



# **Buffalo Sabres**

**Daily Press Clips**

*February 12, 2017*

## **Maple Leafs look to remain perfect vs. Sabres**

Associated Press

February 10, 2017

TORONTO -- The Buffalo Sabres have not figured out how to beat the Toronto Maple Leafs this season.

They are 0-2-0 against the Maple Leafs and have three more games against their Atlantic Division rivals, starting Saturday night at the Air Canada Centre.

The Maple Leafs are third in the Atlantic Division, seven points ahead of the seventh-place Sabres.

"Any divisional game right now is huge for us," Buffalo center Ryan O'Reilly said. "They're four-point swings and this Toronto team, the last few games, I think, have been disappointing against them. We can be a lot better against them and they're right above us. They're a team we can catch if we chip away and get back in this."

"That's where you make the playoffs is right there, pretty much," Sabres right winger Kyle Okposo said.

"They say it's a four-pointer," Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock said after practice on Friday. "I have been in the league a long time, (points) only go up two at a time. I know that. We just keep trying to get our two each night."

The Maple Leafs (25-17-11) defeated the Sabres (22-22-10) by a 2-1 score at Buffalo on Nov. 3 and 4-3 on Jan. 17 in Toronto.

After Saturday, the two remaining games between the teams, March 25 and April 3, are at Buffalo.

The Sabres lost 5-2 to the Anaheim Ducks Thursday night after a 5-4 comeback win in overtime Tuesday over the San Jose Sharks, a game in which Buffalo trailed 4-1 in the third period and hoped would be a momentum builder.

"It was tough sleeping last night knowing I could've been a lot better and impacted the game a lot," O'Reilly said Friday. "But coming to the rink today, it's a new day and we've got to prepare for Toronto. It's going to happen but my focus is on (Saturday's) game and making an impact."

The Sabres again will be without Zemgus Girgensons, who did not play on Thursday because of a mid-body injury. The center will miss at least two more games.

Buffalo defenseman Cody Franson, a former Maple Leaf, injured his foot blocking a shot against Anaheim and will not play Saturday. Taylor Fedun is expected to replace him in the lineup.

The Maple Leafs will be playing the third game of four in a row at home on Saturday. They beat the Dallas Stars 3-1 on Tuesday and lost to the St. Louis Blues 2-1 in overtime on Thursday.

Maple Leafs right winger Nikita Soshnikov participated in practice Friday after missing the game Thursday with an upper-body injury. His status for the game against the Sabres will not be known until after the morning skate on Saturday.

Frederik Andersen, who stopped 38 shots in the game Thursday, will start in goal against Buffalo. Defensemen Martin Marincin and Alexey Marchenko are likely to be healthy scratches again. Marchenko was claimed off waivers from the Detroit Red Wings last Saturday.

After allowing 22 goals in four games, the Maple Leafs have tightened defensively in the past two games, even though the Blues had 40 shots on goal on Thursday.

"When we do a good job like we have the last two games, and be on the inside and check real well, I think it really helps the goaltending," Babcock said. "So, some nights you give up not very many shots but you give up back-door opportunities, and that's hard on the goalie. The other thing is shots from the outside, if you're inside, aren't as big a deal."

## **Babcock 'shocked' by poor start as Leafs drop sixth in the last eight games**

By Jonas Siegel

Canadian Press

February 12, 2017

TORONTO — Mike Babcock said he was "shocked" by how his Maple Leafs started against the Buffalo Sabres on Saturday night.

The Sabres scored two goals — 55 seconds apart — before the Leafs even got their first shot at Robin Lehner, Morgan Rielly's attempt coming more than nine minutes into the opening frame. Buffalo added another goal — the second of the night for Evander Kane — before the period was through.

"We weren't ready to play any way you look at it," Babcock said after a 3-1 loss, the sixth defeat in the last eight games for Toronto.

The Leafs are just holding onto the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot with 61 points through 54 games. A flood of teams, now including the Sabres with 56 points, are nipping at their heels.

Babcock stressed to his team beforehand how little there was separating teams in the East, even those hovering near the bottom like Buffalo. He wondered afterward whether the message was received.

"If you don't prepare you don't win, it's real simple," Babcock said. "You can cheat the system once in a blue moon. Not good enough."

Saturday's slow start mirrored one from two days earlier against St. Louis, the Leafs outshot 17-4 in the first before ultimately falling 2-1 to the Blues in overtime.

Babcock thought his team "gifted" the Sabres all three goals with a series of defensive errors.

The first goal saw Auston Matthews get beat by fellow American Jack Eichel on a defensive zone draw, Sam Reinhart quickly shuffling off the loose puck to Kane, who fired the first of his two goals by Frederik Andersen.

Eichel, who finished with a career-high three assists, actually lost nine of his 14 draws against Matthews, but won both in the Toronto zone.

His partial break on the following shift drew a hooking penalty from Leafs defenceman Jake Gardiner and another goal ultimately for the Sabres, this one on the power play from Reinhart. The Sabres somehow managed to get numbers behind the Leafs defence on the play, a streaking Kyle Okposo feeding the 21-year-old Reinhart for 2-0 lead.

Buffalo upped its lead to three when Eichel set up Kane's 18th of the year behind the Toronto goal.

The Leafs continued to give up quality chances early in the second before mounting some pushback amid some brief line shuffling from Babcock, which included Matthews and fellow star rookie Mitch Marner playing together for a shift or two. Rielly thought his team started to establish more of a presence down low in the Sabres zone.

"I think that at the start we were trying to create too much off the rush and maybe be a bit fancy," said Rielly. "I think that once we realized it wasn't working we started chipping pucks in and going to get 'em."

It was Marner who finally got the Leafs on the board with four minutes left in the middle frame on a Toronto power play. The 19-year-old rushed along the right side of the Sabres zone, circled the net and then fired an attempt that pinged off the right skate of defenceman Rasmus Ristolainen before caroming once more off Lehner's stick and into the goal.

It was his 15th goal of the year and team-leading 47th point, also the best for all NHL rookies this season.

Toronto kept pushing in the third, pelting Lehner with 16 shots while outshooting Buffalo 44-23 overall. It wasn't enough.

"You put all that energy in and you chase the game around for the next 45 minutes and yet your first 15 minutes sink you," Babcock said. "This was a good lesson for us."

The Leafs, now with 28 games remaining, have allowed almost four goals per-game during this wobbly stretch (2-4-2) while struggling immensely on the penalty kill (62.5 per cent). This comes on the heels of a scorching 16-game run in which 24 of a possible 32 points were picked up.

Toronto will have to gain steam again to keep pace in the crowded East with a pair of back-to-back sets ahead in the coming week, starting on Tuesday night against the surging New York Islanders.

"We're not worried about it being a long-term thing," Rielly said of the team's first-period struggles. "We're going to talk about it. We're going to improve on it and make sure that doesn't continue to happen."

Jonas Siegel, The Canadian Press

## **Sabres' Kane shines in 'Hockey Night' spotlight**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2017

TORONTO – Evander Kane is one of the hottest scorers in the NHL, as folks in Buffalo know. What’s the best way to make it known throughout the hockey world?

Score twice in Toronto. On a Saturday night. On “Hockey Night in Canada.”

And what the heck, why not do it two years to the day of the big trade to the Sabres?

“Happy anniversary,” said “Hockey Night” reporter Christine Simpson during her nationally televised one-on-one with Kane.

As Kane looked back on the 3-1 victory over the Maple Leafs, he also looked back on a torrid 10-week stretch that has put him atop the Sabres’ scoring list. The two goals in Air Canada Centre gave him 18 for the season.

He’s tied for 36th overall in the NHL, especially impressive considering his first goal didn’t come until Dec. 3.

“Health-wise this is probably the best I’ve felt in the last number of years in terms of staying healthy, having some games and getting in a groove,” Kane said.

The broken ribs he suffered in the season opener are a distant memory. So is the 12-game slump to start the year.

“Health has a lot to do with it,” Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. “Once he got back to skating the way he can skate and bringing the speed and physicality, we’ve seen his game from Dec. 1 on really elevate.”

Since Dec. 1, Kane is fourth in the league in goals, including an NHL-best 17 at even strength. He has five two-goal games this season, bringing his career total to 24.

The 25-year-old is still waiting for a hat trick.

“I think I’m leading the league in two-goal games by a player with no hat trick,” Kane said with a laugh.

He really is. Since 1987-88, only the retired duo of Pavel Datsyuk (39) and Brian Leetch (25) have had more two-goal games during the regular season without a getting a hat trick, according to Ian Ott, the Sabres’ manager of media relations.

Kane had a couple of long-range chances during the closing minutes that went wide and resulted in icing calls.

“I definitely appreciate the boys trying to get it for me, and that ice probably wasn’t the best opportunity to get it,” Kane said. “Hopefully it will happen, maybe tomorrow night.”

The Sabres host the Vancouver Canucks at 7:30 p.m. Sunday.

Kane is performing like General Manager Tim Murray envisioned when he swung the deal with Winnipeg on Feb. 11, 2015. In addition to the two goals, Kane attempted four shots, had three hits and two takeaways.

Both goals came during the first period as Buffalo blew past the Leafs for a 3-0 lead. Kane opened the scoring from the top of the right circle when Jack Eichel won the draw to Sam Reinhart, who quickly fed Kane.

After Reinhart scored, Kane took a pass from Eichel and fired from inside the left faceoff dot.

"The third one was one I really liked," Bylsma said. "It's not an area he gets in and sits in and is a recipient of a pass too often. That's a sign of him adding another level to his game there, not just the speed and shooting the puck down the wing, but finding that soft area there. Jack makes a great play, and he makes no mistake with it."

The early goals and a bushel of saves by Robin Lehner allowed Buffalo to hold off the Leafs. Toronto took 44 shots in the final 51 minutes.

