



Buffalo Sabres

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Bruins beat Sabres 3-1 on Bergeron, Schaller goals

By Ken Powtak

Associated Press

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BOSTON (AP) — A fast start and another solid outing by goaltender Tuukka Rask made for a fairly easy afternoon for the Boston Bruins.

Patrice Bergeron and Tim Schaller scored second-period goals Saturday to help the Bruins beat Buffalo 3-1 and complete a sweep of home-and-home games against the struggling Sabres.

"We played much better — better start," Bruins coach Claude Julien said. "We were playing with the lead, which makes a big difference. In the third period we played smart."

The victory also gave Boston a sweep of its four-game season series against the Sabres. Buffalo was the only team the Bruins had never swept during a regular season. Buffalo lost 4-2 at home to Boston on Thursday.

Boston opened a 3-0 lead and Rask took care of the rest. He made 26 saves.

"It's something we've talked about," Rask said. "We want to get that first goal more often. I thought we came out really strong today — like we wanted to. It paid off today. It's something we have to do more often."

On Thursday, the Bruins fell behind 2-0 in the opening period.

Frank Vatrano scored the other goal for Boston, which had lost five of its previous nine games but improved to 12-1-2 in the last 15 meetings against the Sabres.

Jack Eichel, a former Boston University star and Hobey Baker winner, scored for Buffalo. Robin Lehner made 25 saves. It was the ninth loss in 11 games for the Sabres (2-5-4).

After the game, Eichel was visibly upset, slamming his equipment as he packed his bag, knocking a clock above his locker to the floor during his tirade. He didn't speak to the media.

"I think every one of us should be," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said of Eichel's feelings. "We should all find that desperation, that urgency, that anger."

The Sabres are searching for anything to get them going.

"It's frustrating now. Something has to change and it has to come from the inside," Buffalo center Sam Reinhart said.

When asked how, he said: "It's tough to say. You can talk all you want. It's got to come from us, got to come from the start of the game, but it's unacceptable. We've shown it."

Leading 1-0, Bergeron one-timed Ryan Spooner's pass by Lehner from the right circle for a power-play goal 7:04 into the period. Schaller scored 2:25 later when he came charging down the right wing and fired a backhand that slipped into the net between Lehner's body and the near post.

Eichel scored his seventh goal with 21.2 seconds left in the second when he one-timed a shot from the right circle. Vatrano slipped a wrister inside the left post 1:28 into the game.

Lehner kept it to one goal in the opening period with a couple of nice stops. His best was when he flashed his right pad to rob Schaller, who was alone at the edge of the crease.

NOTES: The Bruins honored Denna Laing, a former women's professional hockey player who suffered a career-ending spinal injury when she crashed into boards at Gillette Stadium the day before the 2016 NHL Winter Classic. Laing, 25, came onto the ice in her wheelchair and dropped the ceremonial first puck. She was given a

standing ovation and got a hug from Bruins captain Zdeno Chara. She also visited the dressing room after the game and a number of players stopped by. . Boston also hung the jerseys of James Lavin and Owen Higgins on the glass behind their bench during pregame warmups. The 17-year-olds — high school hockey teammates from Falmouth, Massachusetts — were killed in a car accident in December coming home from practice. . The Bruins announced during the game that F David Backes was out "indefinitely" because of a concussion from a hit Thursday.

UP NEXT

Sabres: Face the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday is the second of a three-game trip.

Bruins: At New Jersey on Monday in the first of five of six on the road.

After bounceback with Amerks, Bailey gets another shot in NHL

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

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Training camp produced a quick exit back to Rochester, a stunner for a prospect who felt he was primed to make the NHL roster. An October callup produced two games with no points and another quick return, complete with a clear frown from Dan Bylsma when the Buffalo Sabres coach was asked for a progress report.

So perhaps Justin Bailey has been humbled a bit by his season to date. The Williamsville native returned to the Sabres Friday and will be in the lineup Saturday afternoon in TD Garden as the Sabres play their return engagement with the Boston Bruins. And Bailey will get back in the NHL in the wake of quite a hot streak in Rochester.

"I got a little bit of confidence going into the break scoring wise," Bailey said after practice in HarborCenter. "Lately I've been clicking finding some good chemistry with Tim Kennedy and I've been feeling pretty hot down there."

Bailey has 13 goals, seventh in the AHL, and nine assists for the season with the Amerks. He is on a five-game point streak with five goals and seven points. The memories of September and October are clearly fresh in his mind.

"I was disappointed with the outcome," he said. "It's one of those things where a month or two after you think, 'Hey, what more could I have done in the summer? What more could I have done in training camp?' I reflected. I look at a lot of things. But what are you going to do? I worked my butt off down in Rochester to get back up here and that's in the past and I'm looking at the present.

"There's been a ton of ups and downs this year. From training camp to even the first little bit of the season. I keep telling myself while I'm on the top streak to remember what this feeling was like and try to bring that to the rink every single day."

Kennedy, the South Buffalo native who played as a rookie for the Sabres during their 2009-10 Northeast Division championship season, has been a big help to Bailey as his center the last three games. Kennedy returned from Sweden earlier this month and the Sabres wanted to sign him for the Amerks but he was claimed on the AHL's waiver process by Carolina. The Hurricanes then agreed to loan Kennedy to Rochester.

"He's been great," Bailey said. "I remember watching him when I was a kid and he was a rookie. It's funny how things kind of happen like that. He's a quiet guy who just goes about his business and plays hard. We jelled a little bit and it's been great to play with him."

Bailey will be in the lineup for the Sabres as William Carrier will miss the game because he aggravated an injured hand in a fight Thursday night with Bruins defenseman Adam McQuaid. Bailey has played 10 NHL games the last two seasons and has not recorded a point -- but has 33 goals and 67 points in that span with the Amerks.

At least initially, it seems Bailey is not going to get top-line minutes in Buffalo. He practiced Friday on the fourth line, in Carrier's spot with Derek Grant and Nicolas Deslauriers. Bylsma is hoping to see the kind of production Bailey put forth in his NHL debut last year in Philadelphia, when he collected seven shots on goal.

"You just go back to his game against Philly last year to see what type of player he can be and where he can add," Bylsma said. "Even today in our 5-on-5 portion of our drills, the speed he's attacking the defensemen with and chasing the puck down is dangerous. He's got some great speed down the ice and that's where he's got to be effective for us.

"That could be on any line. It could be on the fourth line or it could be next to Jack" Eichel "for a portion of the time. That's something he has to earn with his play."

The 6-foot-3, 215-pound Bailey wants to quickly see his production in Rochester translate to the NHL.

"Everybody knows I'm fast and I'm big and I can score goals," he said. "That needs to translate here. From the top down, I'm being more detailed in practice to translate into the game. For me, that's building confidence early, playing simple in the first 10 minutes of the game. Once I'm confident playing fast, I'll be able to go do my thing."

Bailey's return to the NHL is one subplot to a game that has much darker ramifications for the Sabres. After blowing a 2-0 lead and losing to the Bruins, 4-2, Thursday in KeyBank Center, the Sabres would fall 10 points behind Boston for the Atlantic Division's final playoff slot with a regulation loss Saturday.

The players and staff were angrier than they have been after any game all season -- and probably after any game in several seasons. It will be interesting to see what the team's reaction will be.

"I feel a little bit like when you're in a playoff series," Bylsma said. "It's an emotional game, a game we poured a lot into and it's a huge disappointment losing that game and losing it the way we did. Now you've got to regroup, put it aside and have them again. That's kind of how I feel about it."

Bylsma said Carrier's hand was not broken during Thursday's fight, confirming what the coach said immediately after the game. There is no timetable for Carrier's return.

Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (back) did not make the trip to Boston. He will miss his second straight game, and his 16th overall this season. Cody Franson replaced Kulikov in the lineup Thursday.

Quick Hits: Bruins 3, Sabres 1

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 31, 2016

BOSTON -- Through their long history dating to 1924, the only team the Boston Bruins had never swept in a season series had been the Buffalo Sabres. That changed Saturday in TD Garden.

The Bruins were workmanlike in rolling past Buffalo, 3-1, in a New Year's Eve matinee before the usual sellout crowd of 17,595. As a result, they swept both a four-game season series and what the Sabres had labeled as the season's most important back-to-back set.

Frank Vatrano beat Robin Lehner on a quick shot just 1:28 into the first period and Boston never trailed again. Buffalo is now 10 points behind the Bruins, who hold third place and the final playoff spot in the Atlantic Division.

The Buffalo offense: The Sabres were already in a 3-0 hole when Jack Eichel scored his seventh goal of the season with 21.2 seconds left in the second period. It came on a one-time slapshot off a back pass from Rasmus Ristolainen, who posted his 22nd assist. Sam Reinhart got the secondary assist, extending his career-high point streak to six games.

The opener: Vatrano took a diagonal pass from Zdeno Chara and beat Lehner from the right circle on a shot that may have been deflected by Jake McCabe. It gave the Bruins a quick lead much like the one the Sabres took in their 4-2 loss Thursday in KeyBank Center. Marcus Foligno scored at 1:32 of that game.

Prescient point: During his pregame briefing with reporters a couple of hours before faceoff, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma bemoaned a major factor in the team's penalty killing problems was its simple inability to clear the puck out of its zone when it has control. That reared its head again on Patrice Bergeron's goal at 7:04 of the second period that added to Buffalo's woes as the league's worst PK unit.

With three seconds left on a slashing penalty to Eichel, Bergeron pounded home a Ryan Spooner feed to put Boston up, 2-0. It came a few seconds after Ristolainen had the puck on his stick and simply didn't get it out of the Buffalo zone. The puck never left the Sabres' end until it was in the net.

Soft one: Lehner would certainly want the Bruins' third goal back as former Sabres center Tim Schaller confounded him with a backhand between the legs from the right boards to put Boston in front 3-0 at 9:29 of the second period. It was the fifth goal of the season for Schaller, a New England native and former Providence College product who scored two goals in 35 games with the Sabres the last two years and spent most of the last three seasons in Rochester. He signed with the Bruins as an unrestricted free agent over the summer.

Not so special teams: The Sabres went 0 for 4 on the power play and managed just five shots on goal during those chances, including a 5-on-3 advantage for 67 seconds in the first period.

Matinee mania: The Bruins improved to 4-0 in afternoon games this season. The Sabres fell to 1-2. They have four more remaining, including next Saturday's visit by Winnipeg.

Add two more to the injury rolls: The first period was not kind to the Sabres. Johan Larsson was pounded into the boards by Boston defenseman Adam McQuaid and left with an apparent left arm/shoulder injury. Josh Gorges suffered a hip injury. Neither player returned. The Sabres, of course, were already playing without Ryan O'Reilly (appendectomy) and Dmitry Kulikov (back).

