



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

February 19, 2017

Sabres' winning streak starts at the top

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

February 18, 2017

Ryan O'Reilly regularly puts the onus on himself. He says it's up to him to lead the Sabres to victory.

He's partially right.

Buffalo's highest-paid player and No. 1 center certainly needs to carry the load. He's not the only one. The Sabres also have Jack Eichel, Evander Kane, Kyle Okposo, Rasmus Ristolainen and Robin Lehner at the top of the leadership group.

"Those are the guys that have to get it done for us," coach Dan Bylsma said Saturday.

During a 3-2 victory over St. Louis, those six players combined for two goals, six points and 37 saves. It's no coincidence Buffalo won its third straight game and fourth of the last five.

"That's what we want," O'Reilly said in KeyBank Center. "We have to contribute every game and find a way to do things, generate momentum. We did."

The Sabres have inched back into playoff contention with a team effort. In order to continue the climb, their best players need to be the best players. Well ...

*Kane recorded a goal and assist, becoming Buffalo's first 20-goal scorer in the process.

"I'm not interested in the 20-goal mark, to be honest," he said. "I'd like to go past that."

There's no reason to think he'll stop. All 20 goals have come in the last 35 games. Since Kane started his run Dec. 3, only Montreal's Max Pacioretty (23) has scored more. No one has more even-strength goals than Kane (19).

"The even-strength goals says it all," Bylsma said. "It's hard to score in this league. It's hard to get even-strength goals in this league, and he's leading the league since Dec. 1 in doing so. It hasn't been just him and his shot and coming down the wing. He's done it a lot of different ways and a lot of tough ways."

Kane, who tipped home a shot from the blue line, has 14 points in the last 13 games.

*O'Reilly scored the game-winning goal, giving the Sabres' a 3-1 lead in the final minute of the second period. He has 20 points in the last 22 games.

*Eichel assisted on Nicholas Baptiste's goal as the Sabres tied the game, 1-1. The center has 17 points in the last 17 games. Eichel had a game-high eight shots.

*Lehner stopped 37 of 39 shots while saving his best for the end. He made 16 saves during the third period, allowing only a short-handed breakaway goal.

Lehner has stopped 99 of 103 shots during the three-game winning streak.

*Ristolainen earned his 100th career point with an assist on O'Reilly's goal. The defenseman has a point in seven of the last nine games.

*Okposo picked up an assist, giving him eight points in the last nine games.

"We've got to step up," Eichel said. "We're going to be the go-to guys on this team. We've got to step up and make plays, come up big when the team needs you."

"The good thing is we've had a lot of good contributions from a lot of guys on this team, and that's why we're winning games against good hockey teams."

They get one more chance Sunday evening. The Chicago Blackhawks will visit KeyBank Center. After the game, Buffalo will have a five-day bye. Other teams will close the gap in games in hand while the Sabres are off, so two more points will let them rest a bit easier.

"I know where we are," Okposo said, referring to the jumbled standings. "We've kind of got by that bottom tier. Now we're in that next tier. We're kind of in the middle."

"We need to catch that next tier. What it's going to take to do that is string four, five, six, seven games together. That's what we need, and hopefully we're on our way."

Lehner has claimed the crease

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

February 18, 2017

Robin Lehner insists he doesn't care about the numbers but the ones he's putting up are eye-popping. He's a lot more interested in feeling good in the goal crease and helping his team collect victories.

He's getting the job done there as well.

The Buffalo Sabres' net has been wide open for the taking since that bizarre night nearly three years ago when Ryan Miller was shipped to St. Louis just a few days in front of the NHL trade deadline. Lehner, the hand-picked choice of General Manager Tim Murray the morning of the 2015 draft in Florida, is rewarding the GM's massive leap of faith.

You don't give up a first-round pick for a goalie unless you get a stud. While Murray's deal with his old team in Ottawa looked like a massive overpay as Lehner struggled with injuries last season, it's tipping much more toward the Sabres this year.