"We jumped on them early, and we were rewarded for it," Eichel said. "The next 40 we did enough to win the game, and that's what's important. With that being said, we still need to be a little bit better in pushing for that next goal. The fourth one would have been nice."

## **Mike Harrington: For one period at least, Sabres put troubles against East aside**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2017

TORONTO -- The Sabres are a great tease. Just when you write them off and think it's really over this time for another season, you get a first period like Saturday night. You see the potential for the future and, frankly, you wonder why you haven't seen more of it the last 30-some games.

We're talking two lasers from Evander Kane, three assists from Jack Eichel and a Sam Reinhart goal on a power play unit that has ascended to second in the NHL.

The 3-1 victory over the Toronto Maple Leafs was a badly need elixir. Let's face it, were it not for that completely-out-of-left-field comeback against the Sharks, this week would have rated as a complete disaster.

There was the stinker in New Jersey, what looked like a JV vs. the varsity beatdown by San Jose for 45 minutes until the stars aligned, and the pounding the Sabres took Thursday against Anaheim.

But now all of a sudden you're talking two wins in three games, a visit from the Canucks Sunday night and a critical trip to Ottawa Tuesday. Now all of a sudden, the Sabres are only five points back of Toronto for a wild-card when it could have been nine.

Frankly, a lot of Saturday's win looked like the Sabres got exceedingly sick of hearing about the Leafs. Who can blame them?

There was plenty of nastiness in this one. Rasmus Ristolainen and James van Riemsdyk, of all people, dropped the gloves in the first period. Nazem Kadri continues to be a pest and drove Brian Gionta hard into the boards, drawing Marcus Foglino's ire.

In the final five seconds, it was Ristolainen against mega prospects Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner. There's two more meetings in Buffalo to come. Stay tuned.

"Great. Tight game. Physical game," Ristolainen said. "Both teams are competing for the same playoff spot. It sounds pretty exciting for me."

"There was no question we had a good start to the game and then they came out and came after Ristolainen," said a smiling coach Dan Bylsma. "You saw that at the end too with scrums around the net. They weren't worried about their defensemen not getting in there late in the game and needing a faceoff in the offensive zone. It was a pileup at the net a couple times and one you don't mind seeing."

The Leafs, of course, are riding the wave of one of the greatest rookie crops in recent NHL history. They entered the night with three of the top four in points (Marner, Matthews and William Nylander) and an astonishing six of the top 14 when you add in Nikita Zaitsev, Connor Brown and Zach Hyman.

Toronto rookies have combined for 208 points this season. Sabres rookies? Seven goals and 10 points.

The white-hot Kane's two goals gave the Sabres the quick jump they desperately needed in this one after losing their first two meetings with Toronto, including a blown 2-0 lead here last month. That one really stands as a symptom of their struggles all season against the Eastern Conference.

Buffalo is just 13-17-8 against the East but 10-5-2 against the West -- the best points percentage of any team in the Atlantic Division.

There's some clear holes on the Sabres' Eastern resume. While it's hard to quibble about that 1-4-1 against division-leading Montreal and Washington, it's their record against some of the lesser lights in the conference that's killing them.

That 0-4 against Boston -- with the final game played on New Year's Eve -- just about kept Claude Julien afloat for a few more weeks before the Bruins finally sent him packing Tuesday.

That combined 0-6-2 against Tampa Bay, New Jersey and Carolina is particularly grievous. The Sabres were 0-2 against the Leafs heading into Saturday.

Buffalo's shoddy play in the East is in stark contrast to its work against the West.

The Sabres have already won at Minnesota and Edmonton. They lost at Chicago in overtime, in a game they led inside the final 2 1/2 minutes of regulation. They still have all four of their games left against sadsacks Arizona and Colorado, and any team remotely still thinking playoffs should be talking about eight points in those games.

There's really no true theories on this. The West has long been known for what coaches like to call "heavy hockey" the last few years. Think Anaheim's 2007 Stanley Cup or the Los Angeles victories in 2012 and 2014. But teams in the East have been better this year. Washington is 12-2 against the West. Columbus is 16-5-3, the New York Rangers are 18-5.

Meanwhile, you wonder how much of a wall Toronto is hitting. With this loss, the Leafs are 4-5-3 in their last 12 games and 2-4-2 in the last eight. While the youngsters are still scoring, the defense remains ultra-vulnerable and goalie Frederik Andersen is mortal again; He entered Saturday at 4.45/.877 in four February games. and it's kind of surprising there wasn't a mercy pulling after the first period.

The Sabres need the Leafs to keep coming back to the pack. Having some hate for what should be their big rival has to help too, even if the principals aren't ready to make such a pronouncement.

"We're ticked off we're still five points behind," Reinhart said. "We were at seven and it could be either nine or five. That's all the motivation we needed. We're still right there. We've got to improve and tighten that gap but it started tonight."

The Sabres have been saying all year they're one big winning streak away from being in the thick of the race and they're right. The problem is that Saturday was game 55 and there's been two three-game winning streaks all season.

And there's that little issue of this franchise not putting together so much as a five-game winning streak since 2012 -- even though there's been 23 of them in the league so far this year. Yes, 23.

So it's not over yet. The Sabres keep hanging around. Even as they let another opponent get 40-plus shots on goal. Robin Lehner made 43 saves, stopping all 18 in the third period and the Sabres got out of town with exactly what they needed: Two points in regulation.

"This time of year, games really matter and it's a good thing we find ways like that," Ristolainen said. "You don't want to lay back when it's 3-0 but Lehner had a huge game for us. We have to keep going."

## **Sabres Notebook: Babcock mourns; Ryan Miller won't play**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2017

TORONTO – After the Maple Leafs' morning skate, Mike Babcock headed to the media room. He was clearly hurting.

Toronto's coach spent 10 years working in Detroit, and Friday's death of Red Wings owner Mike Ilitch hit Babcock hard.

"He made you want to be a better man," Babcock said Saturday before facing the Buffalo Sabres. "He was committed to doing things right, and what he touched in business turned to gold. But he had that presence about him that he made you want to be better."

Few teams have been better than the Red Wings. They've made the playoffs for 25 straight seasons under Ilitch, with Babcock leading them to the Stanley Cup in 2008.

"We all work for someone," Babcock said in Air Canada Centre. "Some people make you come in earlier. They don't say nothing, but they just show up every day and they grind, and they make you want to grind."

"That, to me, was what he was all about. Ken Holland as general manager and Mike Ilitch, they set a standard for all the people that worked there that made you want to please them and made you disappointed in yourself, not mad at them, disappointed in yourself, when you didn't live up to what you should."

Tributes to Ilitch have poured in from the sports world. The 87-year-old also owned baseball's Detroit Tigers, who count Michigan native Dan Bylsma as a fan.

"I've always viewed the Ilitches as one of the great owners," the Sabres coach said. "I know the guy wanted to win a World Series here in the last couple years, and it's a bit of disappointment not getting to achieve that."

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Ryan Miller is returning to KeyBank Center, but he isn't expected to play.

The Sabres will host the Vancouver Canucks at 7:30 p.m. Sunday, with both teams finishing a back-to-back. Miller made 26 saves Saturday in a 4-3 loss to the Boston Bruins. Canucks coach Willie Desjardins said Miller and Jacob Markstrom would split the crease this weekend, which puts Markstrom in line to face the Sabres.

Markstrom is 9-10-3 with a .913 save percentage. Miller is 15-15-3 with a .917 save percentage.

Miller's has 355 career victories, including a franchise-record 284 with Buffalo, and his next win will move him past Rogie Vachon for 19th place on the NHL's all-time list.

The Canucks are 1-5 in their last six games, falling to 24-25-6. They are just 7-17-3 away from home.

Buffalo is 13-9-4 at home and 4-4-1 on the second night of back-to-backs.

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Sabres defenseman Cody Franson, who blocked a shot off his foot Thursday, is expected back right around the NHL trade deadline.

"We're looking at bone bruise at this point in time, two to three weeks, maybe two weeks," Bylsma said.

Franson is a pending unrestricted free agent who was expected to attract interest prior to the March 1 deadline. The defenseman has three goals, 16 points and a minus-1 rating in 51 games.

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Jack Eichel's friendship with the Leafs' Auston Matthews is well-documented, but that's not Eichel's only connection to Toronto. The Sabres center played on the Boston Jr. Bruins with the Leafs' William Nylander when he was 9 years old.

"That's where I got the toe-drag from, William Nylander," Eichel said with a grin. "It's pretty crazy that it goes back that far. ... It's always nice to play your buddies in the NHL."

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Buffalo is home to the Beauts of the National Women's Hockey League. Its rival, the Canadian Women's Hockey League, held its All-Star Game in Air Canada Centre between the Sabres' morning skate and the Buffalo-Toronto game.

"I know they've got one going in the U.S., too, and it's important that they have an opportunity to play and continue to grow the game," Babcock said. "The Canadian women's program and the U.S. women's program are very dominant on the world stage, and that's because they have places to play."

## **Quick hits: Sabres 3, Maple Leafs 1**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2017

TORONTO – The Sabres knew the math. A loss to Toronto would put them nine points back. A victory would cut the deficit to five.

Give 'em five.

Buffalo came out flying in Air Canada Centre, then relied on Robin Lehner for a 3-1 victory Saturday. The Sabres pulled within five points of the Maple Leafs, who hold the final playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

There are five teams between the clubs, but five points sounds way better than nine.

Big start: The Sabres exploded for three goals in the first period to take a 3-0 lead. Evander Kane scored twice, Sam Reinhart had a goal and assist, while Jack Eichel had three helpers.

Saving grace: It took the Leafs more than nine minutes to take their first shot, but they finished with a 44-23 advantage. Lehner shut the door, allowing only a fluke goal, to hand Toronto its first regulation loss in five games.

The Sabres have allowed at least 40 shots in three straight games.

Kane's first: The Sabres needed 4:03 to open the scoring. Eichel won an offensive-zone draw to Reinhart, who pushed the puck to Kane. The left winger promptly fired into the top corner.