Up Next: The Sabres flew home immediately after the game but will head back on the road Monday for a tough two-game trip. They play the New York Rangers Tuesday night in Madison Square Garden and the Chicago Blackhawks Thursday in United Center.

Eichel's eruption says it all after another Sabres loss

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 31, 2016

BOSTON -- Another loss was in the books and there was virtually no sound in the Sabres' dressing room Saturday afternoon other than goaltender Robin Lehner quietly chatting with a small group of reporters. And then Mount Eichel erupted.

Jack Eichel, all of 20 years old, has clearly had enough with the morose brand of hockey this team is playing almost every game.

After a 3-1 loss to the Boston Bruins in TD Garden that wasn't nearly as close as the score might say, a red-faced Eichel went berserk. He fired some pieces of equipment into his duffel bag, pounded others on his locker seat and drove the bag hard into the rubberized floor at one point.

There were also some choice four-letter words spliced into the outburst of Eichel, who stormed out of the room without speaking to reporters even as a team PR official inquired if he would do so. Normal media practice in such spots might be to skewer a player -- especially such a young one -- for forsaking his league-mandated obligations, win or lose.

But this case is an exception. This is the face of the franchise clearly reaching his breaking point after a loss to his hometown team. And his actions spoke louder than any quote he could give reporters on this day.

Told about Eichel's tantrum, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma nodded over the anger described.

"I think every one of us should be," Bylsma said. "We know the situation we're in and we know how desperate we are at this point in the season to win hockey games. We should all find that desperation, that urgency and that anger."

Eichel scored the only Buffalo goal in the game, in the last minute of the second period on a Rasmus Ristolainen feed, but this was not one of his better efforts. He gave the puck away at times and was lax in the neutral zone, culminating in a lazy slashing penalty in the second period that led to Patrice Bergeron's power-play goal and a 2-0 Boston lead.

Eichel has to be frustrated playing on a line with Matt Moulson and Marcus Foligno, both of whom play a slower, grinding game. Without Sam Reinhart or Evander Kane on at least one wing, Eichel's speed is getting neutralized by his own team and that's not what a No. 2 overall draft pick expects.

Still, Buffalo's sixth loss in the last seven games hardly rests on Eichel's shoulders. Very little is going well right now.

The offense is stuck in the mud, with poor puck management killing any semblance of a speed game. The Sabres have been shut out or scored one goal 17 times, almost half their games. The bottom-six forwards contribute almost nothing, with fourth-liner Derek Grant playing the 72nd game of his NHL career without scoring a goal.

The penalty kill is last in the league, gave up a goal for the fourth straight game and succeeded at a pathetic 63.8 percent clip in December. The defense corps continues to be leaky and now the goaltending, which had been stellar the first two months, is showing similar cracks.

The Sabres have given up at least three goals for six straight games. Lehner was beaten by Frank Vatrano's snapshot at 1:28 of the first period and Buffalo never caught up. The team's starter took full responsibility for his big gaffe, allowing former Sabre Tim Schaller's backhand from the right boards to leak through him at 9:29 of the second to put Boston up 3-0.

The Sabres have won just 13 of 36 games on the season. They're last in the Eastern Conference, now 28th out of 30 teams in the NHL's overall standing and 10 points out of a playoff spot that seems like a pipe dream.

And unlike the 2013-14 and 2014-15 seasons, they're actually trying to win this time.

"Guys need to understand where we are in the season, where we are in the standings," said captain Brian Gionta. "We need to start making a move now. We can't continue to wait. We said before Christmas was a big week and we blew it and again this week we had two huge games coming in against these guys for that final divisional playoff spot so it's disappointing."

Things might get worse before General Manager Tim Murray decides to do anything to fix this mess. The Sabres' next two games are at New York and at Chicago -- and this disaster is about to get foisted upon the eyes of the nation. Both of those games will be televised coast to coast by NBC Sports Network.

The fans across the land might fall asleep watching the lifeless, boring hockey Bylsma's team plays most nights. There's no speed, no urgency. Nothing but limited forechecking, bad passes, bad decisions.

"Of course we're angry. We're disappointed," Lehner said. "We expect more but it feels like we're chasing it out there. It takes a lot of energy to get something going and then it doesn't take a lot for our opponents to get something. Two-on-1s, 3-on-2s, breakaways, whatever. They get a lot of good quality chances from not earning it and we have to earn everything. It seems like I can't tell you the last time we had a 2-on-1 or a breakaway."

"It's coming from our decision making with the puck," said Reinhart. "We're finding an open guy but it's not at the right time, not with the right support. When we do have success, everyone is on the same page and knows where that next play is. Everyone knows to track it down and get on that puck."

Murray is at the World Junior Championships in Montreal, watching No. 1 draft pick Alexander Nylander tear up the tournament for Sweden. You wonder if Nylander, who has struggled mightily at times in Rochester this year, and Nick Baptiste, atop the AHL goal scoring charts until last week, are looking at imminent trips to Buffalo.

You also wonder if Murray has to go outside looking for more help, be it to create a push this season or to be better ready to make one next year.

"We have to be better in this room, plain and simple," Gionta said. "It's on the guys in this room to be better. We've been better, we've shown spurts where we can do it."

This is Buffalo sports as we start 2017, with the honeymoon period long gone from Pegulaville. The Bills got eliminated from the playoffs last week and promptly fired their coach. Barring some unforeseen resurrection, the Sabres are essentially toast less than halfway through their season and the kid they put the weight of their franchise on is exasperated.

#OneBuffalo indeed.

Sabres notebook: Larsson out weeks with wrist injury

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

December 31, 2016

BOSTON -- What's another Sabres game without some injuries? There were two more in Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Boston Bruins and one looks like it will be major.

Center Johan Larsson suffered what coach Dan Bylsma termed a dislocated left wrist in the first period as he was crushed into the corner boards by Boston defenseman Adam McQuaid. The hit was a clean one as the pair engaged while chasing a loose puck and McQuaid caught Larsson off balance and sent him flying into the boards.

Bylsma had no firm timetable on Larsson other than to say his checking-line center would be out weeks. Larsson, who played 74 games last season, had not missed a game this year. He has six goals and five assists.

With Larsson and fellow center Ryan O'Reilly (appendectomy) both out of the lineup, the Sabres might have to go by position and call up Rochester captain Cal O'Reilly to fill a hole in their middle. Nick Baptiste, who was leading the AHL in goals until last week, could also be a candidate to play on the wing if Buffalo wants to shift Zemgus Girgensons to center.

Defenseman Josh Gorges exited in the first period with a hip pointer and was seen leaving TD Garden with a heavy limp. Bylsma had no update on his status. Taylor Fedun, who gave the Sabres some good minutes on 5-on-5 and the power play during his first NHL stint this year, could be a candidate to replace Gorges.

The Sabres have suffered 175 man games lost to injury this season, fourth in the NHL. They played Saturday without O'Reilly, Tyler Ennis (who missed his 24th game after double hernia surgery), Dmitry Kulikov (back) and William Carrier, who was sidelined after injuring his hand Thursday night.

Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner fell to 8-12-5 with the loss and is 3-3-1 in his last seven decisions after winning just one of his previous 10. With no back-to-backs on the Buffalo schedule until Jan. 12-13, Lehner may get the bulk of the action in the next couple of weeks.

"Sometimes you see a 60/40 split and sometimes it's a little greater than that," Bylsma said. "With this schedule, you're probably see something a little greater than that for Robin."

Lehner went 3-5-2 in December with a 2.69 goals-against average and .921 save percent. His numbers were eerily similar in November: 3-5-2/2.30/.924. For the season, he has a 2.51 GAA and .921 save percentage.

The Sabres finished December 5-6-3 -- the same record they posted in November. They were 3-3-2 in October. Buffalo is just 4-7-3 against the Atlantic Division and 7-12-7 against the Eastern Conference. The Sabres are 6-3-1 against the West.

The Bruins were not happy that linesmen tried to break up Carrier's fight with McQuaid on Thursday, which resulted in Carrier getting in some free shots while McQuaid's arms were tied up. The men in stripes were quick to step in at times again Saturday, notable when Evander Kane was chasing around Kevan Miller during one second-period confrontation.

That stemmed from a Kane hit on Miller as the final horn was sounding Thursday night in KeyBank Center. The Boston crowd booed as the players were broken up and Kane was given an extra 10-minute misconduct, clearly for his efforts to break free from an official.

Cracked Miller: "I think he was excited to fight when the referees came in and not before."

There was an emotional scene prior to the game as former Boston Pride player Denna Laing received a standing ovation from the crowd as she wheeled to center ice for a ceremonial faceoff between captains Brian Gionta of the Sabres and Zdeno Chara of Boston.

Laing was paralyzed from a spinal injury suffered during an exhibition game featuring her National Women's Hockey League team on Jan. 1 in Gillette Stadium in Foxborough on the weekend of the Winter Classic between the Bruins and Montreal Canadiens. She is continuing to rehab from her injuries.

Sabres Notebook: Larsson hospitalized; Carrier returns

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 1, 2017

Johan Larsson spent the weekend in a Boston hospital, but the Sabres hope the center will head back to Buffalo on Monday.

Coach Dan Bylsma said Larsson was hospitalized after suffering dislocations of his elbow and wrist.

"We'll have a further evaluation on his situation once he gets back here ... but he's definitely long term at this point," Bylsma said Sunday in KeyBank Center.

Larsson crashed hard into the boards while chasing a puck with Bruins defenseman Adam McQuaid. A two-way center, Larsson defends against top lines while putting up six goals and 11 points in 36 games.

"It'll be a real big loss," Bylsma said. "A tough guy to play against. He battles hard every night for us. He's been a leader in really having that grit and determination in our game."

The Sabres also lost defenseman Josh Gorges to a hip injury against the Bruins. He did not practice Sunday.

"Josh Gorges felt better," Bylsma said. "Hopefully, he'll continue to improve here."

Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner also sat out practice, with Bylsma terming the absence a maintenance day. Goaltending coach Andrew Allen served as the second netminder alongside Anders Nilsson.

Forward William Carrier, who missed Saturday's game with a hand injury, returned to practice and could play Tuesday when the Sabres visit the New York Rangers.

Carrier got hurt by a cross-check in front of the net several weeks ago, then further damaged the hand by fighting McQuaid on Thursday.

"I've been dealing with it for a little while now, and fighting is probably not the best for the hand," Carrier said.

He had to fight after a hit that concussed the Bruins' David Backes.

"I keep looking at it," Carrier said. "I was just trying to finish my hit, and I think he turned while I was finishing my hit. I played with him in St. Louis, too. I know the guy. I didn't want to injure him or anything. I know he's had a few concussions in the past, too, so I feel kind of bad for him."

