



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

January 5, 2017

Hossa to return when Blackhawks host Sabres

Associated Press

January 5, 2017

CHICAGO -- Marian Hossa is returning when the slumping Chicago Blackhawks need him most.

The five-time All-Star right winger has not played since Dec. 20 because of an upper-body injury. He is scheduled to be in the lineup when the Blackhawks (23-12-5) host the Buffalo Sabres (14-15-8) on Thursday night at the United Center.

Chicago lost two games in a row and went 1-3-1 without Hossa, who shares the team lead with 16 goals. The 37-year-old practiced with his teammates Wednesday and reported no problems.

"I felt good," Hossa told reporters after practice. "I would have loved to be back faster, but at this point it was smarter to wait (until) when I felt comfortable to come back. Obviously, you don't want to lose too much (time) if you have things going your way, but sometimes you cannot help it."

The Sabres are seeking their second win in a row after a 4-1 victory over the New York Rangers on Tuesday night. The game offered a positive sign for a team that is 2-4-2 in its past eight contests.

Buffalo faces a stiff challenge against Chicago, which has won nine straight games in the series. The Blackhawks have not lost to the Sabres since Dec. 11, 2009, and have not lost to the Sabres at the United Center since Jan. 10, 2007.

Center Ryan O'Reilly could return for Buffalo if he receives clearance from the team's medical staff before the game. O'Reilly, 25, underwent surgery for an emergency appendectomy less than two weeks ago but practiced Wednesday and said he felt good.

Chicago goaltender Corey Crawford is set to make his 25th start of the season. Crawford is 13-8-3 with a 2.32 goals-against average and a .927 save percentage this season. Against Buffalo, he is 7-0-0 with a 1.70 goals-against average and a .937 save percentage in his career.

For the Sabres, goaltender Anders Nilsson could earn his second start in a row after limiting the Rangers to one goal Tuesday. The 26-year-old Swede is 6-3-3 with a 2.35 goals-against average and a .928 save percentage in 12 games (11 starts) this season.

If Nilsson returns to the bench, look for fellow Swedish netminder Robin Lehner to start. Lehner, 25, is 8-12-5 with a 2.51 goals-against average and a .921 save percentage in 26 starts this season. He stopped 37 of 39 shots in his only career appearance against the Blackhawks in 2012.

Sabres right winger Justin Bailey will try to remain hot after scoring his first career goal Tuesday. The 21-year-old Buffalo native appeared in 12 career games, including eight last season.

"It was a huge relief," Bailey told reporters when asked about his first goal. "I've had chances in the past, and I can't say it hasn't been on my mind all of last summer and this year, too. I was happy it finally came and I can start getting back to the playing the way I play."

The Blackhawks are 0-2-1 in their last three games at home. However, they are 13-4-4 this season at the United Center. Buffalo is 7-7-5 on the road

O'Reilly makes speedy recovery, likely to play Thursday

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 4, 2017

CHICAGO -- One thing we've learned in his 15 months playing for the Buffalo Sabres is how much Ryan O'Reilly hates missing hockey games or even practice. But O'Reilly may have outdone himself this time.

Just 10 days after having an emergency appendectomy on Christmas, O'Reilly hopped a plane from Buffalo in the morning and returned to practice Wednesday in United Center. And judging by his activity level -- and pending final approval from doctors -- O'Reilly looks like a good bet to return to the lineup Thursday against the Chicago Blackhawks. He has missed the last four games, and the Sabres are 2-2 in his absence.

"It felt great to be back with the guys," O'Reilly said. "It feels like it has been months since I've been around. It's nice to get out there. I feel 100 percent. It's just a matter of making sure everybody is on board and feeling safe. It was an unfortunate thing, but we got it done when we did or it could have been a lot worse. I was happy it didn't erupt or anything like that. We got in, got it out when we had to and hopefully I don't miss any other games."

O'Reilly said he was not impacted by any illness during the Sabres' 5-1 loss to the New York Islanders in Barclays Center on Dec. 23 but began to feel ill after the team returned home.