Power-play rush: Eichel sent Kyle Okposo and Reinhart on a two-on-one, and Reinhart easily beat goaltender Frederik Andersen just 55 seconds after Kane scored. It was Reinhart's 12th of the season and seventh on the power play.

Kane's second: The streaking winger took over the Sabres' scoring lead with his 18th goal. Eichel took a pass below the goal line and waited for Kane to find space near the left faceoff dot. Kane sent a laser past Andersen to make it 3-0 with 1:58 left in the first.

At the time of the goal, Kane ranked fourth in the NHL with 18 goals since Dec. 1, including a league-best 17 at even strength.

On the board: The Leafs cut their deficit to 3-1 with 4:03 left in the second. With Buffalo's Josh Gorges in the box for tripping, Mitch Marner carried the puck behind the Sabres' net. He sent it to the front, where it bounced off defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen and goaltender Robin Lehner to carom into the net.

Who did what?: Ristolainen and the Leafs' James van Riemsdyk dropped the gloves during the first period. It was only the second fight of Ristolainen's career and the third for van Riemsdyk.

Bailey gets a boost: Rookie Justin Bailey skated as the left winger for center Ryan O'Reilly and right wing Kyle Okposo.

"He's definitely earned it and been one of our more effective players with his speed in the time that he's gotten," coach Dan Bylsma said. "He's had a little more tenacity on the puck and putting pressure on the opposition with that speed."

Position switch: The Sabres recalled forward Evan Rodrigues one day after sending him to Rochester. For the first time in the NHL, he played center. He skated in the middle of left wing Marcus Foligno and right wing Brian Gionta.

"Growing up I played center, then through college I didn't very much," Rodrigues said. "This year, I've played probably half the year at center" with the Amerks.

Milestone: Van Riemsdyk skated in his 500th game as Toronto celebrated "You Can Play Night." Van Riemsdyk was the ambassador as the Leafs welcomed players from the Toronto Gay Hockey Association to the morning skate.

Next: The Sabres welcome the Vancouver Canucks to KeyBank Center on Sunday with a rare 7:30 p.m. start. Ryan Miller was in net for the Canucks' 4-3 loss Saturday in Boston, so he is not expected to play.

## **Inside the Sabres: When injured players skate, it's Miller time**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 11, 2017

When Dan Bylsma provides injury updates, the Sabres coach will often say, "He skated on his own before practice." The players aren't really on their own.

Sometimes they wish they were.

Dennis Miller, in charge of rehab and development in Buffalo's performance department, skates with players as they return to health. The Sabres have praised his work and ingenuity, but the 47-year-old Buffalo native has a trait he likes better.

"My best skill is running my mouth," Miller said with a grin.

Jake McCabe found out the hard way. Miller usually plays music while he works out the players, but they cut the sound one day this month while McCabe was rehabbing his shoulder.

"We were about 60 minutes into the workout and McCabe finally said, 'Will you shut up?'" Miller said. "One of the nice compliments they throw at me is, 'I never want to see you again. I don't want to do any work with you.'

"I'm like, 'I don't want you to, either. I want you want to stay healthy and stay in the lineup.'"

Miller is essentially the gateway to the games. He works with the medical, training and sports science staffs to bring injured players back to the lineup. After the players are cleared physically, they endure a few days of "battle drills" with Miller. The former college defenseman uses his stocky frame to push, pull and shove the players while testing their ailments, and they push, pull and shove back.

"He's the best I've seen at getting you ready, and I've worked with a lot," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "Skating and skating and skating might get your lungs and your legs ready, but playing hockey is so much different than straight-line skating.

"Dennis does such a great job of giving me what I need as a player and specific to me as a defenseman. He factors in all these different things. He gets you ready so when you're back you're ready to step right in again."

Miller tailors his drills to each player. It's obvious that goaltender Robin Lehner's ankle needs different drills than William Carrier's knee. But as a forward, Carrier uses his knee much differently than Gorges does. Miller carries a notebook with him to each game, and he jots down the way players pivot, turn and stride. He then draws up plans to help each skater from each position.

"We do some things differently than they're used to," Miller said. "They're really open-minded when I throw ideas at them and say, 'Let's try this,' as long as I can make it clear that there's a reasonable goal to what we're doing, that there's a connection to their game.

"Part of it is understanding each guy's personality and how they work. Most of the times you need to slow them down in order to keep them in the progression and to keep them from doing something that might set them back. That's why the connection between medical and strength and the on-ice is so important."

The medical staff establishes a timeline when players get hurt. The athletic trainers start the rehab process. When the players are ready to skate, they head to Miller. He gets help from the sports science folks, who track the players' vitals to see if they're deviating from the timeline.

"We tie everything together to make sure we're pointing everything in the right direction," Miller said. "When they say they want to do more work, 'Nope, we've reached our goal for the day. You don't need to do more work. We need to save some energy for tomorrow or Saturday night when you're back in the lineup.'

"We always have that data available on the computer, right on the bench. It's really important in those one-on-one sessions so we know what our goals are and where we want to get them to in their workload. We've got evidence you've done the work you need to do for today. We don't need to do more.

"That's a really important piece because when they're out of the lineup they want to do whatever they can to get back in. You just have to hold them back from doing too much. That's where that instant feedback is really important. We can see that we're getting them to that target heart rate. We can see the recovery."

The players can feel it.

"The drills he does with us to be able to step in and be as game-ready as possible, he does a great job along with the rest of the strength and conditioning staff," McCabe said.

While Miller loves his job, his favorite days are when he doesn't have to do it. It means everyone is healthy.

He hasn't had too many days off.

"Dennis has worked way too much this year for us, to be honest," Bylsma said. "Regardless of the situation that you're in or the position that you play, Dennis is a guy who does a ton of work behind the scenes getting these guys ready to come back and step back in."

## **Like Sabres, O'Reilly in search of consistency**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 10, 2017

Ryan O'Reilly had a rough night against Ryan Getzlaf. Not just the game. The whole night.

"It was tough sleeping last night knowing that I could have been a lot better and impacted the game," the Sabres center said Friday.

O'Reilly doesn't have to dwell on the outing anymore. There's no time. He'll line up against center Nazem Kadri and the Toronto Maple Leafs on Saturday, and he'll probably get a good dose of Vancouver's Henrik Sedin on Sunday.

If O'Reilly plays well, the Sabres have a shot at winning. If he doesn't, the Leafs should have a fun night in Air Canada Centre.

O'Reilly has skated in 44 games this season. In the 18 wins, he has 10 goals, 23 points and a plus-13 rating. In the nine overtime losses, he has seven assists, eight points and a plus-1.

In the 17 losses, he has no goals, three assists and a minus-8.

The Sabres ask a lot of O'Reilly. He's a big reason why they win, and he's also a factor when they don't. With Buffalo sitting at 22-22-10, it's clearly been an inconsistent season.

"If we want to make the playoffs, I myself have to contribute every game for that," O'Reilly said in KeyBank Center. "Last night I don't think was good enough. It's frustrating, but going forward I myself have to be a lot better."

O'Reilly was minus-2 with an assist during Thursday's 5-2 loss to Anaheim. He was far from the only one to have an off night, but his mistakes are magnified because he's Buffalo's No. 1 center and he's making \$11 million this season – the fifth-highest total in the NHL.

"I wasn't reading the puck very well," O'Reilly said. "I found at times plays were there and I just wasn't making them quick enough. Sometimes it happens, but I've got to do other things well.

"Getzlaf and their line, they're tough to play against. If you give them time with the puck, they're going to make plays. I don't think I defended quick enough. I've got to take away a lot of their time and make it tough on them. It wasn't what I wanted."

One of the things hurting the Sabres is lack of support. While O'Reilly looked bad on the Ducks' opening goal – he slowly spun in a circle near no one – Corey Perry wouldn't have had a clear path to the slot if Evander Kane had succeeded with his poke-check.

"We've got to make each other look good," O'Reilly said. "Like myself, if I'm tracking the puck hard and making it easy for the D to have a good gap, it makes them look good, makes them feel good. That's kind of the stuff we can build around.

"We're way too inconsistent right now, and it's getting out of our heads and trying to help each other out. We've got to go out there each shift and box out so the goalies can make the easy save. It's all that stuff that'll build confidence. If we can make each other look good, it's going to help."

Whenever O'Reilly is a step behind, his injuries become a question. He had a midsection/back ailment early in the year, and he missed four games after Christmas because of an appendectomy.

"I feel great. There's no issue there," O'Reilly said. "Certain guys have to step up in certain ways, and for myself being hurt coming back, I know what I have to do each game. I don't think I'm restricted at all in anything."

In the grand scheme, O'Reilly is nearly matching his first season in Buffalo. He had 21 goals, 39 assists and 60 points in 71 games last year. He's on pace for 18 goals, 38 assists and 56 points in 72 games this season.

But expectations were higher for both him and the team, and neither has made a jump.

"I've got to be able to put the puck in the net, play more consistent, give life when it's needed," O'Reilly said. "The goal scoring, I think it's a little more personal. For myself, it's my own creativity. I've got to find it. It's not through a system. It's my own battles that I have to learn to create offense off of.

"My focus is on Toronto's game and making an impact."

## **Sabres Notebook: Buffalo has a ball; Franson injures foot**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 10, 2017

As the Red Hot Chili Peppers' road crew set up for a concert Friday, joyful shouts echoed from the 100 Level concourse. No, it wasn't rock fans getting a glimpse of the band in KeyBank Center.

It was the Sabres having a ball while playing ball.

Buffalo canceled its morning practice in HarborCenter and elected for team bonding in the main arena. The players carried soccer balls and giant fitness balls upstairs. From the sounds of it, they had a good time bouncing them around.

"It was just nice to have a little fun," right wing Kyle Okposo said. "You're playing so many games here, and your mind's on hockey constantly. It's nice to get a little change of pace, take your mind off things and hopefully come rejuvenated" to Saturday's game in Toronto.