That's because Lehner has become a leader in the dressing room and a go-to figure on the ice. The Sabres haven't had that from a goalie since Miller left. You generally don't go to the playoffs without it.

"I just want to play and I want to play with this hockey club," Lehner said after piling up 37 more saves in Saturday's 3-2 win over St. Louis. "This is what you've been practicing your whole life to be -- to be a starting goalie and to play lots of games. I think I've been playing well all season but it's a team game and it's been clicking for us lately."

Lehner is 17-16-6 this season, a mediocre record borne mostly from his lack of goal support in the first half. But he's got a 2.47 goals-against average and a .926 save percentage that ranks tied for third among NHL starters. Only Minnesota's Devan Dubnyk (.933) and Pittsburgh's Matt Murray (.927) are better.

Among goalies who have started at least 50 games over the last two years, who has the highest figure? Yep, it's Lehner at .926. Going into Saturday, he was ahead of big names like Dubnyk and Braden Holtby (both .924), as well as Corey Crawford, Carey Price and Ben Bishop (all .921).

"He's been our most consistent player and our best player," said center Ryan O'Reilly. "He's making huge saves when things aren't going well. Once we do get a lead, he's shutting the door. We're all glad to have that but we have to help him out even more."

There's still 23 games to go for the final analysis to come into focus but it sure looks like a seminal moment to this season came last Sunday night, when Lehner called out his team in the wake of their disjointed loss to Vancouver here.

Since then, the Sabres have won three straight in regulation for the first time since November and Lehner has stopped 99 of 103 shots.

"It's small, minor details that have been hurting us," Lehner said. "There's not many times this year I could complain about our effort. The effort has been there but it's the details and slowly but surely, we're starting to put them together."

Saturday was Lehner's 41st game of the season, breaking his previous professional career high of 40 set in Binghamton in 2011-12. When he gets to 50 games, Lehner will become the first Buffalo netminder to reach that mark since Miller played 61 in that same '11-12 season.

Want some more numbers? Try these:

---In Lehner's 17 wins this season, he has a 1.76 goals-against average and .950 save percentage.

---In nine games in February, Lehner is 5-3-1, 1.89/.950

---Against the Central Division, it's almost like he's as unbeatable as he is playing Ottawa: Lehner is 7-1, 1.87/.943.

There's a good omen for Sunday night against a Chicago team that's beaten the Sabres 10 straight times. The Sabres had dropped nine in a row against St. Louis but ended that slide Saturday, and the Blackhawks will be coming from home after hosting Edmonton on Saturday night.

Lehner has been strong early in games -- think the stop on Nikita Zadorov in the first 20 seconds of Thursday's shutout of Colorado -- and he stood tall late Saturday with a stop on Patrik Berglund with the Blues pushing for the tying goal and Jake Allen on the bench. His best stop might have been in the first few seconds of the middle period, when he stymied Jori Lehtera to keep the game even at 1-1.

Coach Dan Bylsma said Friday this team is going to ride Lehner going forward but it's really already happened. Saturday's start was his sixth straight and 10th in the last 11 games. It's going to be seven in a row and 11 of 12 against Chicago.

"You see he's more comfortable now and he's trusting himself," O'Reilly said. "We see it. Calm goalies staying even keel making the right saves back there. When a guy can do that like he has been, it's nice to have on your side for sure."

The Sabres are 26-23-10 and, believe it or not, this is the first time they've had three more wins than regulation losses since the final day of the 2011-12 season. That's when they ended the first non-playoff year of their current drought at 39-32-11. They could go into their bye with four straight wins, a legitimate factor in a playoff hunt for the first time in five years.

On the bigger picture is what to do about Lehner going forward. He's a restricted free agent. You know the Sabres will bring him back. The way he's been playing, it's simply going to be a question of dollars and term. He's proving he's their guy, one game and more bushel full of saves at a time.