Forward Tyler Ennis joined the Sabres for the opening of practice but left once battle drills began. He is still a week or two away from returning after sports hernia/groin surgery.

"He's just assimilating back into practice where he can and when he can," Bylsma said.

Officials prevented the Sabres' Evander Kane and the Bruins' Kevan Miller from fighting Saturday, with Miller saying Kane was "excited to fight when the referees came in and not before."

They traded jabs more Sunday, with Kane taking to Twitter in the morning.

Wrote Kane: "When a guy pretends to want to fight and only chirps when the 6'6 linesman is standing in the way. #KevanMiller #pretender #stoplying"

Miller responded after the Bruins' practice.

"He wanted to fight when the refs came in and now he's using Twitter," Miller told Boston reporters. "He seems to have to say that when we don't play them again. That's my thought. He knew I wanted to" fight. "There's no ands, ifs or buts about it.

"Everybody on his team knew I wanted to and I'm pretty sure everybody on his team knows how I feel about him. There's always next year."

Eichel tired of Sabres' poor play, wants improvement

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 1, 2017

Jack Eichel is sick of losing.

"At the end of the day it's about one thing and one thing only, and that's winning hockey games," he said. "However that needs to happen, it needs to happen."

The center is furious with the Sabres' play and wants improvements across the board. He is equally as adamant that the season is not yet lost for the last-place club.

"I don't think we've hit the halfway point yet," Eichel said Sunday. "I'm sure not giving up on this, and I don't think anyone else is. Have we" frittered "away some good opportunities for ourselves to put ourselves in a good position? Yes, but there's still a lot of hockey to be played."

A trip home from Boston and the flip of the calendar did nothing to change Eichel's mood. He showed his anger after Saturday's loss to the Bruins, and he voiced his irritation after practice in KeyBank Center.

"As a whole team, everyone needs to look in the mirror and we all need to get a lot better," he said. "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."

Buffalo has sunk back into last in the Eastern Conference by going 1-4-2 in its last seven games. There are 10 points and seven teams between them and a playoff spot.

What needs to be better?

"Everything," Eichel said. "Power play, we had a five-on three, we don't score. It's not good enough. Penalty kill, we continue to put pucks on the other team's stick on the kill. It's not good enough. Five-on-five, we don't score enough goals either."

An inability to score remains the Sabres' biggest problem. They're averaging 2.14 goals per game, tied for 29th in the NHL. In their 36 games, they have just 49 even-strength goals.

The Sabres have been without key players, including Ryan O'Reilly and Eichel, but the second-year pro doesn't care about injury-induced line changes or anything else.

"We're just not executing well enough," Eichel said. "I don't think as a group that we should be blaming what's going on on line changes and injuries because every team deals with it. Obviously with us we've had some key players injured at key times in the year and have not played 100 percent as a team in the two years that I've been here, which is frustrating."

"This is also hockey, and injuries are going to happen. We need to find a way to get over that."

So far, nearly every setback has led to another one. The Sabres are at their low point because all of the recent losses have come against teams directly ahead of them in the standings.

It certainly seems like the season is slipping away, but there is time to turn things around. The St. Louis Blues were last in the Western Conference on New Year's Day during the 2008-09 season. They closed with a 27-11-7 record to make the playoffs.

Buffalo will have to do something similar. The Sabres have 34 points and need to finish in the 95-point range for a postseason chance. With 46 games left, they will have to play at a points percentage of .663. They are at .472 now with a 13-15-8 record.

"If we play how we can and we win hockey games at the rate we can, it can put us in that area where we think we're going to need to be to be in playoff consideration," coach Dan Bylsma said. "That's really got to be the focus for us here.

"But it also can't wait for another 20 games to say that same situation. We have to realize the situation we're in now, and we've got to win 60 percent of our points the rest of the way out for sure."

The schedule resumes with a two-game road trip. Buffalo visits the New York Rangers on Tuesday and the Chicago Blackhawks on Thursday. The teams have a combined home record of 26-10-5.

That's the kind of success Eichel wants for the Sabres. They haven't had it, and his frustration level is high.

"I don't think it's about me," he said. "All these guys have probably been winners their whole life. We're a group. We're one. We go through adversity as a team together, and the highs when we win games it's also together.

"I think everybody here is pretty" angry "with themselves and the way things have went. We've got a game against New York in New York on Tuesday, another opportunity to get two points and win a game. That's all that matters. At the end of the day, nothing really matters but winning."

Sabres Notebook: Larsson done for year; Gorges back

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 2, 2017

Johan Larsson's season is over.

The Sabres center is back in Buffalo after surgery on his wrist and elbow, but he won't be back on the ice in 2016-17.

"Unfortunately my season is over," Larsson said in a text Monday to Gotland Newspapers in his homeland of Sweden.

Larsson dislocated his wrist and elbow while careening into the boards during Saturday's loss to the Bruins. He had surgery in a Boston hospital over the weekend and returned to Buffalo on Monday.

"It's sad to see," center Zemgus Girgensons said in KeyBank Center. "That's a tough one to see him go. He contributes so much to our team. He's definitely a big loss."

Larsson has been one of the Sabres' top two-way centers for the past two seasons. He also put up six goals and 11 points in 36 games this year.

The 24-year-old is on a one-year, \$950,000 contract. He is scheduled to be a restricted free agent July 1.

Josh Gorges practiced alongside Rasmus Ristolainen as the Sabres prepared for Tuesday's road game against the New York Rangers. The defenseman left Saturday's game with a hip injury and skipped Sunday's practice.

"Things are looking good," Gorges said. "It seems each day to get a little bit better, so it's a good sign."

Gorges left midway through the first period of the loss to the Bruins.

"It was to a point where I didn't have strength, so to go out there you're putting yourself in jeopardy but you're also putting your teammates in jeopardy," Gorges said. "If I don't have the ability to skate and turn and make a proper play, I'm putting myself and my team in a bad position. I couldn't do it."

The Sabres' other defensive pairs were Jake McCabe with Zach Bogosian, and Justin Falk with Cody Franson. McCabe suffered a leg injury midway through practice but finished the session.

Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov was scheduled to meet with a doctor Monday and did not join the Sabres on their two-game road trip. Coach Dan Bylsma is expected to have more information regarding Kulikov's back injury Tuesday.

Kulikov will miss his third straight game with an injury that has lingered since the preseason.

The Sabres sent forward Hudson Fasching to Rochester in October, but the prospect has yet to suit up for the Amerks because of a groin injury.

"He's skating now, has been for a number of days," Bylsma said. "Hopefully, that means he's progressing to a heavier workload and back to play."

With no goals in 72 career games, Sabres center Derek Grant is inching toward history. Only two forwards have ever played more games without scoring. Enforcer Gord Dwyer had no goals in 108 games, while Tim Sestito was scoreless in 101 games.

Grant has taken 30 shots in 32 games with the Sabres this season. He has 88 shots in 72 games with Ottawa, Calgary and Buffalo.

"It would be a huge boost to get one from throughout your lineup and to get one from the fourth line," Bylsma said.

Sabres' centers have daunting challenge ahead

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
January 2, 2017

If the Sabres aren't careful, this could be their worst week yet. That's why Dan Bylsma's message is simple:

Be careful.

As Bylsma's team prepared for a two-game road trip featuring the New York Rangers and Chicago Blackhawks, the coach preached about the importance of puck management. He said it during Monday's meetings. He said it during a profanity-laced speech at center ice. He said it during his news conference.

"You don't want to go chance-for-chance with the teams that we're playing here," Bylsma said in KeyBank Center. "You don't want to go offense-for-offense or run-and-gun. You do have to limit what they get by how you play with the puck. That's a focus for us in the next two games."

The Sabres heard him. The tough part is it may not matter.

While the goal-challenged Sabres won't try to win 6-5 games, it's also doubtful they'll be able to keep it 2-1. Buffalo's top two-way centers, Ryan O'Reilly and Johan Larsson, are out against two of the NHL's top offensive teams.

Since the home team has the last line change, New York and Chicago will be able to send their lethal scorers against their choice of Zemgus Girgensons, Sam Reinhart, Derek Grant or Jack Eichel.

"It changes the situation fairly dramatically in terms of matchups and situations," Bylsma said. "Zemgus will kind of assume the position that Lars was in. A little bit of the defensive situations, he'll be favored playing in defensive zone on the road and those types of situations. Jack's going to get the matchup against whoever they see fit. On the road, that's going to be a challenge for him."

It'll be a challenge for all four centers. While Buffalo is tied for 29th in scoring at 2.14 goals per game, the Rangers are third at 3.41 and the Blackhawks are 15th at 2.65.

The teams are even better at home. New York, which hosts the Sabres on Tuesday, scores 3.6 times per game in Madison Square Garden. The Blackhawks, who will welcome the Sabres on Thursday, average 3.1 goals in United Center.

"It's not going to be a 0-0 game going into overtime and a shootout," Reinhart said. "You've just got to prepare for that and try to limit their Grade A opportunities."

It wouldn't be a surprise if Reinhart saw the Rangers' and Blackhawks' best forwards. He is centering offensive-minded Evander Kane and rookie Justin Bailey. The opponents could decide to test the trio's defensive game.

"Down the middle we're going to have to step up and all play a more solid game and two-way game," Reinhart said. "It's worrisome if you're not looking forward to these two games. Obviously, with some guys out the opportunity is there for us to have, and we're all going to have to step up."

The Sabres' other lines will feature Eichel between Marcus Foligno and Kyle Okposo, Girgensons in the middle of William Carrier and Brian Gionta, and Grant centering for Nicolas Deslauriers and Matt Moulson.

There's no clear-cut shutdown line, but Bylsma is banking they'll be up to the challenge.

"You don't want to concede the fact that they're going to get their chances," Bylsma said. "We have to play good defensively. We have to play responsible defensively. We have to play responsible defensively with the puck."

They also have to win. The Sabres are 1-4-2 in their last seven games and have fallen 10 points out of a playoff spot.

"We can't be blind and ignorant to the fact of where we are," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We know where we stand. We can look at it as this is an opportunity for us to get on a roll, get things going, get things moving in the right direction.

"This is a road trip that we're playing two of the best teams in the league. It's gut-check time. It's time for us to find out what we're made of as a group and as individuals."

Sabres recall Bailey

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 30, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Justin Bailey has been called up from Rochester to replace the injured Will Carrier. Carrier has been playing with a sore hand and re-injured it during a fight with Adam McQuad. Carrier does not have a broken hand and there's no time-table for his return.