"It came out of nowhere," he said. "The morning of the 24th I kind of felt my stomach was upset and didn't really think anything of it. I tried to settle it and nothing really happened. That night around 10:30, I called the doctor and said, 'Hey, I want to make sure this isn't appendicitis or anything like that' and unfortunately it was. It was good we caught it in time and didn't travel anywhere with it."

O'Reilly's teammates greeted with him a group stick-tap when coach Dan Bylsma welcomed him back at the start of practice Wednesday. O'Reilly skated as the third-line center between Derek Grant, who may move from the middle, and captain Brian Gionta. O'Reilly also took his regular role on the top power-play unit with Jack Eichel, Rasmus Ristolainen, Sam Reinhart and Matt Moulson.

Bylsma knew O'Reilly had been working out in Buffalo and admitted he was "pleasantly shocked" to get the news late Tuesday afternoon that O'Reilly was flying to Chicago to meet the team Wednesday.

"I heard it yesterday that he was active a couple days ago and felt fine," Bylsma said. "And then he skated yesterday and felt really good, and shot and skated and took one-timers and did everything and felt fine. He was going to see the doctor in the afternoon. The doctor gave him the OK to go forward."

The return of O'Reilly means the Sabres could suddenly be very strong down the middle, just as they thought they were thin there in the wake of O'Reilly's illness and Johan Larsson's season-ending wrist and elbow injuries. Bylsma said it's "very likely" he would go with Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart and O'Reilly as his top three centers and have Zemgus Girgensons in the middle of his fourth line.

O'Reilly said he was given a timetable of about two weeks out of the lineup when he first had his surgery but started to feel good after 4-5 days of no activity. He said he did not do much research into other NHL players who've undergone the procedure but just focused on what his doctors told him.

"I tried not to think about it. I was pretty bummed," he said. "I didn't want to know too much about it, just what was the minimum timeframe I would need. The said two weeks and I kind of stuck to that trying to get back for this game.

"The break didn't go the way I wanted to. It would have been nice seeing family and all that instead of being in the hospital and laying on the couch," he said. "On the other side of it, it's kind of good it did happen during the break. With three days off, there could have been games in that time."

O'Reilly has seven goals and 11 assists in 27 games this season. He missed six games earlier in the year with an oblique issue.

O'Reilly said he was heartened by watching the Sabres' strong performance in Tuesday's 4-1 win in New York, a big response to the back-to-back losses the team took during its showdown series with Boston. That set started with the Sabres blowing a 2-0 lead in KeyBank Center and suffering a 4-2 loss. They then traveled to Boston and fell, 3-1, on New Year's Eve.

"The one at home we played a great game and had it there for the taking," O'Reilly said. "To see it slip away like that was frustrating. You could see the frustration of the guys and kind of going into the next game we didn't have it there. Losing that first game took the wind right out of our sails. It was unfortunate but I think the last game was a great response. The guys looked really good."

Sabres Notebook: Bylsma wary of Blackhawks snapping slump

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

January 4, 2017

CHICAGO -- There's a mini crisis going on in the Windy City with the Blackhawks mired in a 1-4-1 slump -- and only scoring 11 goals in that stretch. The power play is only 15th in the league and is 4 for 24 in the last eight games.

But Sabres coach Dan Bylsma isn't hearing any of it. He's more than wary about what his team will be dealing with when it meets the Western Conference leaders Thursday night in United Center.

"It's like the power play with great players on it that aren't scoring. They're still a dangerous power play," Bylsma said. "They're still a power play that's going to score a goal. I think you'd like to be able to take advantage of them maybe being slumping, but you certainly don't approach it that way when you're going to play them.

"Whatever the numbers are or aren't, they're still a powerful team, a scoring team. They've got dangerous players and that's something we're going to have to be very aware of."

The Sabres are 0-8-1 in their last nine games against the Blackhawks. They've lost six straight in the United Center and haven't won here since a 2-1 victory on Jan. 10, 2007.