"It's a team game," Lehner said. "I felt like I've let things come to me, read the plays well and stayed in the middle of the net. Sometimes you have bounces, sometimes you're not getting them. But I've felt good all year."

Quick hits: Sabres 3, Blues 2

By John Vogl
The Buffalo News
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In order to extend their winning streak, the Sabres needed a victory against a team they hadn't beat since 2009.

The drought is over.

Buffalo won its third straight Saturday, earning a 3-2 victory over the St. Louis Blues. The Sabres carried a 3-1 lead into the third period, and Robin Lehner made 16 of his 37 saves in the final 20 minutes to close out the win.

The Blues had won nine straight against Buffalo as part of a 19-2 run. The Sabres' last victory in the series was a 5-3 decision Dec. 27, 2009, in St. Louis.

Buffalo improved to 26-23-10 overall and 7-2-1 in the last 10 games in KeyBank Center.

Sick Sam: The Sabres skated without second-leading scorer Sam Reinhart, who missed the game with an illness. It was the first game Reinhart sat out this season.

Quality replacement: The Sabres recalled right wing Nick Baptiste to take Reinhart's place, and it paid off. Baptiste slid into Reinhart's spot alongside center Jack Eichel and left wing Evander Kane, and he recorded a goal and assist for his first multipoint game.

Quick start: The Blues overwhelmed the Sabres at the drop of the puck. They forced Buffalo into a penalty, but no one ever went to the box. With goaltender Jake Allen on the bench during the delayed call, St. Louis sniper Vladimir Tarasenko took a pass in the right circle, got Robin Lehner moving and fired short-side with just 1:31 gone.

Tie game: Eichel carried the puck into St. Louis' zone, and Baptiste streaked behind the defenders. The winger took Eichel's pass and promptly slipped it between the pads of Jake Allen to tie the game, 1-1, with 9:34 gone.

It was the third goal in 13 NHL games for Baptiste. He is eighth in the American Hockey League with 18 goals.

First to 20: Kane continued his hot streak with 8:02 left in the second and became a 20-goal scorer for the third time. The left winger reached out to tip Zach Bogosian's point shot, extending his lead in the Sabres' goal-scoring race. Kane scored 20 goals last year and potted a career-high 30 in 2011-12 with Winnipeg.

O'Reilly factor: Ryan O'Reilly's first drive resulted in a five-on-three power play. His second resulted in a 3-1 lead. Less than 30 seconds after forcing Scottie Upshall into a hooking penalty, O'Reilly faked a shot at the top of the slot, skated into the right circle and beat Allen on the far side.

The goal with 31.3 seconds left in the second contributed to a standing ovation from the fans as Buffalo headed into intermission.

Not done: The Blues' penalty killers put a scare into the crowd with 4:57 left. Upshall intercepted a slow pass by Kyle Okposo and raced to the Buffalo end for a short-handed goal, cutting St. Louis' deficit to 3-2.

Milestone: Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen assisted on O'Reilly's goal, giving him 100 career points.

False start: After Doug Allen completed the national anthems, the referees announced the Zamboni would have to take another spin because the ice was "compromised." The players remained on the bench for the resurfacing.

Hello, goodbye: The Sabres welcomed back defenseman Cody Franson, who had missed four games with a foot injury. He skated alongside Zach Bogosian.

Rather than keep eight defensemen, the Sabres waived Taylor Fedun. The blue-liner has seven assists and a plus-3 rating in 25 games with Buffalo. The other teams will have until noon Sunday to claim Fedun. If no one does, he can report to Rochester.

Counting the house: The Sabres announced a sellout with 19,070 tickets sold for the matinee.

Next: The Sabres host another Western Conference powerhouse as the Chicago Blackhawks visit at 6 p.m. Sunday. Following the game, Buffalo will shut it down for five days with its inaugural bye week. The Sabres will resume the schedule Saturday in Colorado.