The Sabres certainly could have used practice after a mistake-filled 5-2 loss to Anaheim on Thursday, but they also could have used a mental break. Buffalo is in a season-defining stretch of 11 games in 18 days, and the team has started the run just 2-2-1.

"We played a ton of hockey in the last 10 days, and we play six in nine here," coach Dan Bylsma said. "We had a meeting. We had a video and just an activity with the group."

The team then boarded the bus for a meeting with the Maple Leafs in Air Canada Centre. It's the third matchup of the five-game series, and the Leafs have won the first two.

The Sabres are just 7-10-3 against Atlantic Division foes, a big reason they're in seventh place out of eight teams.

"That's where you make the playoffs right there pretty much," Okposo said. "We see these guys a lot, and we have to make sure we're doing a better job against them."

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Defenseman Cody Franson couldn't get his kicks with his teammates. He stood by the fun with a crutch and a walking boot.

Franson blocked a shot with his foot Thursday. He definitely won't play Saturday or when Vancouver visits Sunday. The results from further evaluation Friday will determine how much more time he misses.

The severity of the injury could affect the trade deadline. If Buffalo remains off the playoff pace, Franson is a pending unrestricted free agent who would bring assets at the March 1 deadline.

Franson had been playing his best hockey during the past few weeks, contributing two goals and seven points in the last 10 games.

Center Zemgus Girgensons will also sit this weekend. He has missed one game so far with a full-body injury.

"He's more than day-to-day at this point," Bylsma said. "It'll be through the weekend, then we'll see on Monday."

The coach said Zach Bogosian (ribs) skated on his own, and the team will evaluate his reaction to contact. With Evander Kane healthy, the Sabres have sent forward Evan Rodrigues back to Rochester.

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The Leafs don't figure to be the tonic that ails Buffalo's team defense, but they could provide a boost to the offense.

The Sabres have allowed 40 or more shots in three of the past five games. Toronto is third in the NHL at 32.4 shots per game.

"If you look over the last handful of games going back to before the All-Star break," Bylsma said, "we've given up an average of 20 to 21 scoring chances over that stretch of seven or eight games, and that's really got to come down.

"The Ottawa game where we win, 4-0, is a 14-scoring-chance game. That's really where we've been lacking over that eight games is getting it under 15. A 14-or-under number is what we're shooting for."

Toronto, meanwhile, has allowed 40 or more shots in three of its past four games. The Sabres took just 26 against Anaheim and Ottawa, and they had only 23 against New Jersey.

"We've got to come out cleaner out of our own zone," Okposo said. "I've said it all year. That's where everything starts. We sit in our own zone for 30 seconds, then you finally get the puck out and it's not a clean exit, and then you're tired and you've got to change.

"If you come out of your own zone clean in 10 seconds, then you have a lot more energy to play offense and create more chances."

## **Sabres allow Eichel fan to meet his 'towering' influence**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 10, 2017

When the Sabres were in Nashville last month, they set up a meeting between Jack Eichel and one his biggest fans.

They also documented the experience.

C.J. Gworek, 8, took inspiration from a Dan Dunleavy call in which the Buffalo announcer quipped fans could put another goal on the Eichel tower. Gworek took it literally and began building an Eichel tower, adding a puck whenever Eichel finds the net.

"He will jump off the couch and he'll just grab one," Gworek's father, John, said to Sabres.com. "He absolutely wants to be the one to do it.

"There was something about this whole idea that Jack Eichel would know about it."

Eichel learned about it and met with the Gworeks after the morning skate in Bridgestone Arena.

"It's a pretty cool thing you've got going on," Eichel said before autographing a puck. "Add it to the tower."

## **Kane, Eichel Propel Sabres to 3-1 Win**

WGR 550

February 11, 2017

Evander Kane scored twice and Jack Eichel picked up three assists, all in the 1st period, en route to a 3-1 win over the Leafs. Robin Lehner made 43 saves in the win.

### Scoring

Evander Kane opened the scoring with his 3rd goal in 2 game, snapping a shot over Frederik Andersen right off a faceoff at 4:13 of the 1st.

Sam Reinhart made it 2-0 less than a minute later, finishing off a 2-on-1 with Kyle Okposo for his 12th of the season.

Kane's second of the opening period came with less than two minutes left, a one-timer from Jack Eichel behind the net. The assist marked Eichel's 3rd of the period.

Mitch Marner got Toronto on the board with a power play goal in the 2nd, banking a wraparound shot off Rasmus Ristolainen and Robin Lehner for his 15th.

### Game Notes

Kane now leads the Sabres with 18 goals, passing Kyle Okposo on Saturday (17).

Kane's 17 even strength goals are the most in the NHL since December 1, 2016.

Eichel's 3 assists led to his team-leading 10th multipoint game of the season. Eichel has played in 34 games.

With 43 saves tonight, Robin Lehner has 37 or more saves in each of his 5 February starts.

### 1st Period

#### Goals

4:13 - BUF - Evander Kane (17) (Sam Reinhart, Jack Eichel)

5:08 - BUF - Sam Reinhart (12) (PPG) (Kyle Okposo, Jack Eichel)

18:02 - BUF - Evander Kane (18) (Jack Eichel, Justin Falk)

### Penalties

4:39 - TOR - Jake Gardiner (2 min., hooking)

13:16 - BUF - Rasmus Ristolainen (5 min., fighting)

13:16 - TOR - James van Riemsdyk (5 min., fighting)

15:29 - BUF - Bench penalty (2 min., too many men on the ice, served by Tyler Ennis)

### 2nd Period

#### Goals

15:57 - TOR - Mitch Marner (15) (PPG) (Nikita Zaitsev, Tyler Bozak)

### Penalties

6:22 - BUF - Kyle Okposo (2 min., hooking)

15:12 - BUF - Josh Gorges (2 min., tripping)

### 3rd Period

#### Goals

None

### Penalties

19:56 - TOR - Morgan Reilly (2 min., roughing)

19:56 - BUF - Rasmus Ristolainen (2 min., roughing)

### Goaltending

BUF - Robin Lehner (43 saves, 44 shots)

TOR - Frederik Andersen (20 saves, 23 shots)

### Power Plays

BUF - 1 of 1

TOR - 1 of 3

## **From the Locker Room: Sabres-Leafs**

WGR 550

February 11, 2017

Evander Kane and Jack Eichel all factored in on the scoring in the Sabres' 5-2 victory at Toronto. Read what each had to say following the game.

Evander Kane

"Healthwise, this is probably the best I've felt in the last number of years in terms of staying healthy and having some games, and getting in a groove and not being held back by injuries. Just trying to stay healthy is kind of big for me."

"We had a two-goal lead last time in this building. We want to extend leads. When we were up 3-0, we were talking, let's get the 4th, let's get the 5th. Let's really take it to them because there's no rule for scoring too many goals in this league."

Jack Eichel

"Kane brings a lot of speed, he gets into the forecheck, causes a lot of havoc, gives us a lot of room and goes to the net. He's got a good finishing touch. We're just trying to use each other, get pucks on the net and we were rewarded tonight."

"We had some chances [in the 2nd and 3rd]. Maybe backed off a little too much. That being said, we did enough to get the win. Two points in a divisional rivalry game in Toronto on a Saturday night...not much better than that. We needed this one and we got it."

## **The Sabres stayed off the ice again**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

February 10, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- The Sabres decided not to practice on Friday. Instead, Dan Bylsma held meetings and then the players had a soccer game up on the 100 level of the arena. Bylsma said, "We've played a ton of hockey the past 10 days and six in nine here, so we had a meeting, had a video and just an activity with the group."

Buffalo got a new injury on defense near the end of the Ducks game. Bylsma said he doesn't know the extent of Cody Franson's injury, "Franson blocked a shot with his foot and there will be more evaluation on him today and he is not going to be playing in Toronto." Franson had a walking boot and crutch to walk.

Zemgus Girgensons isn't progressing quickly. Bylsma said, "He's more than day-to-day at this point, he's more through the weekend, so not as fastly or as well as we like, but we'll see on Monday."

Zach Bogosian skated again Friday dealing with a mid-body injury in the rib area and we'll see how he reacted to contact that he had this morning."

Ryan O'Reilly has played some very good hockey for the Sabres this season, but he also has played some bad hockey too. Thursday against the Ducks he couldn't handle Ryan Getzlaf and had many problems at both ends of the ice.

On Corey Perry's goal he just stood and watched Perry curl out from the wall and score the Ducks first goal.

Earlier in the period, O'Reilly put Dmitry Kulikov in a jackpot with a soft pass back to the point that produced a 2-on-1 the other way. O'Reilly of course wasn't happy with his play, "If we want to make the playoffs, I myself has to contribute every game and last night I don't think was good enough, it's frustrating, but going forward I myself have to be a lot better."

"I wasn't reading the puck very well, I felt at times plays were there and I wasn't making them quick enough and with Getzlaf, I don't think I defended quick enough to take away a lot of their time and make it tough on them."

In 427 games with Colorado, O'Reilly averaged 17 goals and 30 assists for 47 points. In 115 games with Buffalo, the center has averaged 23 goals and 44 assists for 67 points.

I asked O'Reilly if he's 100 percent and he said, "Yes I feel great, there's no issue there, it's just I've got to be able to put the puck in the net and play more consistent and give life when it's needed."

For the first 21 games the Sabres averaged around 1.8 goals per game. In the last 31 games they've averaged 3.03 goals per game, but the shots against have gone sky-high. In the last nine games they've given up 37 or more shots eight times. In the game they didn't it was 35. O'Reilly said, "It depends who you're playing, each team is different, but it does have to start in our own end. We've got to be smart and make it easier for the goalies to see it and then go from there."

"The goal scoring, it's a little more personal and for myself, it's my own creativity and I've got to find it. It's not through a system, it's battles that I have to create offense off of."