The Hawks are coming off Monday's 4-1 loss to St. Louis in the Winter Classic at Busch Stadium. They are expected to get Marian Hossa back after he's missed five games with an upper body injury and Hossa (16 goals) is scheduled to join AHL recall Spencer Abbott on a line with captain Jonathan Toews, who has just six goals in 30 games this season.

Abbott, who played one game for Toronto during the 2013-14 season, will be making his Chicago debut. He has eight goals and 13 assists this year at Rockford.

South Buffalo native Patrick Kane has 11 goals and is second on the team in scoring with 37 points. Kane has just one goal and one assist over the last six games and told Chicago reporters Wednesday's he's disappointed the team has followed a five-game winning streak with the current slide.

"It's been up and down," Kane said. "It seemed like we were trending in the right direction there for a little bit ... We have to try to squash this as quickly as possible and get back to the winning ways."

Last week in Nashville, Kane became the sixth player in Blackhawks history and the first player from the 2007 draft class to reach 700 career points. Kane, who did it in 696 games, and Pittsburgh's Evgeni Malkin are the only two active players with 700 points in fewer than 700 games.

Sabres winger Justin Bailey was still living in the afterglow of his first NHL goal Tuesday in New York, which landed him in the ESPN SportsCenter Top 10 plays of the day. Bailey, who remained on his line Wednesday with Sam Reinhart and Evander Kane, said his cell phone was full of messages and texts when he opened it after the game.

"It was pretty blown up. I don't think it's been like that since I got drafted and since the day I got called up last year for the first time," Bailey said. "A lot of texts, real positive tweets and I appreciate all the support from everybody."

Bailey said he was particularly appreciative of tweets from ex-Sabres who have become close friends like Matthew Barnaby, Jay McKee and Matt Ellis.

"Seeing those tweets from them is something I really appreciate. Those are guys I lean on," Bailey said. "I know how proud my family and friends are but guys like that are just as proud as well."

Bailey said he talked to his mother, Karen Buscaglia, in two stages. One was a brief call before the team left Madison Square Garden and then there was another Wednesday morning because the team arrived in Chicago past 1 a.m. in Buffalo.

"It was great. I know she was definitely very emotional with my family watching the game," he said. "The call is one I'll remember forever and it will continue to motivate me."

Sabres center Zemgus Girgensons was thrilled to share some Latvian power Monday night in New York with a postgame meeting with Knicks standout and fellow countryman Kristaps Porzingis. The 7-foot-3 Porzingis tweeted a picture of him towering over the 6-foot-2 Girgensons, as the pair was holding a jersey of the other.

"We just followed each other on Twitter. We're two of the only players from back home who are professionals here," Girgensons said Wednesday. "He's a big, big deal at home. We hit each other on Twitter and it was great to meet him and exchange the jerseys."

Porzingis did not play in the game, an ugly 115-103 loss to Orlando, because of a lingering Achilles tendon issue. The No. 4 overall pick in the 2015 NBA Draft entered Wednesday second on the Knicks in scoring at 20.1 points per game.

"It was a tough game for them and I was a little bummed out about that," Girgensons said of Porzingis' injury. "It definitely would be nicer to see him play but that will come next time."

Defenseman Jake McCabe missed practice Wednesday for what Bylsma termed a maintenance day but the coach said he expected him to play in the game. Josh Gorges (hip) returned to practice and skated on the top pair with Rasmus Ristolainen. Winger William Carrier stayed away from the team due to the flu.

Dmitry Kulikov (back) has been seen by doctors this week and Bylsma said there's encouraging news with his situation.

"Seeing some improvement, seeing some good things and hopefully moving forward I'll get a better read on that situation when we get back," Bylsma said. "But he's improving, which is a good sign for possibly getting back out on the ice."