Stars front and center in Sabres' win over Blues

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 18, 2017

BUFFALO – Jack Eichel set up a nifty goal to Nick Baptiste shortly after the Sabres fell behind 91 seconds into Saturday afternoon's tilt against the St. Louis Blues. Evander Kane scored his 20th goal, continuing his torrid stretch. Ryan O'Reilly netted the eventual winner on the power play.

Then goalie Robin Lehner dazzled late, making 16 of his 37 saves in the third period as the Blues blitzed the Sabres.

In the Sabres' 3-2 triumph inside KeyBank Center, their third straight victory and fourth in five tries, top talent buoyed them, helping end the Blues' six-game winning streak.

"Those are the guys that have to get it done for us," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

Those guys have all helped carry the Sabres during a busy and critical stretch. Eichel has 17 points in the last 17 games. Kane has eight goals and 14 points in his last 13 outings. O'Reilly has seven points in the last seven games.

Lehner, meanwhile, has morphed into the team's backbone, compiling a gaudy .935 save percentage in his last 17 appearances.

"He's been ... our most consistent player and our best player," Bylsma said of Lehner. "He's making huge saves when things aren't going well for us. Once we do get a lead, he's shutting the door."

The surging Sabres, who haven't won four consecutive contests *all season*, get another chance tonight at home against the heavyweight Chicago Blackhawks, the final game before a bye week.

"When you're playing games that close together, it adds up pretty quickly when you can win three in a row, you can get four of five and add eight points to the column," Bylsma said. "And it was against a good team, a hot team tonight against St. Louis."

The Sabres are 0-8-2 in their last 10 games against the Blackhawks. But, hey, they were 0-8-1 in their last nine meetings with the Blues. Sooner or later, streaks must end.

Early on, when Vladimir Tarasenko scored on a delayed penalty, it looked like the Blues might continue their long run against the Sabres.

"We took a deep breath," O'Reilly said. "We said, 'OK, let's just get back, find our forecheck, find our legs, start simplifying a bit more.' ... Once we can do that and the instincts take over and get into the system, that's when you start to generate chances."

But Eichel helped the Sabres answer at 9:34, slickly feeding Baptiste, who was recalled Saturday morning, allowing the rookie to zoom in and put a backhand between St. Louis goalie Jake Allen's legs.

Then Kane continued the Sabres' best goal-scoring stretch in years, this time from the slot, tipping Zach Bogosian's high shot 11:58 into the second period.

Kane scored 20 goals in 67 games last season. He needed only 47 games to hit the symbolic number this campaign.

"I'm not interested in the 20-goal mark, to be honest," Kane said. "I'd like to go past that."

Kane probably will push for 30. He didn't score his first goal until Dec. 3, his 13th appearance after four broken ribs sidelined him three weeks. Incredibly, Kane has 19 even-strength goals.

"The even-strength goals say it all," Bylsma said. "It's hard to score in this league. It's hard to get even-strength goals in this league, and he's leading the league since Dec. 1.

"It hasn't been just him and his shot coming down the wing. He's got a lot of different ways and a lot of tough ways. A goal at the net, a tip-in goal."

O'Reilly followed 19:28 into the second period, scoring from the right circle on a two-man advantage.

"It's a five-on-three goal, so there's opportunities out there for everyone," Bylsma said. "But that one had the feel of him taking it and I'm putting this one in the back of the net."

When the period ended, the capacity crowd of 19,070 roared in approval.

Then Lehner was the Sabres' best player late. Only Scottie Upshall's short-handed breakaway beat him in the third period.

"We're playing one of the best hockey clubs in the NHL," Lehner said. "They're going to have chances, they're going to have shots, it's a big hockey team over there. I think we played a hell of a game."

Remember, Lehner passionately called out teammates – and later, himself – following last Sunday's 4-2 loss to Vancouver. The Sabres haven't lost since.