With Evander Kane OK, Evan Rodrigues was sent back to Rochester.

The Sabres left for Toronto in the early afternoon to face the Leafs Saturday night.

## **Kane available for trade, will only be dealt for right price**

By Brayton Wilson

WGR 550

February 10, 2017

Perhaps the 2016-17 season has not gone as planned for the Buffalo Sabres. With 28 games to play, the Sabres are 22-22-10 with 54 points in the standings and six points out of a playoff spot in the Eastern Conference.

While the Sabres may be out of the playoff picture at the moment, that can change on a dime if the team can string together some wins and get some help around the National Hockey League.

However, the NHL trade deadline is less than three weeks away and the Sabres could be sellers once again if they fall out of the playoff picture. As of right now, the only two sellers to be established are the Colorado Avalanche and the Arizona Coyotes. Both teams are sitting in the bottom of the standings and well out of a playoff spot. As for the Sabres, we may not know where they stand until the trade deadline gets closer.

"I still think there's a little bit of a wait and see attitude [in Buffalo]," ESPN's Craig Custance said with Howard Simon and Jeremy White on Friday morning. "I'm not sure if anyone is sure of what direction the Sabres are going to go. They're in the same position as a lot of teams are, especially in the [Eastern Conference]. You wanna give your team as much of a chance heading into the deadline to actually make a little bit of a run and make things interesting."

Perhaps the most intriguing name the Sabres have on the trading block is forward Evander Kane.

Kane, 25, has set himself up to put up some productive numbers by the season's end. In 43 games this season, Kane already has 16 goals and is on pace to finish the season with 26 goals.

While the Sabres acquired Kane from the Winnipeg Jets two years ago, his name has been on the trade market for quite some time now.

"His name has been out there for quite some time," TSN's Darren Dreger said with Andrew Peters and Martin Biron on The Instigators on Friday. "It depends on when you get to [Sabres general manager] Tim Murray as to whether or not he's legitimately in play. I think that applies right now."

Kane has one year remaining on his contract after this season, and carries an average annual value of \$5.25 million. Kane will become an unrestricted free agent at the end of his contract, and will be free to sign a new deal with any of the other 30 teams in the league. Kane was recently ranked number-9 on TSN's Trade Bait list.

Tim Murray joined Mike Schopp on Thursday at 716 Food and Sport and said that he is currently not looking to trade Kane away unless he was blown away by a deal that would have to involve him. Dreger knows that Murray has to do his job, and if there is a deal that comes up that Murray needs to make it is like that a trade involving Kane could happen.

"Tim Murray has a job to do as general manager of the Buffalo Sabres and that job is to make the Sabres a better team," Dreger said. "If there is something out there that requires Evander Kane to be part of a package that makes Buffalo better, then obviously he's going to consider that and make that deal. But last time I checked, he was more in a listening mode than he was a shopping mode. I don't think that much has changed in that regard."

"I don't think the Sabres are in a position to not listen on guys," Custance said also pertaining to a Kane trade. "They need a defenseman. If there's a trade to be made and Evander Kane is what it's going to take to get that defenseman, I think you at least listen to that conversation."

While Kane's name is gaining attention in the trade market, teams have to keep in mind his history off the ice with run-ins with the law. In December of 2015, Kane was accused of sexually assaulting a woman in his hotel room at the HarborCenter. He was cleared of those allegations in March and was not criminally charged. In June, Kane was involved in an incident at a bar in Downtown Buffalo that saw him arrested and charged with

harassment and criminal trespass. However, his charges will be dismissed in April if he manages to stay out of trouble with law enforcement.

Murray also said on Thursday that they have worked through the off-ice issues and that he has learning from his mistakes.

While Kane is maybe the most intriguing name from the Sabres on the trade market, defenseman Dmitry Kulikov will likely garner some attention as the deadline nears. Kulikov, 26, has a goal and an assist in 28 games played this season, and is set to become an unrestricted free agent at the end of this season.

"There aren't a ton of defensemen available [on the market]," Custance said. "There certainly is an advantage for a GM, like Tim Murray, to say, 'I'm still thinking big picture here.' That's the sense I get from the Sabres. [Buffalo could] strike while there's not many sellers on the market. That could serve them well because there will be interest in a guy who can play in your top-four and play 20 to 22 minutes a game."

Kulikov was acquired in a deal at the 2016 NHL Draft from the Florida Panthers. He has missed nearly half the season so far due to a lingering back injury that he suffered in the preseason.

Kulikov came in at number-16 on TSN's Trade Bait list, while Sabres captain Brian Gionta rounds out the list at number-25.

## **Buffalo Sabres' Jack Eichel didn't need to poke fans for booing**

By Sal Maiorana

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

February 10, 2017

Jack Eichel is young, he's used to playing on winning teams, and he's from Boston so he's naturally spoiled rotten by all the championships his beloved teams have won during his 20 years on this earth. All he's ever known is winning, until he came to our neighborhood.

Thus, we should give him a pass for his rather snarky comment the other night following the Sabres' scintillating 5-4 overtime victory over San Jose.

The Sabres were down 4-1 midway through the third period and the fans at KeyBank Center were either booing or heading to the exits to beat the traffic, lamenting yet another disappointing night. Then, out of nowhere, the Sabres rallied with three goals in less than four minutes to tie it, and ultimately Eichel set up Evander Kane for the winning goal in overtime.

It was an incredible win, but rather than bask in the glow, Eichel looked completely annoyed as he spoke to the media, and during the interview session he took a churlish swipe at the fans for having the nerve to boo.

"We got the building going and some energy in here after they were booing us off the ice," said Eichel. "We win a game in overtime and everyone loves us again, so it's interesting how that works."

Yeah young fella, that is how it works in pro sports. People are paying a lot of money – a lot of money – to watch these games and they want wins, and if that's not possible – far too often the case with the Sabres – then they at least want to be entertained.

For most of the last six years, Sabres fans have been woefully let down by their team, and it was happening once again against the Sharks. For about 50 minutes, there was nothing entertaining about the way the Sabres played and they deserved every catcall they received.

Kudos to them for getting off the deck and authoring a rally the likes of which we haven't seen in a long time. According to Elias Sports Bureau, this was the first non-shootout game Buffalo has won in which it trailed by three goals in the third period since a 7-4 victory against Tampa Bay on March 19, 2008. Further, the only other non-shootout game in which the Sabres won when trailing by at least three with less than 11 minutes to play was a 7-6 victory at Pittsburgh on March 10, 1976. They were down 6-2, but scored five times in the final 8:35 to win it.

Eichel addressed his comment Thursday following the morning skate prior to the Sabres' game against Anaheim, which they would lose 5-2 despite a pretty goal by Eichel.

"I think a lot of people made that out to be something that it wasn't," Eichel said. "If you look at my statement and what I said, it's completely factual. Nothing I said was opinionated. If I remember correctly, I said they booed us for two periods, then we come back and win a game and they love us again – which is exactly what happened. There's no way somebody can argue that happening because that's completely factual. I never said that there was something wrong with them booing us. We didn't play well. We weren't playing well. I think people like to take things and run with them."

Eichel has been here for a year-and-a-half. He missed the two tank seasons the Sabres endured so that they could draft Connor McDavid, or him. He has no clue what it's been like for Sabres fans who haven't attended a playoff game since the spring of 2011, which might not be so bad if not for the fact that on top of that the Bills haven't been to the playoffs since the 1999 season.

If they want to boo the Sabres for what, to that point, had been a brutal performance, then Eichel needs to suck it up and take it. He doesn't have to like it, but he also doesn't need to call the fans out for it.

## Taking my shots

► Someone must enlighten me on why LeBron James takes so much seemingly undeserved crap while simultaneously being the best player of his generation. For anyone who pays attention, blabber mouth Skip Bayless has been hating on LeBron for years, and Charles Barkley hasn't always been LeBron's biggest fan, either. Barkley took his latest shot at LeBron last week when he criticized him for trying to act like the general manager of the Cavaliers.

While I agree that players should play, coaches should coach, and GMs should GM, it's a fact of life that superstar players often get involved in the running of teams. Hey, Magic Johnson did the same thing in his day when he basically demanded the Lakers fire coach Paul Westhead in 1981. You don't think Michael Jordan had a say in what the Bulls were doing?

Outside of The Decision debacle when LeBron garishly announced he was joining the Miami Heat, the guy has been a pillar for the NBA. He's one of the greatest players in history with three NBA championships, three Finals MVPs, four league MVPs, and 10 first-team All-NBA selections. He stays out of trouble, seems to be a good role model for kids, and unlike the greatest quarterback in NFL history, he never deflated any balls. "All I've done for my entire career is represent the NBA the right way," James. "Fourteen years, never got in trouble. Respected the game." I have to agree. Leave the guy alone and enjoy his brilliance.

► I hope Major League Baseball isn't serious about this experiment it plans to conduct whereby in an extra-inning game, every inning from the 10th on will start with a runner at second base, an apparent attempt to lessen the possibility of interminable games in terms of both innings and time. MLB plans on testing the concept in the rookie-level Gulf Coast League and in the Arizona Fall League to, as MLB Chief Baseball Officer Joe Torre, "see what it looks like."

We'll also get a look at this in the upcoming World Baseball Classic. There are so many ways MLB can reduce the time of its games — less relievers, less mound visits, batters staying in the box, a pitch clock, etc. — but this seems way too contrived. That said, I'm a big fan of 3-on-3 overtime in the NHL, so perhaps this would grow on me.

► The Yankees' signing of free agent slugger/strikeout artist Chris Carter doesn't exactly thrill me because Carter is exactly the kind of player I don't like — a one-trick pony home-run hitter who does nothing else of value. He led the majors with 41 homers for the Brewers last season, and he also led the majors in strikeouts with 206 while batting .222 in 549 at-bats and playing a mediocre-to-worse first base. On the positive side, Carter is a pretty cheap \$3 million insurance policy in case Greg Bird, who missed all of 2016 with a shoulder injury, can't cut it full-time, and Carter will also get a few games as a DH against left-handers.

