visit Montreal on Tuesday.

For the parents/mentors road trip that the Sabres are enjoying, each player was allowed to bring one guest. Since O'Reilly's brother, Cal, is also up with Buffalo, the O'Reillys got to bring their mom and their dad.

"Every year, parents are fighting over who gets to come," Ryan O'Reilly said. "It made it easy for us that both could be here. It's obviously real special."

Sabres' parents are enjoying the time with their sons

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 25, 2017

Dallas, TX (WGR 550) -- It's always fun when the parents and mentors come on their annual Sabres road trip. Every time I've seen Tyler Ennis and his mom, they've had huge smiles on their faces. Tyler is so happy she's here, "It's great, she's a lot like me, she's happy all the time and she's really enjoying this trip."

"It's nice she gets to see things like the day to day NHL and she's making some new friends and she's having fun."

This is a trip that the players say they look forward to. Tyler Ennis said, "Anyone that's made the NHL has parents that have done a lot for them, so this is a great way to kind of give back a little bit and my parents have seen a lot of cities that maybe they wouldn't ordinarily see if I wasn't in this position."

The parents are with the players a lot, but the team sets up activities for them along the way. Tyler said, "They can sit in with us and eat breakfast and lunch and hang out, or they can do whatever they want so she's been hanging out with moms mostly, Mrs. Reinhart, Mrs. Kane, Mrs. O'Reilly, so they've been having some good chats and hanging out with us too eating some good meals"

Cal O'Reilly was called up to the Sabres after Derek Grant was claimed off waivers by Nashville. With Ryan already here, both his mother and father are on the trip, "It's real special, to have them both here, they've done so much for our hockey careers and when we were growing up, to have them here on a road trip in the National Hockey League is pretty special for them and for us. It's kind of a once in a lifetime thing."

"They're loving it, just to be around us, traveling with us, see what we do is pretty special for them."

Ryan O'Reilly feels the same way, "I think it's really cool that they both got to come, it seems like every year parents are fighting about who gets to come, so it's obviously real special."

"There's tons of people that you could bring and to have someone here that you care about so much and show them what the life's like, the travel and how spoiled we are and for them to get to see that and all the sides to it is really cool to share it with them and to give them a taste of all the hard work that they put in and to see how it pays off and to see what our life's like."

Dan Bylsma gets to meet all the people that are special to his players. Bylsma said that's important to him, "I think it's a great trip, I've had the experience of bringing my own on the trip and to see their parents coming reminds me that I'm my father's son and I really enjoy that about this trip, you see the dads, you see the experience, what it's like for their sons to play in the National Hockey League, but I get to experience that father-son or parent-child relationship that I think is a special one."

Jack Eichel scored a spectacular overtime goal in Nashville. Buffalo had been behind 4-2 in the third period and Eichel was excited his dad was there to see it, "It's definitely extra special having all the parents here and I think the guys are excited to be able to share this with them and I'm sure they were able to enjoy it."

Ritzel: Sabres need big time second half to end playoff drought

By Justin Ritzel

Auburn Citizen

January 26, 2017

The Buffalo Sabres are on a hot streak.

Will it be enough to rise up the National Hockey League's Eastern Conference standings? That remains to be seen.

For only the second time in franchise history, the Sabres (20-18-9, 49 points) have won three straight games via overtime after rallying to defeat the Nashville Predators 5-4 Tuesday. Jack Eichel scored two goals, including a dandy of an overtime winner, and for at least one night in Buffalo all was right with the world.

But despite extending its streak, Buffalo sits four points back of the final wild-card position that the Toronto Maple Leafs — with two games in hand — currently occupy. Certainly not an insurmountable difference, but four other teams sit between the two clubs.

The outlook isn't any better within the Atlantic Division, where Buffalo is five points behind the third-seeded Boston Bruins.

The Sabres are 6-3-1 in their past 10 games, and they'll need to continue that pace if Buffalo is to end a five-year playoff drought. It didn't help matters that the team stumbled out to a 13-15-8 record through Dec. 31.

That was largely without their star center Eichel. The former second-overall pick missed the first 21 games after suffering an ankle injury in the final practice before the regular season on Oct. 13. His loss was a major blow to an already mediocre offense.