Bailey was part of the first cuts coming out of training camp and was swapped out for Carrier after being called up for two games earlier this season. Bailey practiced on Friday with Derek Grant and Nick Deslauriers. Dan Bylsma gave Carrier opportunity with Ryan O'Reilly and he said Bailey has a chance to earn opportunities for more ice-time, "I think he so, I think with Justin if you go back to his game against Philly last year, you see what type of player he can be and where he can add his speed, even today in our 5-on-5 portion of our drills, the speed he's attacking the defensemen with, that's where he's got to be effective for us and that could be on any line and that's something he has to earn with his play."

You always wonder how a young player will react when things don't go well for him. Bailey said this season has definitely been a learning experience, "Both of those were disappointments, but I've been itching to get back up here and for me, every time I come up here I want to stay as long as I can, I want to do better all the things that got me sent down last time and show them that I've improved."

Anytime a player gets sent down, he'll get instructions from Dan Bylsma and Tim Murray about what they have to work on. Bailey said, "I think just my details, everyone knows I'm fast, everyone knows I'm big and everyone knows I can score goals, so I think that needs to translate here, but from the top down, being more detailed whether it's in practice or in the game."

Bailey has 13 goals and 22 points in 31 games with Rochester. Bailey is on a five game point string scoring five goals and seven points.

Bailey has gotten to see the opportunities Carrier has earned since coming up and the winger knows that can happen to him too, "I think there's a lot of opportunity to be had, so for me whatever my role is, it's going to be different than in Rochester, so I need to adjust to that and simplify my game and do those little things well to keep myself up here."

Dmitry Kulikov is still day-to-day and will not make the trip to Boston. That means Justin Falk remains in the lineup.

The Sabres practiced Friday at HarborCenter and then flew to Boston.

Sabres' Carrier's hand is improving

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

December 31, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Will Carrier is back at practice despite re-injuring his hand during a fight against the Bruins. Carrier hit David Backes giving him a concussion.

After serving a minor penalty, Carrier was jumped by Adam McQuaid. He said his hand is better and maybe a fight wasn't the best idea, "It feels pretty good, I have to deal with it."

"It's been a couple of weeks and getting into a fight probably wasn't the best idea."

Carrier made the hit and wasn't surprised that he had to answer for it, "Yes after that hit I knew it was coming, I was waiting for it."

Carrier was in the Blues organization before being traded to the Sabres, so he knows Backes. He said he has not been in contact with him since the hit.

Carrier has played 24 games with the Sabres and had a good stretch with Ryan O'Reilly. Despite all that, he has two NHL points. Carrier still believes he can produce points at this level, "Yes, I've had a lot of chances, a lot of shots and passes and some Grade A chances and I'm just not burring it right now, but I think once one goes in, then the rest of them will go in too."

Josh Gorges practiced fully and said his hip feels much better. He's hoping to play against the Rangers.

Dan Bylsma said Johan Larsson had surgery on his dislocated wrist and his elbow. Larsson returned from Boston on Monday morning.

Tyler Ennis didn't skate with the team, but Bylsma said that he wasn't scheduled to be on the ice.

Dmitry Kulikov is not going to be on the road trip and is seeing a doctor on Monday afternoon.

Bylsma said it's possible the Sabres could call a player up for the trip to New York and Chicago.

From the locker room: Sabres-Bruins

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 31, 2016

Robin Lehner:

"It just felt like there wasn't a lot of life today for some reason. Couldn't really get going. They're a good defensive team with a good goaltender. Rask makes two good saves, and if you want to win against a team like this you gotta have a little more than that. We let up a little bit... We gotta work better. Everyone."

"Of course we're angry, we're disappointed. We expect more but it feel like we're chasing it out there. It takes a lot of energy for us to get something going, then it doesn't take a lot for our opponents to get something like a 2-on-1, 3-on-2, breakaways, whatever. Sometimes they get a lot of good, quality chances from them earning it. We have to earn everything."

Samson Reinhart:

"We had out opportunities. We had out looks. It's frustrating. Something has to change and it has to come from the inside."

"Right now [we're struggling] with our decision making with the puck. We're finding an open guy, but it's not at the right time. It's not with the right support. When we do have success, everyone's on that same page. Everyone knows where that next play is and everyone's going to track it down and get on the puck."

Brian Gionta:

"It's a tough league. When you're not committed to [the game] for 60 minutes, you're not going to come out of it on the winning end. We need to find a way as a group to buy into that, and make sure we're doing that as a collective group."

"We need to get more desperate. Guys need to understand where we are in the season and in the standings. We need to start making a move now. We can't continue to wait. We said it before Christmas, it was a big week and we blew it. And then again this week we had two huge games coming in against these guys for the final divisional playoff spot. It's disappointing."

Dan Bylsma:

"The challenge for our team is being able to play for 60 minutes. Every game is not perfect, and this game certainly wasn't. They got the early lead, Larsson gets injured early on and only plays a few short minutes, Gorges also gets injured and we're stuck with a short bench. We had opportunities on the powerplay to get back into this game and we came up short there."

"I think everyone of us should be [as emotional as Eichel]. We know the situation we're in and we know how desperate we are at this point in the season to win games. We should all find that desperation, that urgency, and that anger."

Bruins sweep season series; beat Sabres 3-1

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

December 31, 2016

Buffalo, NY (WGR550) -- After losing a two-goal lead on Thursday night at the KeyBank Center, the Buffalo Sabres were looking for revenge against the Boston Bruins on Saturday at the TD Garden in Boston. But the Bruins get out to an early lead and hold on to beat the Sabres 3-1 and sweep the 2016-17 season series between the two teams.

With the loss on Saturday, The Sabres fall 10 points behind the Bruins in the Atlantic Division standings. Boston currently holds the third and final spot in the division behind the Ottawa Senators and Montreal Canadiens.

The Sabres went into the game without defenseman Dmitry Kulikov for the second straight game as he continues to deal with a lingering back injury. Sabres forward William Carrier left Thursday's game after suffering a hand injury after a fight with Adam McQuaid.

With Carrier out of the lineup, the Sabres called up Williamsville native Justin Bailey on Friday from the Rochester Americans for the second time this season. Bailey has been playing red-hot for the Amerks recently with five goals in his last four games, and points in his last five games.

For Boston, David Backes did not play after taking a hit from Carrier on Thursday night. The Bruins have confirmed that Backes suffered a concussion as a result of the hit.

The Sabres turned back to Robin Lehner in goal after stopping 34 of 37 shots he faced on Thursday. The Bruins also turned back to Tuukka Rask in goal after a 31 save performance.

It did not take long for the Bruins to get on the board with a goal from Frank Vatrano just 90-seconds into the contest. Vatrano put a shot on goal that looked to go off the stick of Jake McCabe and past Lehner on the blocker side.

A few moments later, Johan Larsson was knocked down by McQuaid while pursuing a puck into the Boston corner. Larsson would go into the boards and get his left arm caught up behind his body. Larsson left the ice holding his arm and did not return.

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McQuaid drills Larsson

1:27 PM - 31 Dec 2016

43 43 Retweets 85 85 likes

The Sabres had a chance to tie the game with 8:20 to go in the period with a 5-on-3 powerplay for 1:07, but the Bruins were able to kill off both penalties.

The Sabres were unable to get on the scoreboard after 20 minutes of play. The Bruins led 1-0 in the scoring department, and led in the shots on goal department, 9-5.

The Sabres' penalty kill was tested again after Jack Eichel went off for slashing David Pastrnak. With three-seconds left in the penalty kill, the Bruins went up 2-0 after Patrice Bergeron beat Lehner with a quick shot from the slot. Ryan Spooner and Brad Marchand were credited with the assists on the goal.

Just 2:25 later, former Sabre Tim Schaller gave Boston a 3-0 lead after beating Lehner with a soft backhand through the five hole. Tory Krug and Austin Czarnik were given credit for the helpers.

The Sabres finally put up a goal on the scoreboard in the dying seconds of the second period. After a drop pass from Rasmus Ristolainen behind his back, Eichel one-times a shot from the top of the left faceoff circle that beats Rask to cut the deficit to two. The assists on the goal were given to Rasmus Ristolainen and Sam Reinhart.

The period ended with the Bruins up 3-1 with shots on goal all even at 18-18.

More injury news came down from the Sabres at the start of the third period. Defenseman Josh Gorges had suffered a hip injury during the game, and did not return to action.

The Sabres were able to put up a couple of good chances in the third period, but the Bruins would hold on to their 3-1 lead and win by that score. The final shot totals in the game ended in favor of Boston, 28-27.

Following the game, head coach Dan Bylsma updated the media on the injuries to Gorges and Larsson. Gorges left the game with a hip pointer, while Larsson suffered a dislocation in his arm. Bylsma says that Larsson's injury could result in him missing time on a week-to-week basis.

First Period

Scoring:

1-0 Boston - Bruins goal (1:30)

Frank Vatrano scores his second goal of the season on a shot that beat Robin Lehner on the blocker side. The lone assist on the goal was credited to Zdeno Chara.

Penalties:

1-0 Boston - Sabres penalty (8:23)

Cody Franson gets a two-minute penalty for hooking Anton Blidh. Sabres successfully kill off the penalty.

1-0 Boston - Bruins penalty (10:47)

Brad Marchand went off for two-minutes for slashing Jack Eichel. The Bruins are able to kill off the penalty.

1-0 Boston - Bruins penalty (11:40)

Tim Schaller goes off for two-minutes after hooking Rasmus Ristolainen. Boston was successful at killing off the penalty.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: None

BOS: Vatrano (2)

Penalty Summary

BUF: Fanson - Hooking (8:23)

BOS: Marchand - Slashing (10:47); Schaller (11:40)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 5, BOS - 9

Second Period

Scoring:

2-0 Boston - Bruins powerplay goal (7:04)

Patrice Bergeron scores his seventh goal of the season on the powerplay. Ryan Spooner and Brad Marchand are credited with the assists.

3-0 Boston - Bruins goal (9:29)

Tim Schaller scores on a backhand that beats Lehner through the five-hole. Torey Krug and Austin Czarnik get the assists.

3-1 Boston - Sabres goal (19:38)

Jack Eichel scores on a one-time that beats Tuukka Rask on the glove side. Rasmus Ristolainen and Sam Reinhart are credited with the assists.

Penalties:

1-0 Boston - Sabres penalty (5:06)

Eichel goes off for two minutes for slashing David Pastrnak. Boston scores with :03 left on the penalty kill.

3-0 Boston - Bruins penalty (10:55)

Kevan Miller is given a two-minute roughing penalty after a mix up with Evander Kane.

3-0 Boston - Sabres penalty (10:55)

Evander Kane is given a two-minute penalty for unsportsmanlike conduct after a mix up with Kevan Miller. Kane was also given a ten-minute misconduct.