If it were up to me ...

The NHL would do away with the shootout and settle all games with a sudden-death 10-minute overtime of 3-on-3 hockey. The more 3-on-3 we get to watch, the better. Nothing would change in terms of the point distribution — the winning team gets two points, the losing team gets one.

And in the unlikely event that a game wouldn't be decided in 10 minutes — though with 3-on-3 it would be pretty hard for both teams to go scoreless — then hey, it's a tie, each team gets one point, just like they did in the NHL for the first eight decades of the league's existence.

To me, watching 10 minutes of exciting up-and-down 3-on-3 hockey would more than make up for the possibility of the game ending in an unsatisfying tie. I don't hate the shootout, but 3-on-3 is way better.

This week in baseball ...

In 1949, Yankees superstar Joe DiMaggio became the first American League player to make \$100,000 in one season. And then 52-years later this week, in 2001, Yankees superstar Derek Jeter finalized details on a 10-year, \$189 million contract. That was the second-largest contract in the sport at the time, behind only his future

Yankee teammate Alex Rodriguez's 10-year, \$252 million deal with Texas. And to think, these days, the Yankees are trying to be more fiscally responsible.

The numbers game

Courtesy of Elias Sports Bureau

- ▶ The Golden State Warriors blew out the Chicago Bulls on Wednesday night at home, and it was the 53rd straight game they had topped 100 points at Oracle Arena, the longest streak in the NBA since Denver scored at least 100 at home in 53 straight from March 1988 to April 1989. There's a reason why my former colleague, Bob Matthews, loves the Warriors.
- ▶ After Charles Oakley was forcibly removed from Madison Square Garden the other night — man, what a circus the Knicks are — New York went on to lose to the Clippers. This improved Los Angeles coach Doc Rivers' all-time record against the Knicks to 42-19. That .689 winning percentage is the third-best ever against the Knicks, behind only Billy Cunningham (.727) and current Knicks president Phil Jackson (.724).
- ▶ Tuesday night in the NHL, four games ended in shutouts where the margin of victory was four goals or more. Believe it or not, this is the first time this has ever happened in the 100-year history of the league.

## **Sabres' Cody Franson out after blocking shot**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 10, 2017

BUFFALO – Sabres defenseman Cody Franson blocked a shot in Thursday's 5-2 loss to Anaheim and will miss this weekend's games, coach Dan Bylsma said.

Franson, who needs to be evaluated, was wearing a walking boot on his left foot and using a crutch to walk today inside KeyBank Center, where the Sabres had an off-ice workout instead of practicing at HarborCenter.

The Sabres play Saturday in Toronto and host Vancouver on Sunday.

For a blue line that has endured a rash of injuries this season and is currently missing Zach Bogosian, Franson's absence could be huge.

Franson, 29, has been one of the Sabres' most productive defensemen, compiling three goals and 16 points while averaging 18 minutes, 51 seconds of ice time in 51 games.

If the Sabres become sellers before the upcoming trade deadline, Franson, an unrestricted free agent following the season, could be one of their most valuable assets. But a long-term injury could change that.

In other news, Bogosian, out with a mid-body injury, skated today, Bylsma said. The Sabres want to see how he responds to contact.

Center Zemgus Girgensons, meanwhile, will miss the weekend games with a mid-body injury, Bylsma said. Girgensons sat out Thursday's loss.

Bylsma kept the Sabres off ice today because of the busy schedule.

"We played a ton of hockey in the last 10 days," he said. "We play six in nine here."

In other news, the Sabres sent center Evan Rodrigues back to the Rochester Americans this morning. Rodrigues was recalled Thursday but sat out against the Ducks.

## **Evander Kane helps push Sabres past Maple Leafs**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 11, 2017

TORONTO – For nine weeks, as Evander Kane quietly morphed into one of the NHL’s hottest players, the Buffalo Sabres winger did most of his scoring on the third line, without the benefit of a top center.

So what could Kane do if he, say, played regularly with a slick pivot? Well, Saturday at the Air Canada Centre, Kane gave a pretty good demonstration.

Teamed up with center Jack Eichel again, Kane scored twice in first period, helping the Sabres jump out to a 3-0 first-period lead in their 3-1 win against the Maple Leafs before 19,427 fans.

“Just another game,” said Kane, who has five two-goal outings this season.

Sure, Evander.

Kane has 18 goals in his last 32 games, 17 at even strength. Remember, Kane broke four ribs opening night and struggled after returning. He didn’t score until Dec. 3, his 13th appearance.

So despite the anemic start, Kane’s on a 29-goal pace. He scored a career-high 30 goals in 74 games with Winnipeg in 2011-12.

“Even after he came after three weeks, you’re still dealing with that (injury) for a good portion of time,” Sabre coach Dan Bylsma said. “I think once he got rid of that time frame and got back to skating the way he can, bringing the speed, the physicality, you’ve seen his game from Dec. 1 on really elevate.”

Kane, who went back beside Eichel last week, said he hasn’t felt this good in years “in terms of staying healthy and having some games and getting in a groove and not being ... held back by injury.”

Kane opened the scoring 4:13 into the contest, beating Leafs goalie Frederik Andersen just after Eichel won a draw.

The 25-year-old made it 3-0 at 18:02, unleashing a wicked one-timer from the left circle off Eichel’s feed from down low.

“The third one was one I really liked,” Bylsma said. “It’s not an area he gets in and sits in.”

Eichel added: “He’s got a great shot, so he gets open and he lets it go.”

In between, Sam Reinhart scored on the power play at 5:08, connecting on Kyle Okposo’s nifty pass as he zoomed to the net. Eichel started the play, so he enjoyed his first three-assist game in the NHL.

Kane twice missed two empty nets in the final minute or so.

“I’m leading the league in two-goal games by a player with no hat tricks,” Kane said. “I definitely appreciate the boys trying to get it for me.”

Saturday’s win, the Sabres’ 23rd this season, was massive. It moved them to within five points of the fourth-place Leafs, who fell out of the Atlantic Division’s final playoff spot.

As expected, the high-scoring Leafs, who rallied from a two-goal deficit to beat the Sabres 4-3 on Jan. 17, fought back following their wretched start. Despite pumping their first shot on Sabres goalie Robin Lehner 9:07 into game, they outshot the Sabres 13-10 in the first period and 44-23 overall.

Mitch Marner scored a second-period power-play goal.

"We came out hard," Eichel said. "We executed our game plan. We jumped on them early and we were rewarded for it. I think the next 40 we did enough to win the game. That's what's important."

The Sabres host the Vancouver Canucks tonight at KeyBank Center.

## **Toronto debut special for Sabres rookie Evan Rodrigues**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 11, 2017

TORONTO – Growing up in Etobicoke, about a 20-minute drive from the Air Canada Centre, Alexander Mogilny's talents mesmerized Buffalo Sabres rookie Evan Rodrigues.

By the early 2000s, long after his dynamic 76-goal season with the Sabres in 1992-93, Mogilny was still an electrifying presence for some strong Maple Leafs teams.

"He was always trying something new," Rodrigues said Saturday prior to the Sabres' 3-1 win against the Leafs. "He always made some real fancy plays. He was an exciting player to watch."

Rodrigues, 23, sounded happy recalling his warm memories of Mogilny. The second-year pro couldn't stop smiling prior to his first NHL appearance in his hometown.

"He's always all smiles," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

True, Rodrigues always seems to be grinning. But Saturday's tilt, which was broadcast across Canada on "Hockey Night in Canada," was extra special for Rodrigues, who, of course, grew up a Leafs fan.

"Watching 'Hockey Night in Canada' growing up, now playing, it'll be a cool feeling," Rodrigues said. "But I'm trying not to think about it too much and just prepare like any other game."

The Sabres wanted a speedy center, so they recalled Rodrigues from the Rochester Americans on Saturday morning. They summoned him on an emergency basis Thursday but he sat out a 5-2 loss to Anaheim because winger Evander Kane was healthy enough to play.

Rodrigues played for the Amerks in Friday's 3-2 loss to the Albany Devils, then took a car to Toronto.

Bylsma joked Rodrigues should've worn No. 22 instead of 71 on Saturday because he was occupying Johan Larsson's spot between Marcus Foligno and Brian Gionta.

"That's really what he's got to do for us going into that position between those two guys," Bylsma said about emulating Larsson. "He's had a good amount of experience in the American Hockey League and done a real good job with it, really kind of earned this opportunity."

It could be an opportunity to stick around for Rodrigues, who played his fifth NHL game. With Larsson out for the season with a dislocated elbow and wrist, the Sabres have struggled to find another center.

The 5-foot-10, 183-pound Rodrigues, a free agent from Boston University, has nine goals and 27 points in 44 AHL games this season.

To make room for Rodrigues, the Sabres scratched winger Nick Deslauriers for the sixth time in 13 games. Bylsma said Deslauriers is "probably a little bit worse for wear" after Thursday's marathon fight with heavyweight Jared Boll.

xxx

A bone bruise will sideline Sabres defenseman Cody Franson two to three weeks, Bylsma said. Franson blocked a shot Thursday and had a walking boot on his left foot Friday.

Taylor Fedun replaced Franson against the Leafs and skated beside Justin Falk, his partner in Rochester earlier this season.

The injury could affect the Sabres' plans for Franson, an unrestricted free agent following the season, before the March 2 trade deadline.

Defenseman are always in demand down the stretch, and as an established veteran with four seasons of 29 or more points, Franson figured to fetch at least a draft pick.

But if Franson, 29, hasn't recovered by then, will there be any interest?

Franson has three goals and 16 points in 53 games this season.

xxx

Leafs coach Mike Babcock said Detroit owner Mike Ilitch, his boss 10 years with the Red Wings, "made you want to be a better man."

Ilitch, widely considered one of the NHL's premier owners, died Friday at age 87.