If the Sabres do rally in the second half of the season, Eichel's comments following a 3-1 loss against the Bruins on the final day of 2016 may serve as the turning point.

Said the generally reserved 20-year-old, "As a whole team, everyone needs to look in the mirror and we all need to get a lot better. I think I speak for the team in saying that we're all frustrated with where we're at, and I don't think I'm the only person in the locker room that's not satisfied."

When asked what needs to improve, Eichel responded, "Everything."

He's held up his end of the bargain. The second-year forward has 21 points in 26 games and six goals in 11 games since his declaration.

A march toward the playoffs will require the rest of the forward core to follow suit.

Kyle Okposo, Buffalo's major free agent acquisition last summer, is scoring at his lowest pace since 2012-13. Ryan O'Reilly was the Sabres' leading scorer last season, but he's missed 11 games. Evander Kane's 0.56 points-per-game on the ice hasn't been worth his \$5.25 million contract or the trouble he's been off it.

Remember that the Maple Leafs and Edmonton Oilers have been fellow NHL doormats over the past five years but, unlike the Sabres, are well in playoff position. Toronto occupies the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference while Edmonton is currently third in the Pacific Division.

Another postseason at home and questions will be asked. Is general manager Tim Murray's direction the right one? Are Terry and Kim Pegula — whose Buffalo Bills are one of the more dysfunctional franchises in the National Football League — capable of owning a competitive organization?

The Sabres can avoid such questions if the level of play over their past 10 games carries over into the final three months.

But another year of breaking out the golf clubs and fishing lines in April, despite banging on the salary cap ceiling, will be very worrisome for a franchise trying so desperately to be relevant.

Young Sabers stampede into Dallas against stumbling Stars

By Stephen Schroats

Fort Worth Star-Telegram

January 25, 2017

Sabres at Stars

7:30 p.m. Thursday, American Airlines Center, Dallas

TV: FSSW Radio: KTCK/1310 AM and 96.7 FM

Records: Sabres 20-18-9, 49 points; Stars 19-20-10, 48 pts.

About the Sabres: Despite being tied for the bottom of the Atlantic Division, the Sabres have won three in a row – including comeback overtime wins Saturday at Montreal and Tuesday at Nashville – and six of their last 10 games. One of those victories came Jan. 16 in Buffalo against the Stars when Dallas' Kari Lehtonen allowed a goal 19 seconds into the game. Center Jack Eichel, the second overall pick in the 2015 draft, had two goals against Dallas. The 20-year-old Eichel had two more against Nashville, including the overtime winner, and has 12 in his 26 games this season. The young Sabres are led by Kyle Okposo (14 goals, 16 assists, 30 points) with support from Sam Reinhart (29 points), Ryan O'Reilly (29) and Rasmus Ristolainen (28). Goalie Robin Lehner had 31 saves in the first meeting with Dallas.

About the Stars: Their first shootout experience of the season left a sour taste when Minnesota clipped the Stars with a fifth-round game-winner in a 3-2 decision on Tuesday. It was worth a point but it was also Dallas' second extended-time loss in a row to begin a five-game homestand. The Stars are 2-10 this season after regulation. Tyler Seguin and Patrick Eaves had the Stars' goals. Eaves leads the team with 18 goals while Seguin has 17 plus a team-high 29 assists. This is the Stars' last game before the All-Star weekend in Los Angeles. They resume play Tuesday at home against Toronto.

Read more here: <http://www.star-telegram.com/sports/nhl/dallas-stars/article128752964.html#storylink=cpy>

Franson, defensemen contributing to Sabres' success

By Chris Ryndak

Buffalo Sabres

January 25, 2017

DALLAS - The Buffalo Sabres are riding a three-game win streak - with all three victories coming in overtime - and they've been able to do it with contributions from all over the lineup.

As Brian Duff noted in the latest edition of #Duffalo this morning, it's been a very good month for the Sabres. They're 7-3-1 in January and will look to carry that into tomorrow night's game against the Stars.

Here's what he wrote today:

Prior to the calendar flip the team was averaging just 2.1 goals per game. My belief was always that they needed to get that number closer to 2.7 for the season to have any realistic chance of staying in the race.