Sabres get a surprise at practice

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

January 4, 2017

Chicago, IL (WGR 550) -- We really shouldn't be surprised, but it was almost shocking that Ryan O'Reilly was back and in full practice just 10 days after an emergency appendectomy. Dan Bylsma didn't think he'd have his number one center back so soon, "I was pleasantly shocked to know that he's doing that well and that he feels great."

O'Reilly saw the doctor and joined Tyler Ennis in Buffalo for Tuesday's skate. O'Reilly said, "It felt great, it felt great to be back on the ice, it feels like it's been months. I feel 100 percent, it's just a matter of making sure everyone's on board."

On Wednesday afternoon there's going to be a conference call between O'Reilly, his doctor, Dan Bylsma and Tim Murray to see if he gets the final approval to play Thursday. O'Reilly said there's no question in his mind, "I want to play tomorrow, I know I can. I might be a little rusty, but I feel I'm ready to get back and can still be effective, it's just a matter of making sure everyone is safe with it."

O'Reilly did not have a good game in Brooklyn before the Christmas break, but he said he was not feeling it then, "No, I wish I could use that as an excuse, but in that game, I didn't play the way I wanted to."

"This came out of nowhere, the morning of the 24th I felt my stomach upset and I didn't think anything of it. I tried to settle it, but nothing happened so at night at 10:30, I called the Doc and I told him I wanted to make sure this wasn't an appendicitis and unfortunately it was, but it was good we caught it in time."

Bylsma liked what he heard after practice was over. He said, "He felt really good on the ice, has no side effects, there's no feeling of the surgery that took place, so that's a good indication that maybe we'll see him tomorrow." O'Reilly said the original timetable was two weeks.

Dmitry Kulikov is not with the team as he again has back and tailbone problems. Bylsma said, "He saw the doctor on January 2nd or 3rd and has seen some improvement and seen some good things."

Jake McCabe is nursing a hand injury and didn't practice on Wednesday. Bylsma said he's confident the defenseman will play on Thursday.

Josh Gorges did participate in practice and took McCabe's spot with Rasmus Ristolainen.

Will Carrier missed practice because he was sick.

Sam Reinhart has started to play well at center. He has points in six out of seven games picking up eight points. With that in mind, Bylsma said he's going to use Reinhart, Jack Eichel and O'Reilly as his top three centers.

The lines on Wednesday were:

Foligno Eichel Okposo
Kane Reinhart Bailey
Grant O'Reilly Gionta
Deslauriers Girgensons Moulson

With it looking like O'Reilly might play, Zengus Girgensons was centering the fourth line. Girgensons had a goal in the win over the Rangers and Bylsma thinks it was his best game, "As the center of the checking line, I thought he did a real good job of it."

"I think he can use last night's game to move forward, it was really his best game, his most complete game and that's what we've got to keep getting from him."

News from the Blackhawks is that Marian Hossa should be ready to return on Thursday. Hossa has 16 goals in 34 games and missed five games with an upper body injury. The Hawks have lost four of those five games scoring eight goals.

Sabres prospect Justin Bailey's first NHL goal emotional for mother

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
January 5, 2017

WILLIAMSVILLE – The emotional scene that followed Buffalo Sabres rookie Justin Bailey's first NHL goal Tuesday night "was insane," said his mother, Karen Buscaglia.

"I cried instantly when he scored," said Buscaglia, who watched the game at her cousin's house with five other family members. "Then I screamed and then I cried. We were just jumping up and down."

As an elated Bailey celebrated in New York's Madison Square Garden by bending over and pumping his arms, almost 400 miles away in Williamsville, Buscaglia, who raised her Sabres-loving son here as a single mother, said she "felt exactly what he felt."

"I can't describe it," she said. "But it was like this big relief."

Then her mind flashed back to "Little Justin," who used to watch "SportsCenter" on ESPN every morning before school.

Bailey's goal 1:03 into the second period of the Sabres' 4-1 win against the Rangers was so good – he pounced on an errant pass and beat Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist as he fell – it earned a spot on the show's "Top 10" segment.

"Now you're actually a clip on the 'Top 10,'" she said. "It's amazing, just those feelings."