"He was committed to doing things right and what he touched to in business turned to gold," Babcock said. "But he had that presence about him that he made you want to be better. He looked after all of us, gave us all the resources to have all the success you could ever ask for. But he had an appreciation of the hard work and stick-to-itiveness and getting things done."

Detroit won four Stanley Cups under Ilitch, the founder of the Little Caesars pizza chain.

xxx

The Sabres won't face goalie Ryan Miller tonight when the Vancouver Canucks visit KeyBank Center.

Miller, Buffalo's starting netminder for nine years, played in Saturday afternoon's 4-3 loss in Boston.

Notes: Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen fought James van Riemsdyk in the first period, the Finn's second NHL scrap, according to hockeyfights.com. ... The Sabres scratched defenseman Zach Bogosian and center Zemgus Girgensons, who both have mid-body injuries.

## **Sabres' Ryan O'Reilly knows he must stand out**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 11, 2017

TORONTO – Even in the best times, when center Ryan O'Reilly is scoring at a torrid clip and the Buffalo Sabres are winning, the eight-year veteran is notoriously hard on himself.

So naturally, Thursday's 5-2 loss to the Anaheim Ducks, a game in which a late four-goal implosion doomed the Sabres, didn't sit well with him.

"It was tough sleeping last night knowing that I could've been a lot better and impacted the game a lot," O'Reilly said Friday inside KeyBank Center after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt against the Maple Leafs.

As the Sabres' most valuable and versatile forward, O'Reilly skates in every situation. That's why the team awarded him a seven-year, \$52.5 million contract in 2015 – the richest in franchise history.

O'Reilly, 26, embraces the expectation he will be a difference-maker every night. He knows he must lead the charge if the seventh-place Sabres, who trail the third-place Leafs by seven points for the Atlantic Division's final playoff spot, want to make a run.

"If we want to make the playoffs, I myself have to contribute every game for that," said O'Reilly, who's earning \$11 million this season. "(Thursday's game), I don't think that was good enough. It's frustrating, but going forward I myself have to be a lot better."

O'Reilly, an NHL All-Star last season, struggled at times against the Ducks, who possess heavy centers in Ryan Getzlaf and Ryan Kesler. On Corey Perry's first goal, O'Reilly and his teammates got caught out of position, giving the former 50-goal scorer open ice. O'Reilly was a minus-2 and had one assist Thursday.

"I wasn't reading the puck very well," O'Reilly said. "I found at times plays were there and I just weren't making them quick enough. Sometimes it happens, but I got to do other things well. ... I don't think I defended quick enough."

Last season, his first in Buffalo, O'Reilly was the Sabres' MVP, scoring 21 goals and 60 points in 71 games, further establishing himself as a tenacious two-way presence.

But O'Reilly has battled injuries all season and hasn't produced at that same level. An oblique problem cost him six games in November. He missed four games after undergoing an appendectomy on Christmas.

O'Reilly has 11 goals and 34 points in 44 games. His shooting percentage has dipped from 13.4 to 8.9. Going back more than a year, he has 15 goals in his last 76 appearances.

"He's scratched those injuries, which he did play with for a good portion of time for the first half of the year," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We're all dealing with less than 100 percent health at this time. We just ask an awful lot of him. We put him on the ice for a lot of situations."

When O'Reilly returned from the World Cup of Hockey late in training camp, Bylsma said he wanted to rely on him less. But almost four months into the season, O'Reilly has averaged 21 minutes, 39 seconds a contest, just five seconds less than 2015-16.

A dearth of healthy centers has forced Bylsma to keep utilizing O'Reilly.

"I feel great," O'Reilly said of his health. "There's no issue there. I've got to be able to put the puck in the net and play more consistent, give life when it's needed. All I'm worried about now is Toronto. It's a huge game."

If the Sabres lose tonight, they're in danger of falling out of the race.

They're 0-2 against Toronto this season and have struggled against divisional opponents, going 7-10-3.

"Any divisional game right now is huge for us," O'Reilly said. "They're four-point swings. ... They're right above us. They're a team that we can catch if we chip away."

The Sabres will have their hands full shadowing three Leafs rookie forwards. Mitch Marner, Auston Matthews and William Nylander have combined for 53 goals and 126 points, stunning numbers in this low-scoring era.

O'Reilly will likely be charged with shutting down Matthews. The first overall pick having compiled 25 goals and 44 points, is already a dynamic presence.

"He does so many things well," O'Reilly said. "He's similar to a guy like Getzlaf, an elite player where you give him space, let him make plays, he's going to get confident and he's just going to roll."

## **5 Observations: Sabres take down Maple Leafs 3-1**

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 11, 2017

TORONTO, ON (WKBW) -

The Buffalo Sabres pulled within five points of the playoffs on Saturday night with a 3-1 win over the division rival Toronto Maple Leafs. Robin Lehner stopped 43 of the 44 shots he faced, while Evander Kane scored twice and Jack Eichel tallied three assists.

Five Observations from Saturday's win:

**STOP TALKING ABOUT TRADING EVANDER KANE**

On Saturday Kane scored twice in the first period and now leads the Sabres in goals with 18. Kane has 11 points in the Sabres last ten games and 28 points this season.

In case you forgot (you probably didn't), Kane missed the first month after suffering an injury in the season-opener. When the 25-year-old forward returned he just couldn't find the back of the net and went 11 games without a goal. Since he has 18 goals in 32 games. Eventually, you'd imagine he'll slow down, but after Saturday's game, Kane is on pace to finish the season with 29 goals in 71 games.

Those goals are exactly why General Manager Tim Murray traded for Kane. Earlier in the week, Murray said on WGR 550 that he isn't actively shopping the second-year Sabre, so unless Murray gets an unbelievable offer, I don't think he's going anywhere.

Good, he shouldn't.

Kane is playing well and the Sabres need someone who can score goals. Yes, they absolutely could use a top-four defender, but I don't want to see Kane sent somewhere for that return. If he keeps this up and it doesn't look he'll resign the Sabres should be able to get a pretty penny next season, assuming he has no more off-ice issues.

The wrist looks fine, eh?

Jack, the giver

Jack Eichel dominated in the first period and had an assist on all three Sabres goals. One of the assists came after he won a face-off, but the other were pretty passes to Okposo to lead a breakout and another to tee-up Kane for his second goal of the night.

Eichel, like Kane, has been extremely hot and now has 14 points in 13 games, including six multi-point contests.

Keep the Kane-Eichel-Reinhart line together, they're creating a lot of chances.

We saw that coming

Lately, the Sabres have been allowing a lot of shots to their opponents. Actually, that may be an understatement because in Buffalo's last six games they've allowed an average of 39 shots against per game.

On Saturday the Sabres got peppered once again, allowing 44 Maple Leafs shots. The good news for the Sabres, Robin Lehner was dynamite.

MVP - Robin Lehner

Robin Lehner is continuing to play some pretty unbelievable hockey. In Buffalo's last outing Lehner allowed four goals, but he faced 44 shots. Aside from Anaheim's fourth goal, I didn't think Lehner was all that bad, so he gets a pass.

Against the Maple Leafs Lehner looked locked-in and made some really pretty saves. His best came in the second period on Leafs forward Tyler Bozak, who had the upper-half of the net open until Lehner flared his pad into the air.

He robbed Bozak again in the third period from point blank for another gem. These were just two of the 43 shots he turned away, in one of his best games of the year. All night it just looked like he wasn't getting beat. After the game, Lehner said the one goal that did sneak past him was a lucky bounce.

All-season Lehner has been criticized by many, including myself, but he's keeping the Sabres in games.

With another back-to-back, I'd expect Nilsson in net against Vancouver on Sunday.

Rodrigues' Homecoming

Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues grew up 15 minutes from Air Canada Center. On Saturday he played in front of friends in family in a game he'll cherish for the rest of his career.

## **Evander Kane scores twice, Sabres top Maple Leafs**

By Dave McCarthy

NHL.com

February 11, 2017

TORONTO -- Evander Kane scored twice for the Buffalo Sabres in a 3-1 win against the Toronto Maple Leafs at Air Canada Centre on Saturday.

Robin Lehner made 43 saves for the Sabres (23-22-10), who are 3-1-2 in their past six games and five points behind the Maple Leafs (25-18-11) for fourth place in the Atlantic Division.

"We came out flying, it was great to see. I think we had a solid first period," Lehner said. "They're a good team over there, obviously they're going to come back and make a push. They kind of had one the last five minutes of the first and they had one in the second. I thought we kept our composure, though, and helped each other out. They got a lucky one, but still we didn't panic that much, I don't think."

The Sabres had a 2-0 lead and outshot the Maple Leafs 6-0 before Morgan Rielly got Toronto's first shot at 9:06.

"Last time we were in this building we got out to a 2-0 lead but gave it back in a second there," Kane said of a 4-3 loss Jan. 17. "When we get these leads, we want to increase them and we want to extend them. They scored a power-play goal but we didn't let that affect us the way we did last time."

Kane scored 4:13 into the first period to make it 1-0, and Sam Reinhart scored a power-play goal 55 seconds later after taking a pass from forward Kyle Okposo on a 2-on-1.

Kane scored his second at 18:02 when he one-timed a shot past Frederik Andersen's glove to put Buffalo up 3-0. He has four goals in his past three games.

"Pretty sure he's going to shoot it whether he's hot or cold or indifferent," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "But I thought the third goal was one I really liked. It's not an area he gets in and is a recipient of a pass too often, and that's a sign of another level to his game. Not just the speed and shooting the puck down the wing, but to find that soft area there."

Mitchell Marner scored a power-play goal at 15:57 of the second period to pull Toronto within 3-1.

Lehner was tested in the third period and made two crucial saves: on Rielly at 2:22, and on a point-blank shot from Tyler Bozak at 6:00.