Well, an average of 3.3 goals per game this month has the season mark now at 2.43. And should they sustain the January pace, they would end the season at 2.80 which would likely make things awfully interesting in April.

Dan Bylsma (1/25/17)

06:09 • January 25th, 2017

Thirteen different skaters have tallied points over the last three games, including five of the top six defensemen in the lineup.

Cody Franson has led the way in production of late on the blue line. He's riding a three-game point streak in which he has one goal and three assists. He had two assists in last night's 5-4 come-from-behind overtime win in Nashville.

"He's been playing well. I thought we've had some good offensive zone shifts and broke out the puck pretty well coming out of our own end," his defensive partner Zach Bogosian said on Wednesday after practice at The Stars Rink at Dr Pepper Arena. "It's been good. It seems like we've complimented each other pretty well out there. It gives me room to skate. He's such a good puck mover so it's been fun."

Franson has been up over 21 minutes in each of the last four games, but he's also being relied upon in all situations with Jake McCabe and Josh Gorges out due to injury, and Dmitry Kulikov now working his way back into the lineup after missing extensive time.

"You get the chance to play the bigger minutes more consistently, you start to feel better about your game and confident in what you're doing," Franson said. "I've felt pretty confident for a while now so luckily it's starting to get those bounces and guys are burying the rebounds that are there."

Speaking of burying rebounds, take, for instance, the sequence that led Jack Eichel's first goal of the game, which made it 2-2 late in the second period.

Eichel buries a rebound

01:01 • January 24th, 2017

"Talk about adding offense from the point or adding offense from the defensemen, I think there's this idea of up in the rush or Paul Coffey-ish and doing that to get more goals and even take more chances," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "But, that [goal]'s a good indicator of where we've gotten a lot better at as a five-man offense, pounding the puck in the offensive zone, possessing it."

With 47.9 seconds remaining, Eichel lost the offensive zone faceoff to goaltender Juuse Saros' right.

Buffalo, however, was able to gain possession of the puck almost immediately and set up shop in the Predators zone, getting all five players on the ice - Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Marcus Foligno, Bogosian and Franson involved in the action.

After the draw, Predators defenseman Ryan Ellis tried to clear it out along the boards, but it was intercepted by Eichel along the left-wing halfwall and Buffalo went to work. Eichel passed the puck back to Bogosian at the point, who fired the puck in around the endboards. Saros was unable to handle it behind the net, and it went around to Reinhart at the right halfwall.

Reinhart moved the puck in the corner to Foligno, who alone was able to hold onto the pick for almost 10 seconds along the boards before squaring up and sending a cross-ice pass to Bogosian at the left point.

Bogosian, this time, shot the puck on net and the rebound came to Reinhart in front, who put the puck into the left-wing corner as Buffalo reset. Eichel took the puck and again passed it back to Bogosian.

Expecting another shot, James Neal went down to attempt to block the slapper and Mike Ribeiro moved out of his lane at top of the zone, which opened up a critical passing lane. Bogosian wound up like he was going to put a rocket on net, but instead passed the puck across to Franson.

"I tried to wait it out," Bogosian said. "I shot the first one maybe 10 seconds before that, and I was hoping that maybe they thought I was going to shoot it again. And they bit on it. I just tried to be patient and have some poise with the puck. Cody slid into the right area and I was lucky to make that pass."

Franson's shot, directed at Saros' right pad, caromed off it and went right to Eichel, who was waiting for it. Eichel buried the rebound into the open net to tie the game. In all, the Buffalo cycle lasted 30.5 seconds.

"That play shows a little bit, hopefully, of what Cody and I can bring to the blue line offensively," Bogosian said. "It's nice to have plays like that and it was a big goal for us. Jack ended up in the right area and that's what smart hockey players do - they find the right areas and the soft spots and that was a big goal for us."

Because it can be so difficult to score on the athletic goaltenders in the league these days, Franson estimates that 90 percent of his shots are taken with the purpose of setting up a scoring chance as opposed to trying to hit the back of the net. He figures that if he can place the puck in the right areas or generate a rebound or deflection, his teammates will have better odds at finding twine.