3-0 Boston - Bruins penalty (13:02)

Dominic Moore was penalized for tripping Sam Reinhart, but the Bruins are able to kill off the penalty.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: Eichel (7)

BOS: Bergeron (7); Schaller (5)

Penalty Summary

BUF: Eichel - Slashing (5:06); Kane - Unsportsmanlike conduct (10:55); Kane - 10 minute misconduct (10:55)

BOS: K. Miller - Roughing (10:55); Moore - Tripping (13:02)

Shots on Goal

BUF -13 (18) , BOS - 9 (18)

Third Period

Penalties:

3-1 Boston - Bruins penalty (4:55)

Czarnik is called for interference on Sam Reinhart, but the Bruins are able to kill off the penalty.

3-1 Boston - Sabres penalty (9:17)

Ristolainen goes off for two minutes after a hold on Schaller. Buffalo was able to kill the penalty off.

End of Regulation

Goal Summary

BUF: None

BOS: None

Penalty Summary

BUF: Ristolainen - Holding (9:17)

BOS: Czarnik - Interference (4:55)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 9 (27), BOS - 10 (28)

Bruins - 3, Sabres - 1

FINAL

Game Notes:

With the Bruins win, it is the first time in the Sabres-Bruins rivalry in which Boston has swept a season series with Buffalo. The Sabres lead the all-time matchup with a 121-120-29-15 record.

Goaltending

BUF - Lehner - 25 saves

BOS - Rask - 26 saves

Power Plays

BUF - 0 for 4

BOS - 1 for 3

Three Stars

1.) Tuukka Rask (BOS)

2.) Zdeno Chara (BOS)

3.) Tim Schaller (BOS)

What's Next:

The Sabres will continue their three-game road trip in the Big Apple when they face the New York Rangers. Faceoff is at 7 p.m. and you can hear all the action on WGR with Rick Jeannaret and Rob Ray on the call.

Sabres' Johan Larsson out weeks with dislocated wrist

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

December 31, 2016

Buffalo Sabres center Johan Larsson suffered a dislocated left wrist in this afternoon's 3-1 loss to the Bruins and will be sidelined "weeks," coach Dan Bylsma told reporters in Boston.

Larsson's left arm bore the brunt of the impact after Adam McQuaid hit him in the corner early in the first period.

Later in Buffalo's sixth loss in seven games, defenseman Josh Gorges left with a hip pointer, Bylsma said.

The Sabres, who just seemed to be getting healthy following a rash of injuries, are also missing defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (back) and forwards William Carrier (hand), Tyler Ennis (groin) and Ryan O'Reilly (appendectomy).

Sabres prospect Justin Bailey ready for fresh opportunity

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
December 31, 2016

BUFFALO – Instead of being given a spot on a scoring line Friday, winger Justin Bailey, the AHL's hottest scorer, mostly practiced beside center Derek Grant and Nick Deslauriers, an odd place for one of the Sabres' top prospects.

Grant and Deslauriers have zero goals and three assists between them in 45 games this season. Incredibly, Grant hasn't scored a goal in 71 career NHL appearances. Deslauriers has more fights (14) than goals (12).

Bailey, meanwhile, has rattled off five goals and seven points in his last five games with the Rochester Americans, gaudy numbers that helped the Williamsville native receive another recall Friday.

So what gives? What happened to putting prospects in a position to succeed in the NHL?

The message from Sabres coach Dan Bylsma is clear: Bailey, who, it should be noted, is pointless in 10 NHL games, must earn time on a scoring line.

So while the 6-foot-3, 214-pound Bailey might start this afternoon's road tilt against the Boston Bruins on the fourth line, the second-year pro could earn a promotion.

"He's got some great speed down the ice, and that's where he's got to be effective for us," Bylsma said inside HarborCenter. "That could be on any line. It could be on the fourth line, or it could be next to Jack (Eichel) for a portion of that time. But that's something he has to earn with his play."

The Sabres summoned Bailey, 21, because winger William Carrier hurt his hand fighting Adam McQuaid early in Thursday's 4-2 loss to the Bruins. Carrier's hand isn't broken, Bylsma said. The rookie has had a hand injury all season.

"He exasperated it a little bit last night with the scuffle," Bylsma said.

Given his torrid stretch, Bailey was the natural choice to replace Carrier. Bailey has 13 goals and 22 points in 31 games with the Amerks.

"I got a little bit of confidence going into the (Christmas) break scoring-wise," Bailey said. "Lately, I've just been clicking. I've found some good chemistry with (center) Timmy Kennedy. I've felt pretty good and pretty hot down there."

But Bailey didn't begin the season hot. Fresh off a 20-goal, 45-point rookie season that included eight NHL games, the 2013 second-round pick was among the first players assigned to the Amerks in training camp.

The Sabres recalled Bailey in early November, but sent him back after two unimpressive outings as a fourth-liner and summoned Carrier.

"Both of those were disappointments," Bailey said. "I think I've been itching to get back up here. ... I want to (improve) all the things that got me sent down last time and show them I could do it."

Working on the details of his game, Bailey said, has helped buoy him recently.

"From training camp to even the first little bit of the season, there's been a lot of ups and downs," Bailey said. "I keep telling myself while I'm on this hot streak to remember what this feeling's like, try to bring that to the rink every single day."

The key today, he believes, will be building his confidence early.

"Playing simple probably in the first 10 minutes of the game," Bailey said. "Then once I have confidence playing fast and I'm confident, I'll be able to go out there and do my thing."

If Bailey can utilize his size and speed, then perhaps he will move up. Despite having just one NHL goal, Carrier has spent much of his time skating beside top center Ryan O'Reilly.

"There's a lot of opportunity to be had," Bailey said. "(Carrier has) done a great job since he's been up here playing fast and physical and playing simple. For me, whatever my role is, it's obviously going to be different than Rochester. I need to adjust to that and simplify my game to stay up here."

Bylsma said: "Will's the guy who took a hold of the opportunity."

Sabres' woes frustrating Jack Eichel: 'We all need to get a lot better

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 2, 2017

BUFFALO – Sabres center Jack Eichel walked back into the dressing room Sunday looking sullen. His hood was pulled tightly over his head and the normally affable youngster didn't smile.

A day after his reeling team's sixth loss in seven games, an embarrassing 3-1 setback that made Eichel lose his cool, the second-year star was still ticked off.

"As a whole team, everyone needs to look in the mirror and we all need to get a lot better," a blunt Eichel said after practice inside KeyBank Center.

Saturday afternoon's loss in Boston, Eichel's hometown, felt more like a 6-0 defeat than a two-goal game. Following the tilt, the 20-year-old reportedly erupted, throwing his equipment and cursing before storming out of the dressing room.

The incident, Eichel said, "was a little bit blown out of proportion." Still, despite his age, his actions and words get noticed. Eichel, after all, is the face of the franchise.

The Sabres' struggles clearly have him seething. What needs to change for the last-place team?

"Everything," Eichel quickly replied. "Power play, I mean, we have a five-on-three, we don't score. It's not good enough. Penalty kill, we continue to put pucks on the other team's stick on the kill. Five-on-five, we don't score enough goals, either."

Eichel said his frustration level is "probably pretty high."

"We have one win in our last (seven), so I think as a team we shouldn't be happy about where we're at," he said.

The Sabres are 16th in the 16-team Eastern Conference, just 13-15-8. Translated, they've lost 23 of 36 games. After two losses in three days to Boston, the team they're chasing, the playoffs look highly unlikely. Sportsclubstats.com gives them just a 2.3 percent chance of making it.

"I'm sure not giving up on this, and I don't think anyone else is," Eichel said. "Have we (thrown) away some good opportunities for ourselves to put ourselves in a good position? Yes. It's still a lot of hockey to be played."

Injuries, of course, haven't helped the Sabres. They endured a rash earlier in the season – Eichel missed 21 games with a high left ankle sprain – and are experiencing a second wave now, with five players, including centers Ryan O'Reilly and Johan Larsson sidelined.

"I don't think as a group we should be blaming what's going on with line changes, injuries, because every team goes through it," Eichel said. "Obviously, with us, we've had some key players injured at key times in the year and we have not played 100 percent as a team in the two years that I've been here, which is frustrating. But this is also hockey, and injuries are going to happen."

Eichel, like most elite young talents, won a lot of games before making the NHL. The current stretch is one of the worst of his career.

"I don't think it's about me," Eichel said. "I think all these guys have probably been winners their whole life. We're a group. We're one. We go through adversity as a team together. The highs when we win games, it's also together.

"I think I speak for the team in saying we're frustrated in where we're at. ... Everyone here is pretty (angry) with themselves."

xxx

Larsson, who is out weeks, stayed in a Boston hospital dealing with the dislocated left wrist *and* dislocated elbow he suffered early after Adam McQuaid hit him.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma mentioned the elbow for the first time Sunday.

Losing Larsson, a tenacious third-line center with offensive skill, is "real big," Bylsma said. "He's quietly and not so quietly become ... a tough guy to play against," he said. "He battles hard every night for us, and he's been a leader in really having that grit and determination in our game. You felt it even in the game (Saturday)."

Meanwhile, Sabres winger William Carrier practiced Sunday after missing Saturday's game with a left hand injury. Carrier aggravated the injury in Thursday's 4-2 loss to Boston fighting McQuaid, who wanted payback for the rookie's hit on David Backes. "Fighting is probably not best for the hand," said Carrier, who could return Tuesday against the New York Rangers.

Carrier wasn't reprimanded for the hit, which concussed Backes.

"I looked at it a few times," Carrier said. "I was just trying to finish my hit. I think he kind of turned while I was finishing my hit. I played with him in St. Louis (training camp), too, so I know the guy. It wasn't bad. I didn't want to injure him. I know he had a few (concussions) in the past, too, so I feel kind of badly for him."

Carrier said a cross check injured his hand a few weeks ago.

In other injury news, defenseman Josh Gorges, who left Saturday's game with a hip pointer, sat out practice. Bylsma said Gorges feels better. Sabres winger Tyler Ennis, who practiced last week, skated on his own Sunday. Ennis had groin surgery Nov. 10.

Sabres' Johan Larsson out indefinitely after surgery for dislocated elbow, wrist

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 2, 2017

BUFFALO – Sabres center Johan Larsson has undergone surgery for his dislocated elbow and wrist is out indefinitely, coach Dan Bylsma said.

Larsson, who was injured when Adam McQuaid hit him early in Saturday afternoon's 3-1 loss to the Bruins, flew back from Boston today.

Update: According to The Buffalo News, Larsson told Gotland Newspapers in his homeland of Sweden through a text message his season is over.