The congratulatory messages she received enhanced those special feelings.

"We're so blessed with so many great people that have been on this journey from when he was little," she said. "Just reading tweets, you get caught up in all the nice things people have said along the way. It just makes everything kind of come full circle."

When they finally talked on the phone Wednesday morning, Buscaglia asked Bailey what the goal felt like.

"He's like, 'Mom, I can't even describe it,'" she said. "He's like, 'I think I totally blacked out. I don't remember anything after that.'"

For Bailey, 21, the goal was a huge relief. While the forward prospect had played well at times in the NHL, he didn't register a point in his first 11 appearances.

The Sabres recalled him again Friday after a torrid stretch of five goals and seven points in five games. To stick in the NHL, Bailey, one of the AHL's top scorers with the Rochester Americans, must produce goals.

"I've had chances in the past," Bailey told reporters in New York. "I can't say it hasn't been on my mind for all of last summer and this year, too. I'm just happy it finally came and I can start to get back to playing the way I play."

The Sabres play another road game tonight against the Chicago Blackhawks. Buscaglia, who said she's "really superstitious," might watch at her cousin's house again.

"We should leave it the same," she said.

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Top center Ryan O'Reilly, out the last the four games after undergoing an appendectomy on Christmas, joined the Sabres for Wednesday's practice in Chicago and could return tonight.

"I'm pleasantly shocked to know that he's doing that well," Bylsma told reporters in Chicago.

The Sabres said earlier O'Reilly could miss two or three weeks.

Sabres' O'Reilly resumes practice

By Matt Bove

WKBW

January 4, 2017

(WKBW) - Not much has gone right for the Buffalo Sabres this season, but on Wednesday they got some rare good news, with the return of Ryan O'Reilly to practice.

The Sabres forward has been sidelined for the past eight days after undergoing an emergency appendectomy. Initially the injury was expected to keep O'Reilly out of the lineup for two to three weeks, and that's still a possibility, but returning so quickly to practice is certainly a good sign.

O'Reilly has battled injuries all season and has already missed ten games, but is still the Sabres fourth leading scorer (7G, 11A).

O'Reilly centered a line with Derek Grant and Brian Gionta at practice on Wednesday and lined up with the Sabres first power play unit. According to Paul Hamilton from WGR 550, O'Reilly even got physical in battle drills in front of the net, something players usually don't do until they've had a few practices under their belt.

When O'Reilly returns to the lineup remains uncertain, but returning to practice is a step in the right direction. The Sabres next take on the Chicago Blackhawks on the road Thursday night.

Ryan O'Reilly of Sabres hopes to play Thursday

By Brian Hedger

NHL.com

January 4, 2017

CHICAGO -- Buffalo Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly practiced Wednesday for the first time since having an appendectomy in Buffalo on Christmas Day and hopes to play against the Chicago Blackhawks at United Center on Thursday (8:30 p.m. ET, NBCSN, CSN-CH, NHL.TV).

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma is hopeful, too, but said a decision wouldn't be finalized until meeting with O'Reilly, general manager Tim Murray and a doctor.

"He felt really good on the ice, has no ill side effects, has no feeling of the surgery that took place the morning of [Dec. 25], so other than getting back on the ice after being off for seven days, he felt good out there," Bylsma said. "Hopefully that's a good indication we'll maybe see him [Thursday]."

O'Reilly was to be inactive for 10-14 days following surgery.

"It felt great to be back with the guys," he said. "It feels like it has been months since I've been around. It's nice to get out there. I feel 100 percent. It's just a matter of making sure everybody is on board and feeling safe."

O'Reilly (seven goals, 18 points in 27 games) has missed four games. He missed five in November with an oblique injury, which he feared returned on Dec. 24.

"It came out of nowhere," O'Reilly said. "The morning of [Dec. 24], I kind of felt my stomach was upset and didn't really think anything of it. I tried to settle it and nothing really happened. That night around [10:30 p.m.], I called the doctor and said, 'Hey, I want to make sure this isn't appendicitis or anything like that,' and unfortunately it was. It was good we caught it in time and didn't travel with it."