So how did Eichel know to be in that spot at that moment? Because they experienced a similar play in the first period.

"In the first period, I had a shot where I had Jack coming off the halfwall. I wasn't really trying to beat him from there," Franson said. "I tried to throw it off his right pad so it would kick out to Jack. I think it was in a timeout where I told him, 'I just tried to put in an area where I knew you guys were coming from.'"

"It was kind of the same thing in the second period there on Jack's goal. I knew he was planted off to the side and we had a good screen in front so I tried to throw it off that far pad so it would come back out in his area. Jack's got a very wide shooting zone. He can get a good shot away from a lot of different positions so I just tried to put it in his general area."

As Eichel explains it, when the time came for them to try that play again, he was just trying to position himself to get a shot off while the rest of the five-man unit moved the puck around.

"He does shoot the puck really hard so it definitely hits the goalie and comes right back out. In the first period, I kind of drifted to the other side. It hit his pad and went right where it was," Eichel said. "So in the second period, I made a quick adjustment and it's great puck possession by Moose in the corner. Bogo makes a heck of a play at the blue line to get his guy down and slide it over."

"I just tried to get lost and they don't come much easier than that one. It's right on your stick. It's a great play by a couple of guys and I just happened to be the beneficiary."

More than anything, Franson credited the poise shown by Bogosian for the goal.

"That was a great play by Bogo. That was a hell of a fake," he said. "He drew two guys to him. The guy that was checking me came out and tried to get in between us. Bogo sold it and I just popped out a little lower and he made a great play. That whole play, I think, starts with Bohgs."

Parents' Trip continues

It's a special time for the team as well because they have their loved ones along for this two-game road trip. Duffer has more on that in today's Sabres in :90.

Wednesday's practice

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#Duffalo: Wins, ties and parental guidance

By Brian Duff

Buffalo Sabres

January 25, 2017

On ice

Seven. Three. And One.

Not a bad January so far with one game to go before the All-Star break, and one coming out of it.

And quietly, a 4-0 mark at KeyBank Center to start 2017.

This marks the first time all season that the Sabres have climbed two games above ".500" in today's NHL. Why is it happening now?

Thirty-seven goals in 11 games. 37!!!

Prior to the calendar flip the team was averaging just 2.1 goals per game.

My belief was always that they needed to get that number closer to 2.7 for the season to have any realistic chance of staying in the race.

Well, an average of 3.3 goals per game this month has the season mark now at 2.43. And should they sustain the January pace, they would end the season at 2.80 which would likely make things awfully interesting in April.

Your January Sabres Scoring Leaders:

Ryan O'Reilly: 11 points (2+9)

Jack Eichel: 9 points (6+3)

Sam Reinhart: 9 points (2+7)

Kyle Okposo: 7 points (4+3)

Evander Kane: 7 points (4+3)

Brian Gionta: 7 points (4+3)

Zemgus Girgensons: 7 points (3+4)

Cody Franson: 5 points (1+4)

Will Carrier: 4 points (3+1)

Marcus Foligno: 3 points (3+0)

Jake McCabe: 3 points (1+2)

Zach Bogosian: 3 points (1+2)

Matt Moulson: 3 points (1+2)

Taylor Fedun: 3 points (0+3)

Rasmus Ristolainen: 3 points (0+3)

A direct by-product of the increased scoring: Robin Lehner is 4-0-0 this month with a 2.85 goals-against average. Nice to see him finally getting some run support.

Another noticeable change, at least from my vantage point, has been seemingly more vocal contributions during practices from the likes of assistant coaches Tom Ward and Terry Murray. (I don't mean to suggest that Bob Woods is the quiet one, but then again, he oversees a power play that is "Top 7" in the league)

Plenty of memorable moments this month. And let's not forget what happened at the front end of January, with Justin Bailey's first NHL goal.

Justin was kind enough to share a few of the messages he received from his family after the game:

Off ice

It's been a while between blogs here and I've been waiting to show/tell this story.

Take a look:

Here is Dan Bylsma after winning the Stanley Cup at Joe Louis Arena (June 12, 2009)

And here is Dan Bylsma with us on the postgame show after winning his 300th NHL game as a head coach, also at Joe Louis Arena (Dec. 27, 2016)

Anything stand out?