The Swede's absence leaves the Sabres woefully thin down the middle. With Ryan O'Reilly out after having an appendectomy last week, the Sabres are down two of their top three centers. Larsson, a tenacious and versatile presence, usually centers the third line, a strong checking trio.

Zemgus Girgensons took Larsson's spot today, pivoting William Carrier and captain Brian Gionta.

"Zemgus will kind of assume the position Lars was in, a little bit of the defensive situations he'll be favored in," Bylsma said today following practice inside KeyBank Center.

That means Girgensons will face some prime talent during the Sabres' two-game road trip against the Rangers and Chicago Blackhawks, which starts Tuesday in New York.

The reeling Sabres, losers of six of the last seven contests, roared back to beat the potent Rangers here Dec. 1, arguably their best victory this season.

"When we look back at that game and think about it, we didn't do anything fancy," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We came to work. We knew what we were up against. We knew we were playing a team that you got to have one of your best game, and tomorrow's going to be no different. We got to be at our best."

In other news, Gorges, who left Saturday's game with a hip pointer, practiced today and could return Tuesday.

"It was to a point where I didn't have strength," Gorges said about Saturday. "To go out there, you're really putting yourself in jeopardy but you're also putting your teammates in jeopardy. If I don't have the ability to skate and turn and make a proper play, I'm putting myself and my team in a bad position."

Some other injury updates:

– Winger Tyler Ennis, who returned to practice Thursday following groin surgery Nov. 10, didn't skate with his teammates today. Ennis is still on pace to play within seven to 10 days, Bylsma said.

– Defenseman Dmitry Kulikov (lower back) is seeing a doctor today, Bylsma said.

– In Rochester Americans injury news, rookie winger Hudson Fasching, out with a "serious" groin pull since Oct. 22, recently started skating again, Bylsma said.

"Hopefully, that means he's progressing to a higher workload and back to the ice," he said.

The Sabres could make a recall for the trip, Bylsma said.

Sabres' offense struggling to score after hot stretch

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 3, 2017

BUFFALO – As expected, Jack Eichel's return following a 21-game absence to begin the season has boosted the Sabres' anemic offense.

In 15 games with their slick young center, the last-place Sabres have scored 39 goals, or 2.6 an outing, a decent number. By comparison, they scored only 38 goals, just 1.8 a contest, without him.

So Eichel's presence has meant almost an extra goal a game entering tonight's tilt against the New York Rangers, the start of a two-game road trip.

But additional goals haven't buoyed the Sabres, who have also allowed more since Eichel returned from a high left ankle sprain Nov. 29.

The 28th-ranked offense has also sputtered recently, scoring only 13 times during a dismal 1-4-2 run.

Being bad *and* boring is a terrible combination. Offensively, the Sabres often showcase little speed and look disjointed. If they score – opponents have blanked or held them to one goal 18 times this season – the joke has become they have their goal for the night.

Right now, with 77 goals through 36 games, 2.1 a contest, the Sabres are on pace for 175 goals this season, which would be the third-lowest full-season total in franchise history.

Despite having the NHL's eighth-ranked power play, they've scored a league-low 52 five-on-five goals.

"Five-on-five, we're still trying to find our rhythm in terms of being consistent for 60 minutes at a time, creating those quality chances," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said Monday inside KeyBank Center. "I think we'll have a period where we create those quality chances, and then we'll get into penalty trouble or we'll turn the puck over a little bit and lose the momentum."

In addition to Eichel's dynamic scoring prowess, his return allowed some teammates to move back to their natural positions and not be forced into different roles.

Still, that hasn't meant much recently. Even before top center Ryan O'Reilly underwent an appendectomy during Christmas break, the offense started sputtering again.

"I don't think you can expect to have as much offense without him there," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

Eichel and O'Reilly, the team's top centers, have only played together 12 times this season. They've missed 30 combined games.

What else has changed recently?

"Probably consistency with how we played with the puck offensively," Bylsma said. "You see (strong offensive play) at times, in spurts of games when we're coming back or the first period against Boston (on Thursday)."

The Sabres scored two goals in the opening period Thursday, then allowed four straight in a 4-2 loss. They've scored one goal in the five periods since then.

"We probably haven't played well enough to score that third and fourth goal in a game, and that's kind of what has been hindering us most of the season," said Sabres winger Kyle Okposo, who has a team-high 10 goals. "Odds are you got to score three goals to win in this league."

The Sabres have scored three or more goals only 13 times this season.

What else has contributed to the Sabres' meager offensive production?

Little secondary scoring

Seven players who should dress for tonight's game have scored zero goals this season. Four others have scored three or less.

The fourth line has contributed almost nothing. While eight-goal winger Matt Moulson recently joined the trio, its other current members, center Derek Grant and Nick Deslauriers, haven't scored this season. Grant, incredibly, has never scored in 72 NHL appearances.

While consistent offense isn't expected from the fourth line, the occasional goal would help out.

"When we get one, it's always a bonus," Deslauriers said. "You can't always count on your top lines to contribute. Obviously, we need to pinch in a little bit more. We might have one chance a game, but we have to capitalize on it, and if not, we'll bring momentum for our first and second line to do it."

Bylsma said: "It's always a big boost. You'd like to have consistency or scoring throughout your lineup.

The defense, meanwhile, has contributed a league-low four goals – one from Franson and three from Rasmus Ristolainen.

The Sabres haven't been lucky

A bounce here or there can go a long way. The Sabres haven't gotten many this season.

"We went through that skid of games where we just weren't getting that bounce to have things going in," Franson said. "We go through some games where we've had trouble creating (chances).

He added: "There's been a lot of situations where (we miss) open nets, (hit) posts, (we're) blocking our own shots – just things like that. Just speaking from my own experience, I feel like I could have 20 points right now. I've got eight. So it's been frustrating."

5 Observations: Bruins knock off Sabres 3-1

By Matt Bove

WKBW

December 31, 2016

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - After an uninspiring start to the season, the Buffalo Sabres had a golden opportunity to make up serious ground in the playoff picture heading into the new year. With just three days left in 2016, the Sabres had two matchups with the Boston Bruins— who currently occupy the last playoff spot in the Atlantic Division.

Buffalo dropped their first matchup after a late game collapse on Thursday. On Saturday, things didn't get much better, falling to the Bruins 3-1.

This was the fourth and final matchup of the season between the division rivalries; Boston won all four games and outscored Buffalo 13-4 in the process, completing the first Bruins sweep of the Sabres in team history.

Five observations from Saturday's loss:

Role reversal

On Thursday the Sabres came storming out of the gate and took a 2-0 lead into the second period. Saturday, the Bruins were the team that started strong, jumping out to a 3-0 lead less than halfway through the game. Buffalo really elevated their play in the second half of the game, but their efforts weren't enough to overcome a three goal deficit.

It seems like we've said this about the Sabres so many times this season — they either start fast or finish fast, but rarely play a complete 60-minute game. If Buffalo is going to start climbing their way up the standings, they'll need to play a much more consistent game at both ends of the ice from start to finish.

Painful loss

-Ryan O'Reilly

-Tyler Ennis

-Dmitry Kulikov

Those are the players already injured for the Sabres, but wouldn't you know it, the injury bug has returned yet again. In the first period the Sabres lost both forward Johan Larsson and defenseman Josh Gorges to injuries, playing the majority of the game with a short bench. If either injury turns out to be a long-term issue, the Sabres will likely have to make another recall from Rochester.

Yes, I know Gorges and Larsson have been popular players to criticize this season, but they're better than the players that will have to replace them from the AHL if their injuries require more than a few days to recover.

Power play problems

The Sabres had four opportunities to cut into the Bruins lead on the power play and failed to score a goal on ANY of their attempts. Early in the game the Sabres had a 5-on-3 power play for more than a minute, but failed to even register a shot.

It seemed like the Sabres were having a very hard time entering the offensive zone, and once they got there, couldn't get shots to the net. The Bruins deserve some credit — they have a very good penalty kill — but if the Sabres scored just once with the man advantage this could've been a different game.

Bailey looks good

I'm not a fan of calling up a player like Justin Bailey and then sticking him on the fourth line. Yes, I understand that he needs to prove himself and doesn't deserve top line minutes, but for a 'skill' player like Bailey, getting

thrown onto the fourth line doesn't seem like the best fit. Bailey did get some shifts with some of Buffalo's top three lines, and when he was called upon I didn't think he looked out of place at all.

Overall, I liked Bailey's game and thought he generated some nice pressure and looked strong against the boards. If he stays in Buffalo for at least the next few games, which I think he will, he deserves some more ice time.

Can the Derek Grant experiment be over?

Derek Grant is 'good' at killing penalties and winning face-offs, but I think it's time the Sabres call upon somebody else for some help. Here's the problem: during the preseason Grant was a scoring machine, but in 32 regular season games Grant has yet to score a goal— he had a glorious chance thanks to a nice pass from Justin Falk against the B's, but was once again denied. I think the Sabres would get more production, at least offensively, from someone like Nick Baptiste or Cal O'Reilly.

Report: Sabres' Johan Larsson done for the year

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 2, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The injury bug reared its ugly head once again for the Buffalo Sabres, and now it looks like the team could be without forward Johan Larsson for the remainder of the season.

"Unfortunately my season is over," Larsson texted the Gotland Newspapers in his home country of Sweden.

Larsson dislocated his elbow and wrist after crashing into the corner boards on a hit from Boston Bruins defender Adam McQuaid in Saturday's 3-1 loss. The hit hospitalized Larsson, but he was able to return to Buffalo on Monday.

Before the season Larsson signed a one-year contract worth \$950,000. In 36 games Larsson has 11 points (6G, 5A).

Bove's take:

Larsson has been far from perfect this season, but he has been one of the Sabres most consistent forwards. I know, I can't believe I'm writing that, either.

He's centered the Sabres steadiest line with Brian Gionta and Marcus Foligno and contributed in several different situations.

Larsson has been moved around the lineup because of so many other injuries, but his loss will without question be another major obstacle for the Sabres.

The good news -- There's nothing positive about a player getting injured, but his roster spot can be filled by one of the Sabres young prospects who fans have ached to see.

The bad news -- Larsson is a center, and the Sabres don't have a ton of talent down the middle in Rochester. Cal O'Reilly seems like a viable option with Larsson out for an extender period of time, unless the Sabres opt to do some more roster shuffling. Without Larsson and Ryan O'Reilly the Sabres find themselves without two of their top three centers.

While I don't think the Larsson injury is a back-breaker, I do believe the Sabres will miss the 24-year-old in the lineup. Remember, even though he has 'only' six goals, Larsson does create space and often gets solid scoring chances.