"You put all that energy in, and chase the game around for the next 45 minutes, and yet your first 15 minutes sink you," Maple Leafs coach Mike Babcock said. "You [have] to give them credit, they were prepared, they were organized, they played harder than we did at the start. It's like being a pitcher, if you're the goalie (with a 3-0 lead). When they've got to get five runs, it's way easier to be a good pitcher."

Andersen allowed three goals on 23 shots.

### Goal of the game

Sabres center Jack Eichel beat Maple Leafs center Auston Matthews cleanly on an offensive-zone faceoff. Reinhart pushed the puck back to Kane, who shot past Andersen from the top of the right-wing circle for his first goal.

### Save of the game

Maple Leafs forward James van Riemsdyk set up Bozak in the slot for a point-blank shot, but Lehner quickly got down in butterfly position to make the save and keep it 3-1.

### Highlight of the game

Marner carried the puck into the Sabres zone on the right wing and froze Lehner at the side of the net. He went around the net and put the puck off the skate of defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen from behind the goal line. It ricocheted off the skate, off Lehner's blocker and into the net.

Unsung performance of the game

Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe got down on all fours and made saves on van Riemsdyk and Marner as they tried to jam the puck in at the top of the goal crease with 10 seconds left in the third period and Lehner out of position.

They said it

"Certainly one of our better starts. We got the faceoff goal from Jack to Evander there off the right dot, and then we got a chance to get on the power play and capitalize. I thought we kept it going. It was our plan to come out and put a lot of pressure on them and establish a forecheck, and the third goal was a result of that." -- Sabres coach Dan Bylsma

"That first 10 minutes, you need to keep it simple. You [have] to make sure pucks get in deep, not turning it over and giving them free ice through the neutral zone. They've got fast guys that can make plays and they definitely did that tonight." -- Maple Leafs forward Auston Matthews

Need to know

Maple Leafs forward Ben Smith won all seven faceoffs he took.

What's next

Sabres: Host the Vancouver Canucks on Sunday (7:30 p.m. ET; MSG-B, SNP, NHL.TV)

Maple Leafs: Host the New York Islanders on Tuesday (7:30 p.m. ET; TSN4, MSG+, NHL.TV)

## **Kane, Eichel lead Sabres to crucial win in Toronto**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

February 12, 2017

TORONTO - Sitting at his stall in the visiting room at Air Canada Centre, Jack Eichel saw no reason to focus on negatives. Not after the Sabres had come away with a 3-1 win over division rival Toronto - making up vital ground in the standings in the process - and doing it on the road no less.

Too often this season Buffalo has had to lament coming up short in these types of games, missing opportunities to gain ground on teams in a tight Eastern Conference. On this night, they quickly answered the bell, scoring all three of their goals in the first period. Eichel earned an assist on each one, while Evander Kane scored twice to continue his pace as one of the League's hottest scorers (more on that later).

Did they back off a little bit too much over the next 40 minutes? Maybe, Eichel said, but the fact that the Sabres battled out a win was what resonated most with the young forward.

"We did enough to get the win," Eichel said. "Two points in a divisional rivalry game in Toronto on a Saturday night, there's not much better than that. We needed this one and we got it."

Each game carries more weight as more days are crossed off the calendar, and the Sabres knew the stakes when they entered the night trailing the Maple Leafs by seven points in the standings. A win in regulation would cut the deficit to five; a loss would mean they trail by nine.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said the plan was to start hot out of the gate and establish their forecheck early. That was accomplished by the line of Justin Bailey, Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo, who spent the majority of their first two shifts in the offensive zone.

It was after that line's second shift that the line of Eichel, Kane and Sam Reinhart took the ice for an offensive-zone faceoff that would turn into Kane's first goal just 4:13 into the contest. Eichel won the draw against Auston Matthews, whom he'd be matched up with throughout the night. The puck went to Reinhart, who quickly fed Kane for a one-time goal from the top of the right circle.

Kane pots goal off faceoff

00:34 • February 11th, 2017

Eichel's line stayed on the ice after the goal, and Eichel quickly used his speed to draw a hooking penalty against Jake Gardiner to give Buffalo its first power play. With the man advantage, Eichel sprung Okposo and Reinhart free for a 2-on-1 with the former feeding the latter for the team's second goal.

Reinhart's power-play goal

00:53 • February 11th, 2017

The Sabres had also gotten out to a first-period lead in their last game at Air Canada Centre, having gone up 2-0 in that January meeting only to lose 4-3. They placed an emphasis on getting a third goal, this time around which they were able to accomplish when Kane one-timed a feed from Eichel from the left circle with 1:58 left to play in the period.

Kane's second goal of the game

00:58 • February 11th, 2017

"I thought the third one was one I really like," Bylsma said of Kane's goal. "It's not an area he gets in and sits in and is a recipient of a pass [in] too often. That's a sign of him kind of [adding] another level to his game there. Not just his speed, shooting the puck down the wing but finding that soft spot and Jack makes a good play and he makes no mistake with it."

Toronto outshot Buffalo 31-13 the rest of the way, but the Sabres' defensemen did well to clear lanes for Robin Lehner and he did the rest, stopping 43 of the 44 shots he faced. Mitch Marner scored Toronto's only goal on the power play with 4:03 remaining in the second period, deking to draw Lehner out and then wrapping behind the net to score.

"I thought we kept our composure though, helped each other out," Lehner said. "They got a lucky one, still we didn't panic I didn't think. We just battled one out I think."

It became more of a literal battle as the game wore on and became increasingly physical between two teams that had played twice already and will play twice more before the season ends. Nazem Kadri was the focus of much of the Sabres' ire after he dove into Lehner on a rush in the third period.

"It what it is," Lehner said. "Unfortunately it's part of the game. It's just dangerous, you know. It's dangerous when you do that ... I lost a year of my career because of something like that, you've got to have a little respect for your opponents but it is what it is."

Perhaps this was another step forward in the rivalry between two young teams on the rise who happen to play less than two hours apart. On the outside, comparisons have been made all season between the Sabres and Maple Leafs, but Reinhart assured the media afterward that those comparisons weren't what motivated Buffalo's hot start on Saturday.

"We're pissed off we're still five points behind," he said. "We're going into this game seven points behind, it's either nine or five so that's all the motivation we needed. We're still right there, we've still got to improve and get better and tighten that gap but it starts tonight and we have another chance at it tomorrow."

#### Kane keeps scoring

It's hard to believe Kane didn't score his first goal of the season until Dec. 3, an otherwise forgettable 2-1 loss at home to Boston. Prior to that game, he'd missed nearly a full month with cracked ribs and went without a goal in 11 games upon his return, still dealing with the effects of the injury.

Since that goal against Boston, only three other players in the League have scored more goals than Kane, and nobody has scored more at even strength. Kane's 18 goals lead the Sabres despite him having played 10 less games than their second-leading goal scorer, Okposo.

Meanwhile, Kane joked afterward that he might have the most two-goal games in the League among players who haven't scored a hat trick. He had as good a chance as any on Saturday, as the Maple Leafs pulled goalie Frederick Andersen with 3:45 remaining, but missed the few shots he had.

#### A first for Jack

Another stat that's hard to believe: Saturday's game was the first three-assist performance for Eichel in his NHL career. It was also his third time scoring multiple points in his last five games, and his team-leading 10th multi-point game of the season.

These are all good things for the Sabres. With the win, they improved to 19-3-0 in Eichel's career when he scores at least two points and 10-0-0 in such games this season, according to Sabres PR.

#### Up next

The Sabres will head home to play the second of back-to-back games when they host the Vancouver Canucks at KeyBank Center on Sunday night. It will be the second and final meeting between the two teams this season, with Vancouver having won the game 2-1 on Oct. 20.

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

## **Franson, Girgensons out against Toronto**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

February 10, 2017

As the Buffalo Sabres continue to navigate their way through as busy a portion of their schedule as they'll see all season - they're now three games into a stretch of nine in 14 days - they called a bit of an audible before hitting the road for Toronto on Friday.

What had been scheduled as a practice day at HarborCenter instead was used for a team activity.

"We play a ton of hockey the last 10 days and we play six in nine here," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "We had a meeting, we had a video, and just an activation here and an activity with the group."

"It was just nice to have a little fun," forward Kyle Okposo said. "You're playing so many games here and your mind is on hockey constantly. It's nice to get a little change of pace, take your mind off things and hopefully be rejuvenated tomorrow."

The Sabres are coming off of a 5-2 loss to the Anaheim Ducks on Thursday, a game in which they were unable to carry the momentum from their 5-4 come-from-behind win over San Jose in the game prior. There were few bright spots to choose from in that game, but with little time to rest between games, the focus on Friday was quickly putting the loss in the rearview mirror.

"It was tough sleeping last night knowing I could've been a lot better and impacted the game a lot," forward Ryan O'Reilly said. "But coming to the rink today, it's a new day and we've got to prepare for Toronto. It's going to happen but my focus is on tomorrow's game and making an impact."

Buffalo's game in Toronto on Saturday is the first of three remaining games against the Maple Leafs this season. The Sabres are 7-10-3 against the Atlantic Division this season and 0-2-0 against the Maple Leafs, who they trail by seven points in the standings.

"Any divisional game right now is huge for us," O'Reilly said. "They're four point swings and this Toronto team, last few games I think have been disappointing against them. We can be a lot better against them and they're right above us. They're a team we can catch if we chip away and get back in this."

"That's where you make the playoffs is right there, pretty much," Okposo added.

### Injury report

Zemgus Girgensons did not play on Thursday, and Bylsma said he hasn't recovered as quickly as the team had hoped. He'll sit for at least the next two games on Saturday and Sunday and then be reevaluated on Monday.

Defenseman Cody Franson, meanwhile, was injured while blocking a shot with his foot against Anaheim and underwent further evaluation on Friday. He will not play in Toronto.

With Franson, the Sabres already had seven healthy defensemen on their roster, meaning Taylor Fedun can step into the lineup without making a recall necessary if they so choose.