The Sabres are 2-2-0 without O'Reilly, who centered a line with left wing Derek Grant and right wing Brian Gionta in practice. If O'Reilly is cleared to play, that line is likely to stay together.

"I want to play [Thursday]," O'Reilly said. "I feel I can for sure. I might be a little rusty, but I feel I'm ready to get back. I still feel I can be effective. It's just a matter of talking with all the management and staff, [making sure] that everyone is [OK] with it."

The Sabres had two players missing from practice a day after they defeated the New York Rangers 4-1 at Madison Square Garden. Defenseman Jake McCabe was out for a maintenance day and forward William Carrier was sick.

Carrier is questionable, and McCabe is expected to play.

Jack Eichel doesn't see himself as Sabres' 'saviour'

By Mike Brophy

CBC Sports

January 4, 2017

The reality of being one of the top picks in the NHL is that most often you go to a bottom feeder and it takes time before your club improves.

Nobody knows that better than Jack Eichel.

Eichel, 20, was chosen second overall by the Buffalo Sabres in the 2015 NHL draft in Florida, right behind Connor McDavid, who went No. 1 to the Edmonton Oilers. While there was never any question who would be selected first – McDavid is considered a generational player – the Sabres got themselves an exceptional prospect determined to do his part to put the Sabres back on the hockey map.

"I don't think of myself as a saviour," Eichel said. "Obviously a lot of pieces have to fit together for a team to become good. We have a lot of good pieces. I just try to be an impact person and player in the locker room and on the ice every day. I try to bring my best as much as I can."

That said, Eichel cherishes the notion of being a go-to player on a franchise that is trying to turn a corner.

"I like to have a big role and I like people to rely on me," said the native of North Chelmsford, Mass. "I think it brings out the best in my game. Just having the mindset that you have to be a big piece of the puzzle can put a lot of pressure on yourself, but it's also a good thing to motivate you."

The curly haired centre was second in Buffalo scoring in his rookie season scoring 24 goals and 56 points in 81 games. That was second amongst NHL rookies. Artemi Panarin of the Chicago Blackhawks was first with 30 goals and 77 points in 80 games. McDavid, who missed a chunk of the season with a shoulder injury, had a higher points-per-game average than both with 16 goals and 48 points in 45 games.

Injury set back

This season, after helping Team North America to an impressive 2-1 record (a goal and two points in three games) in the World Cup of Hockey, Eichel was preparing to help get the Sabres back to the Stanley Cup Playoffs after five seasons on the sidelines, when he suffered a serious ankle sprain. He caught a rut in the ice in a collision during a scrimmage and it caused him to miss the first 21 games of the season, putting the Sabres behind the eight ball.

The Sabres were 8-9-3 in Eichel's absence. One can't help but wonder what kind of a good start they might have enjoyed with a healthy Eichel in the lineup. It is worth noting Eichel scored a goal and had an assist in a 5-4 Buffalo victory over the Ottawa Senators upon his return to the lineup on Nov. 29. The Sabres are 7-6-2 since his return and with seven goals and 13 points he leads Buffalo with 0.81 points per game.

Even though he is back playing, Eichel admitted he's not out of the woods where the ankle injury is concerned.

"It's pretty good for the most part, but it's something you still feel and at any time you can tweak it," Eichel said.

Eichel isn't the only youngster the Sabres are banking on to help them improve. Defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen, 21, leads the team in scoring with three goals and 25 points in 37 games, while centre Sam Reinhart, 20, has eight goals and 24 points, also in 37 games.

While the Sabres, who are last in the Eastern Conference, are a long shot to make the playoffs this season, Eichel continues to develop as a player and a leader. He said he is more comfortable in his second season in the NHL.