The question now is whether or not Larsson will ever play for the Sabres again. I don't know for sure, but his days in Buffalo may be numbered, unless he's a bargain or still available after the expansion draft.

Bruins complete season-series sweep of Sabres

By Matt Kalman

NHL.com

January 1, 2017

BOSTON -- Tuukka Rask made 26 saves to help the Boston Bruins complete their first-ever season-series sweep of the Buffalo Sabres with a 3-1 win at TD Garden on Saturday.

Frank Vatrano, Patrice Bergeron and Tim Schaller scored for the Bruins (20-15-4), who went 4-0-0 against the Sabres (13-15-8). Buffalo was the last team Boston had not swept.

The Bruins, who defeated the Sabres 4-2 at KeyBank Center on Thursday, have won consecutive games for the first time since they won three straight Dec. 1-5. The Bruins also scored first for the first time in three games.

"It's something that we've talked about. We obviously want to improve and we want to get that first goal more often instead of battling back from two or three goals," Rask said. "I thought we came out really strong today like we wanted to. We put pucks in deep and went to work there. It paid off, so it's something we have to build on."

Jack Eichel scored his seventh goal and Robin Lehner made 25 saves for the Sabres, who have won once in their past seven games (1-4-2).

"We're shocked. Of course we're angry. We're disappointed," Lehner said. "We expect more. It feels like we're chasing it out there. It takes a lot of energy for us out there to get something going. It doesn't seem to take a lot for opponents, 2-on-1s, 3-on-2s, quality chances."

Vatrano gave the Bruins a 1-0 lead 1:28 into the first period. It was Vatrano's 10th NHL goal but his first at home.

"Being from [Massachusetts], obviously everybody's dream growing up is to score at the Garden," said Vatrano, who hails from East Longmeadow, Massachusetts. "For me it was pretty cool to be able to do that. It's even better that we got the win."

Bergeron scored a power-play goal 7:04 into the second period for a 2-0 lead. Schaller beat Lehner with a backhand shot from the bottom of the right circle at 9:29 to make it 3-0.

Eichel made it 3-1 with 21.2 seconds remaining in the second.

Goal of the game

After a cross-ice pass from defenseman Zdeno Chara, Vatrano scored with a wrist shot from the top of the right circle.

Save of the game

Rask made a glove save on Derek Grant's wrist shot from the bottom of the right circle 4:00 into the third period.

Highlight of the game

Bergeron scored what proved to be the game-winning goal on a one-timer from the right hash mark after Brad Marchand retrieved the puck behind the net and passed it out to Ryan Spooner at the right dot. Spooner then passed to Bergeron.

Unsung performance of the game

The Bruins' penalty kill went 4-for-4, and Chara was on the ice for 5:51 of the eight minutes Boston was shorthanded. Chara also blocked five shots and was credited with five hits.

They said it

"We need to get more desperate. Guys need to understand where we are in the season, where we are in the standings and we need to start making a move now. We can't continue to wait. We said it before Christmas it was a big week and we blew it, and then again this week. We had two huge games coming against these guys for that final divisional playoff spot, and it's just a disappointment." - Sabres captain Brian Gionta

"I think it's nice to get results. I think you don't second-guess yourself as much and it makes you ... relax a little bit more. But you try to do the right things all over the ice. Obviously I know that offense is a part of my game and it has to be a part of my game. I have to bring that to the team." - Bruins forward Patrice Bergeron, who has seven goals and has scored in consecutive games for the first time this season

Need to know

Sabres forward Johan Larsson sustained a dislocated wrist in the first period and did not return. He's expected to be out several weeks. Buffalo defenseman Josh Gorges sustained a hip pointer and didn't return after the first period. The Sabres were already without forward William Carrier, who missed the game with a hand injury he sustained against the Bruins on Thursday. Carrier is day-to-day. ... Spooner and defenseman Torey Krug each had an assist and have points in five consecutive games. ... Bruins forward David Backes missed the game with a concussion he sustained Thursday. He's out indefinitely.

What's next

Sabres: At the New York Rangers on Tuesday (7 p.m. ET; NBCSN, MSG, NHL.TV)

Bruins: At the New Jersey Devils on Monday (7 p.m. ET; SN, MSG+, NESN, NHL.TV)

Sabres' Johan Larsson done for season

By Adam Gretz

NBC Sports

January 2, 2017

Buffalo Sabres coach Dan Bylsma offered an update on injured forward Johan Larsson on Monday and announced that the 24-year-old was going to be out "indefinitely" after undergoing surgery to repair elbow and wrist injuries.

Just a few hours later Larsson revealed to the Buffalo News that his season is finished.

Larsson was injured early in Saturday's 3-1 loss to the Boston Bruins when he fell hard into the boards and dislocated his elbow and wrist following a hit from defenseman Adam McQuaid.

In 36 games for the Sabres this season Larsson had six goals and five assists and was on pace to set new career highs across the board.

Picked in the second round of the 2010 draft (No. 56 overall) by the Minnesota Wild, the Sabres acquired Larsson at the 2012-13 trade deadline in the trade that sent Jason Pominville to Minnesota.

Bailey's focus is on the present as he rejoins Sabres

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

December 30, 2016

Justin Bailey admitted he's already had his fair share of ups and downs in his second professional season. After playing in a handful of games with the Buffalo Sabres as a rookie last season, Bailey was one of the first players reassigned to Rochester in camp this October. He said it took about a month or two before he really took a look at what had gone wrong.

"I thought 'Hey, what more could I have done in the summer or what more could I have done during training camp?'" Bailey said. "And I reflected, I looked at a lot of things. But what are you going to do? I worked my butt off down in Rochester to get back up here. That's in the past, I'm trying to look at the present now."

The present outlook is much more optimistic. Bailey's recorded five goals and two assists in his last five games for Rochester and said he's felt as good recently as he has at any point in his young career. On Friday, he was rewarded with his second recall of the season. He'll step into the lineup in Boston on Saturday in place of William Carrier, who is out with a hand injury.

Dan Bylsma pointed to Bailey's NHL debut in Philadelphia as the ideal example of what he can bring to the Sabres. He stood out in that game with his combination of speed and size, which he used to be effective on the forecheck. He even earned a handful of grade-A scoring opportunities, although he has not yet netted his first NHL goal.

But more so than his obvious physical gifts and scoring ability, Bailey said his recent success is the product of his working on the small details of his game in practice and seeing them translate come game time. He looks at Carrier, his former linemate in Rochester, as an example of how he can be effective by playing simple.

Carrier has only scored one goal in 24 games, but he's stuck around and even earned time on the top line with his physicality and his speed.

"I think there's a lot of opportunity to be had," he said. "Will's done a great job since he's been up here playing fast, playing physical and playing simple. So I think for me, whatever my role is, it's obviously going to be different than Rochester. I need to adjust to that and simplify my game and do those little things well to keep myself up here."

Bailey practiced on the fourth line with Nicolas Deslauriers and Derek Grant on Friday, and Bylsma said he'll have to earn any opportunities he's going to get on one of the team's top lines. In the meantime, Bailey said he's prepared to play in any situation, including the penalty kill.

Even if the results aren't the same on the ice as they have been during his recent scoring streak, his goal is to make sure his attitude off the ice is.

"From training camp to even the first little bit of the season, there was a lot of ups and downs," he said. "I keep telling myself while I'm on this hot streak to remember what this feeling's like and try to bring that to the rink every single day."

Sabres reflect on Boston game

You could sense the frustration in Buffalo's dressing room following the team's 4-2 loss to Boston on Thursday night, a game that the Sabres led 2-0 after the first period. It was a missed opportunity against a team that the Sabres trailed by only six points in the Atlantic Division standings, and the Sabres felt it was a game they should have been able to win.

"I feel a little bit like you would in a playoff series," Bylsma said. "It's an emotional game, it was a game we poured a lot into and a huge disappointment losing that game and losing it the way we did."

Deslauriers also referred to the game as a playoff-like atmosphere, citing its many momentum swings. They can expect a similar environment when the two teams meet again on Saturday, with the Sabres looking to cancel out their loss and the Bruins looking to further their lead.

Being able to win a game of such magnitude is another step in the team's process of learning to win, but Deslauriers said it simply comes down to staying consistent for all 60 minutes. The accountability and the mindsets in the room, he said, couldn't be better.

"I think just the way we are all in the room, we're all really tight," he said. "We know we battle each other for spots, but at the same time I think everybody just gives their heart out there. We just need to keep going. I think in the room, there's not much we can change. It's probably one of the tightest groups I've been in and it's fun to be a part of it."

Medical report

Bylsma confirmed that Carrier's hand was not broken in his fight with Boston's Adam McQuaid on Thursday night, but he did not have a timetable for the forward's return. Carrier has been dealing with a hand injury all season and it worsened while fighting McQuaid.

Dmitry Kulikov, meanwhile, did not travel with the team to Boston on Friday and will miss his second game in a row when the Sabres play the Bruins on Saturday afternoon. He remains day-to-day with a lower-back injury.

Lines at practice

82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 26 Matt Moulson
9 Evander Kane - 22 Johan Larsson - 12 Brian Gionta
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 23 Sam Reinhart - 21 Kyle Okposo
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 27 Derek Grant - 56 Justin Bailey

4 Josh Gorges - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
29 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian
41 Justin Falk - 6 Cody Franson

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson

Frustration growing for Sabres after loss in Boston

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

December 31, 2016

BOSTON - For the second game in a row, frustration boiled over in the dressing room for a Buffalo Sabres team performing well beneath its own expectations. The Sabres lost to the Boston Bruins for the second time in three days on Saturday afternoon, this time by a score of 3-1, squandering a prime opportunity to make up ground in the Atlantic Division standings.

The loss was the sixth in seven games for the Sabres, a fact Jack Eichel made well known as he packed his bags in the visiting room at TD Garden. Eichel allowed his frustrations to be heard as he shouted and slammed his equipment into his bag, an outburst that represented the collective disappointment of a group that is far from where it planned to be nearly midway through the season.

"I think every one of us should be [angry]," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We know the situation we're in and we know how desperate we are at this point of the season to win hockey games. We should all find that desperation and that urgency and that anger."

The Sabres knew their home-and-home set with the Bruins was an important stretch of games. Had they swept the two games in regulation as they had set out to do, they'd be entering the New Year trailing Boston by only two points in the standings. Instead, they trail by 10 points and have been swept in their season series against Boston for the first time in franchise history.

"We need to get more desperate," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "Guys need to understand where we are in the season and where we are in the standings. We need to start making a move now. We can't continue to wait. We said it before Christmas, it was a huge week, and we blew it and again this week we had two big games coming in against these guys for that final divisional playoff spot. It's disappointing."