Same guy.

Same tie.

You may recall the Sabres had fallen on hard times - losing four straight - prior to that late December game at the Joe. So the proud Michigander dug deep - into his closet - for an old JLA good luck charm.

That (and a pair of goals from Evander Kane, including the third period winner) was all that he needed to reach a pretty nice milestone.

I experienced another first that night at the Joe as well: MayDay doing the intermission report down a contact lens!

The trouble began right before we were about to start. And whenever we'd be off-camera with Brad breaking down plays, he'd cover up the bad eye and focus as best he could with the other.

It's all fun and games until...

Kudos to the amazing PSE production team. Once again they crushed it with the latest Tyler Ennis-centric Beyond Blue and Gold Episode.

I knew when we were interviewing Tyler and his parents in his childhood home in Edmonton that it was going to be powerful. The shooters and editors took it to another level - so much so that Bruce and Diane Ennis, Tyler's parents, sent us an incredibly thoughtful email to express their thanks.

Here's a snippet of it:

"What a powerful and emotional story. I want to commend you and the entire BBG crew on your ability to accurately capture the roller coaster of emotions we experienced as Tyler battled to overcome a serious head injury. The way your team was able to recreate what Tyler was experiencing during the depths of his concussion was amazing. Incredible camerawork, lighting and effects. The segment really helps a person to understand how horrible concussions can be."

Tyler comes by his genuine nature inherently.

He is also a person that has had the utmost respect for his former teammate in Thomas Vanek. It was really good to catch up with Vanek in Buffalo last week, in the midst of a very strong season for him with Detroit.

Number 62 couldn't wait to heap praise on Ennis, who may well be his protégé.

"I think he's one of the most creative players in the game," Vanek said. "Let him be that way. There will be more positives than negatives."

Count Vanek as someone who absolutely still sees the shootout as a very relevant piece of the game today. And that's not because he is 4-for-4 this year!

Vanek loved the drama of seeing it in the World Juniors, doesn't see a need for 10 minutes of 3-on-3 as a way to end regular season games, and still very much feels the fans rising as one in the arenas when the shootout is about to begin.

Life on the road

I've said it before, and will continue to do so until this magical career ride comes to an end: This is a dream job, and I wouldn't trade it for any other career.

That said, you do miss out on a lot of family time. However, it's made easier on many a night by near-real-time technology.

Seconds after Zach Bogosian's OT winner in Montreal on Saturday, my phone buzzed with this, from our youngest daughter Rhiannon...

And clearly, the result resonated with many that night, perhaps more than we've felt in quite a while. As we were touching down in Buffalo and coming to halt, the pilot announced a quick "Well done" to the players. But then added, "And the folks at the control tower tonight wanted to let you know what a great game you played, and they send their congratulations to all of you, and thank you for that win in Montreal!"

It's the little things that remind you of what a caring place we live in.

And when you're in the midst of a Parent's Trip for the players, that emotion comes out just a little bit more, as we heard from Cody Franson in our first intermission last night, and from Jack Eichel on the post-game show.

In the community

The community of Sabres fans really knows no boundaries, and that was on display again Monday night at our latest Sabres Road Crew party at Tin Roof Broadway in Nashville.

A couple hundred die-hard Blue and Gold supporters enjoyed the experience with alumni, broadcasters, and our sponsors - Delta Air Lines and Labatt.

I seemingly offended Rayzor by not using my "indoor voice" while emceeding the proceedings, but other than that, I thought it was a near perfect night - all in support of the Buffalo Sabres Foundation.

Next chance for displaced Sabres fans to congregate in such a manner will be February 24 in Denver!

#Duffalo Three Stars

For the period ending January 24, 2017

1. Tin Roof Broadway - Great staff, perfect venue, can't wait to visit again!
2. The Town Ballroom - Home to the inaugural Casino For a Cause in support of Zach Bogosian's Bogo Bunch Foundation. Always the right place for special events like this!
3. Old Orchard Inn - It's taken us way too long to get this historic gem in East Aurora. It was a perfect place to celebrate (a bit early) the January 24 birthdays of both my wife and our youngest daughter.