"More than anything you just assume a bigger role in terms of being a leader," Eichel said. "You try to be better every day whether it's in practice or a game. I just try to make more of an impact on the guys every day. You can't use the rookie excuse anymore. "

Not that Eichel ever did.

O'Reilly a surprising addition at practice in Chicago

By Chris Ryndak

Buffalo Sabres

January 4, 2017

CHICAGO - When it was announced last Tuesday that Buffalo Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly would be out for some time after undergoing a successful appendectomy over the holiday break, the expectation was that he'd miss about two weeks for rest and recovery and then an additional few days so that he could get back into game shape.

That timeframe could be thrown out the window as O'Reilly was back on the ice with his teammates for practice at United Center in Chicago, just 10 days after the operation.

"We talked about 10 to 14 days of inactivity and he got the go-ahead to start skating and do some exercises a couple days ago," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "He skated yesterday and felt real well and saw the doctor and the doctor gave him the green light to go forward.

"Yesterday, after he skated in the morning-time and after he saw the doctor in the afternoon, we knew he'd be coming, joining us, and skating here today."

O'Reilly said that on Christmas Eve, he wasn't feeling well and at about 10:30 that night, he called the doctor.

"Hey, I want to make sure this isn't appendicitis or anything like that," O'Reilly recalled saying. "Unfortunately it was, but it was good because we caught it in time and I didn't travel with it or anything."

After having the surgery on Dec. 25, O'Reilly said he was out of commission for about five days and on a liquid diet. He says he's fortunate it occurred during the three-day mandatory break because that cut down on the number of games he could've potentially missed.

Now after a practice under his belt that included some work on the power play, he thinks he'll be ready for Thursday night's match against the Chicago Blackhawks, which can be seen at 8:30 p.m. ET on NBCSN.

"I want to play tomorrow. I feel like I can for sure," O'Reilly said. "I might be a little rusty, but I feel like I'm ready to get back. I still think I can be effective and it's just a matter of talking with all the management and staff to make sure everyone's safe with it and I'll be safe with it."

If O'Reilly plays, Bylsma said it's likely that Sam Reinhart would stay in the middle. That would make O'Reilly, Jack Eichel, Reinhart and Zemgus Girgensons the top four centermen.

Defensive efforts

The Sabres are coming off a 4-1 victory over the New York Rangers at Madison Square Garden in a game where they held New York to 25 shots on goal and few quality scoring chances. What's really impressive is that they did it without O'Reilly and Johan Larsson - their best defensive centers - and defenseman Josh Gorges and Dmitry Kulikov.

Taylor Fedun was a late recall for the game after it was determined Gorges could not play due to a hip injury he had sustained the day before. Fedun said he flew out to New York at around 10 a.m. to be ready for the 7 p.m. faceoff.

He skated 13:11 in the game (3:15 on the power play) and recorded two shots with an even plus/minus rating.

Fedun posted four assists and a plus-1 rating during an eight-game stint with the Sabres from Nov. 17 to Dec. 3, 2016.

He was able to use that experience to help make an impact with the Rochester Americans, and, in turn, that confidence enabled him to turn in a strong performance while on a pair with Justin Falk last night.

"The games I got last month or whatever it was gave me a good indication of the way I need to play to be successful and be effective at this level," he said. "Having that kind of in my back pocket coming back, that really helped knowing that - I mean, this game's so mental a lot of the time - to have that going in on such short notice goes a long way."

With the Amerks this year, Fedun is seventh on the team in scoring (first among defensemen) with 17 points (4+13) in 20 games. He picked up three points in back-to-back wins for the Amerks last week, including an overtime winner against Lehigh Valley.

Wednesday's practice

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4 Josh Gorges - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
47 Zach Bogosian - 6 Cody Franson
41 Justin Falk - 38 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson

First Power-Play Unit
Eichel-O'Reilly-Reinhart-Okposo-Ristolainen

Second Power-Play Unit
Kane-Gionta-Moulson-Franson-Fedun

Jake McCabe was given a maintenance day and William Carrier missed practice due to an illness.