Frank Vatrano scored for the Bruins just 1:28 into the contest following a Sabres turnover in their own zone. The Sabres squandered a crucial opportunity to tie the game when they were unable to register a shot on goal during a 5-on-3 power play that lasted 1:07. The Sabres went 0-for-4 on the power play overall after going 1-for-6 against Boston on Thursday.

"That was a huge point of the game," Bylsma said. "It was a squandered opportunity to get back into the game."

"It speaks to where we're at as a team and how fragile we are," Gionta said.

The Bruins, meanwhile, used a power play in the second period to increase their lead. Patrice Bergeron scored a one-time goal from the slot just two seconds before the teams were set to return to even strength, the product of a failed clearing attempt by Rasmus Ristolainen. Former Sabre Tim Schaller increased the Boston lead to 3-0 prior to the halfway mark of the period with a goal that Robin Lehner admitted he'd like to have back.

The Sabres got a bit of life when Eichel scored their only goal with 21.2 seconds remaining in the second, but they followed it up with only nine shots in a scoreless third period. Tuukka Rask, who has been in net for all four Boston wins against Buffalo this season, only needed to make 26 saves.

"We've got to be better in this room, plain and simple," Gionta said. "It's on the guys in this room to be better. We've been better, we've showed spurts where we can do it so we know it's in this room. It's just a matter of finding it and committing and doing it day in and day out."

"You can talk all you want but it's got to come from us," forward Sam Reinhart added. "It's got to come from our compete level coming from the start of the game. We're capable of doing it."

"It's unacceptable, the inconsistency"

Larsson, Gorges leave with injuries

The Sabres were forced to play shorthanded on the bench for most of the game due to injuries to forward Johan Larsson and defenseman Josh Gorges in the first period. Larsson left with an arm injury after going hard into the boards on a hit from Adam McQuaid and did not return, while Gorges did not play after the 8:23 mark of the period due to a hip injury.

"Again, every game's not perfect," Bylsma said. "This one certainly wasn't. They got the early lead, Larsson gets injured early on and only plays a few short minutes, Gorges gets injured and we're stuck with a short bench both on the back end and the forward position."

Bylsma said that Larsson's injury appears to be a dislocated wrist, which would keep him out for weeks.

Reinhart extends his streak

Reinhart's assist on Eichel's goal in the second period extended his career-best point streak to six games. Reinhart has two goals and five assists in that stretch.

Up next

The Sabres will kick off 2017 with a two-game road trip that begins against the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday night. Buffalo beat New York 4-3 in the first meeting between the two teams at KeyBank Center on Dec. 1, a game that saw Jack Eichel score the go-ahead and game-winning goals in the third period.

The game will be televised nationally on NBCSN, or you can listen live on WGR 550. The puck drops between the Sabres and Rangers at 7 p.m.

Notes from Sunday's practice

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

January 1, 2017

Jack Eichel felt his postgame outburst in Boston on Saturday evening had been blown a bit out of proportion, but his level of frustration hadn't waivered when the Buffalo Sabres returned to practice at KeyBank Center on Sunday afternoon.

The Sabres have lost six of their last seven games and sit 10 points out of third place in the Atlantic Division following back-to-back losses against the Boston Bruins, and Eichel said he spoke for his teammates while venting his disappointment.

"I don't think it's about me," Eichel said. "I mean I think a lot of these guys have probably been winners their whole life. We're a group, we're one. We go through adversity as a team together and the highs when we win games, that's also together. 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. I think everybody here is pretty pissed with themselves and the way things have went."

The Sabres have been bitten early and often by the injury bug this season, having already lost Eichel, Evander Kane, Tyler Ennis, Nicolas Deslauriers, Zach Bogosian and Dmitry Kulikov for double-digit games. Ryan O'Reilly will join those ranks assuming he doesn't play in New York on Tuesday - he's yet to return to practice after undergoing an appendectomy last weekend - and Johan Larsson is out for the long term after dislocating his wrist and elbow in Boston on Saturday.

Eichel made the point that the team has never been fully healthy during his two seasons in Buffalo, but he also wasn't willing to blame the Sabres' struggles on injuries. He spoke broadly when asked about what the team needs to improve going forward.

"Everything," he said. "The power play, I mean we have a 5-on-3, we don't score, that's not good enough. The penalty kill, we continue to put pucks on the other team's stick, that's not good enough. Five on five we don't score enough goals either so I think as a whole team, everyone needs to look in the mirror and we all need to get a lot better."

The two games against Boston are particularly disappointing given the stakes of those games - had the Sabres swept them in regulation, they'd currently be sitting just two points back from the third-place team in the Atlantic Division. But while their current 10-point deficit may seem like a steep climb, Dan Bylsma said his team's focus now has to be on the amount of time they still have to make up ground.

"We had opportunities both before the break and the two games against Boston and we let them slip away," the Sabres coach said. "At the same time you have 46 games left in the season, we know if we play how we can and we win hockey games at the rate we can it'll put us in the 90-point [range], that area where we think we're going to need to be in playoff contention. That's really got to be the focus for us here ... We have to realize the situation we're in now and we've got win 60 percent of our points the rest of the way out for sure."

For all the frustration at a low point of the Sabres season, Eichel hasn't waived the white flag either.

"I don't think we've hit the halfway point yet," Eichel said. "I'm sure not giving up on this and I don't think anyone else is. Have we pissed away some good opportunities for ourselves to put ourselves in a good position? Yes.

"But there's still a lot of hockey to be played."

Medical report

Larsson remains hospitalized in Boston due to his dislocated wrist and elbow, injuries that will keep him out long term. Bylsma said the team hopes for him to return to Buffalo on Monday, at which time he'll undergo further evaluation.

Larsson has six goals and five assists in 36 games this season, but his greatest value might be the physical checking he's brought each time out on the ice.

"It's going to be a real big loss," Bylsma said. "He's a tough guy to play against, battles hard every night for us and he's been a leader in really having that grit and determination in our game. You felt it even in the game last night where he's not there for the better part of three periods."

William Carrier returned to practice after missing the game in Boston on Saturday with a hand injury, while Tyler Ennis skated without a red no-contact jersey for the first time. Ennis did not, however, participate in 5-on-5 battle drills at the end of practice.

Carrier has been playing with his hand injury throughout the season, but he aggravated it during a fight with Boston's McQuaid on Thursday. The fight was in response to Carrier's hit on David Backes that saw Backes leave the game with a concussion, a hit Carrier said he felt sorry for on Sunday.

"I looked at it a few times," he said. "I was just finishing my hit and I think he turns while I was finishing my hit. I played with him in St. Louis too so I know the guy ... I didn't want to injure him. I know he's had a few [concussions] in the past too so I feel kind of bad for him."

Dmitry Kulikov (lower back) and Josh Gorges (hip) were both absent, leaving former defenseman Nicolas Deslauriers to fill in on a pair with Zach Bogosian during drills. Bylsma did not have an update on Kulikov, but said Gorges might be able to return to practice on Monday.

Robin Lehner was also absent for a maintenance day.

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48 William Carrier - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 12 Brian Gionta
63 Tyler Ennis - 27 Derek Grant - 26 Matt Moulson

29 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 47 Zach Bogosian
41 Justin Falk - 6 Cody Franson

31 Anders Nilsson

With injuries at center, Sabres matchups to change

By Chris Ryndak

Buffalo Sabres

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With two road games against a pair of the NHL's toughest opponents coming up this week, the Buffalo Sabres are looking to find consistency in their all-around game.

Monday's practice at KeyBank Center had a little bit of everything. Special teams work, 5-on-5 play and some shootout work. The Sabres will have to be sharp in all aspects of their game for the next two games: at Madison Square Garden for a match against the New York Rangers on Tuesday and at United Center for a contest on Thursday against the Chicago Blackhawks.

"This is a road trip that we're playing two of the best teams in the league," alternate captain Josh Gorges said. "It's gut-check time. It's time for us to find out what we're made of as a group and as individuals."

Buffalo takes on the Rangers on NBCSN at 7 p.m. tomorrow night. The last time they played, the Sabres won 4-3 on home ice as Jack Eichel scored twice in the third period to put Buffalo on top.

"When we look back at that game and think about it, we didn't do anything fancy," Gorges said. "We came to work. We knew what we were up against. We knew we were playing a team that you've got to have one of your best games and tomorrow's no different. We've got to be at our best."

The Sabres are 3-5-2 in their last 10 games and complicating matters has been the current injury situation. During their loss to the Bruins on Saturday, they were without William Carrier (finger) and lost Gorges for a large chunk of the game due to a hip injury.

Johan Larsson took a hit into the end boards early on and dislocated his wrist and elbow. He had surgery in Boston to repair the injuries and was on his way back to Buffalo this morning. He's out indefinitely, according to Bylsma.

Ryan O'Reilly has also missed the past three games due to an appendectomy and Dmitry Kulikov has missed the last two with a lower-back injury.

With both Larsson and O'Reilly out, defensively, the Sabres will be looking at some different looks when it comes to matchups concerning the center position.

Sam Reinhart has moved to center in O'Reilly's absence and the roles of Zemgus Girgensons and Derek Grant have elevated. Bylsma said that Girgensons will take on the defensive zone responsibilities once primarily held by Larsson. Eichel, meanwhile, will have to contend with whatever the opposition throws at him, especially because the Rangers and Blackhawks will have the last change.

"It changes the situation fairly dramatically in terms of matchups and situations, especially on the road for these two games," Bylsma said. "Zemgus will kind of assume the position Lars was in - a little bit of the defensive situations, he'll be favored playing in. And Jack's going to get the matchup against whoever they see fit. On the road, that's going to be the challenge for him."

And speaking of matchups, Brian Duff caught up with Rasmus Ristolainen, who is usually tasked with handling the other team's top players:

Monday's practice

82 Marcus Foligno - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo
9 Evander Kane - 23 Sam Reinhart - 56 Justin Bailey
48 William Carrier - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 12 Brian Gionta
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Ennis practiced with the team in a limited capacity yesterday, but had a scheduled day off the ice on Monday and did not practice.

Kulikov (lower back) was also absent from practice for the second straight day and was seeing a doctor today. Bylsma said he will have an update on Kulikov on Tuesday.

Gorges said that he felt better today at practice after missing yesterday's session.

Bylsma also gave an update on Rochester Americans forward Hudson Fasching, who has not played since Oct. 30. After recovering from a groin injury while with the Sabres, he was sent down, but re-injured it soon thereafter. Bylsma said that Fasching has been skating on his own the past few days and that is hopefully a good sign that he can return to game action soon.

The Sabres are not currently carrying any extra healthy bodies so Bylsma said that they'll consider making a recall or two for the road trip.