Nick Baptiste scores early in return to Sabres

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
February 18, 2017

BUFFALO – A positive trend has developed in the last few months for the Sabres. Each time they recall one of their forward prospects from the Rochester Americans, the youngsters make a strong case to stick around.

Rookies Justin Bailey, William Carrier and Evan Rodrigues have all seized their opportunities and started earning regular NHL duty.

After speedy winger Nick Baptiste's impressive performance in Saturday afternoon's 3-2 win against the St. Louis Blues – he scored his third NHL goal and recorded his first assist – the second-year pro could join that group.

"That's kind of the development process we have started in Rochester," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "The coaches down there have done a great job of getting these guys ready to come up and play and be prepared to add, and you can see that with almost every call-up we've had."

The Sabres summoned Baptiste prior to the tilt because winger Sam Reinhart was ill. Baptiste got the call about 9 in the morning, and instead of busing to Binghamton with his AHL teammates, drove 75 miles to KeyBank Center.

Bylsma immediately plugged Baptiste into Reinhart's spot beside center Jack Eichel and Evander Kane.

Baptiste was on the ice for St. Louis' goal 91 seconds into the game, but he tied it at 9:34, taking Eichel's nifty pass and backhanding the puck between St. Louis goalie Jake Allen's legs.

"It was a great play," Baptiste said of Eichel's dish. "He does it all the time. He made a good move to the inside. I was able to kind of read it, get inside the D's shoulder and he made obviously a great backhand pass to me."

He added: "When I play with Jack, I want to just open up space for him, give him the puck and get to the net and use the shot to my advantage."

Bylsma believes Baptiste's legs created the goal, too.

"It's Nick's speed pushing the pace through the middle, it opens up some space," he said.

Baptiste, a 2013 third-round pick, looked impressive at times during 12 games earlier this season, his first NHL run.

"It gave me a confidence boost," said Baptiste, who skated 11 minutes, 52 seconds.

Still, after the Sabres sent Baptiste back to the Amerks in mid-November, he didn't sulk when he was bypassed for recalls.

"We're young guys, just 21 years old," Baptiste said. "There's a lot of time. This is the process for a lot of guys, and it's going up and down and how you kind of handle it. You got to go down there and play with confidence and work your way back up."

Considering Baptiste has 19 goals and 30 points in 42 AHL games, another NHL look seemed likely.

More efforts like Saturday's could mean regular action. Baptiste also assisted on Kane's goal.

"When you can have guys come up here and contribute like that, it shows the depth in the organization," Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly said.

Bylsma said Reinhart became ill Saturday morning. The Sabres also host the Chicago Blackhawks tonight.

"We're doing everything we can to get him ready," Bylsma said.

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With defenseman Cody Franson back Saturday after a bruised left foot sidelined him four games, the Sabres waived Taylor Fedun prior to the game.

Now, will Fedun, 28, get through waivers to the AHL, or will a team looking for depth add the Princeton product? Fedun makes only \$600,000 on his one-year contract and is a right-handed shot.

Defensemen are always in demand at this time of year.

Fedun meshed well with the Sabres, producing seven assists in 25 games. He occasionally played on the power play and averaged 13 minutes, 39 seconds of ice time. He sat five of the last eight games as a healthy scratch, however.

Notes: The Sabres scratched defenseman Justin Falk. ... Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen's assist on O'Reilly's goal was his 100th NHL point. ... With center Derek Grant (shoulder) out, winger Nick Deslauriers skated sparingly as the fourth-line pivot.

Sabres snap Blues' 6-game winning streak with 3-2 win

By John Wawrow

The Associated Press

February 18, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (AP) — Robin Lehner and the Buffalo Sabres have been on a roll since the goalie questioned his teammates' commitment a week ago.

Lehner stopped 16 shots in the third period and 37 overall, and the Sabres snapped the St. Louis Blues' six-game winning streak with a 3-2 victory on Saturday.

Evander Kane and Nicholas Baptiste each had a goal and an assist in Buffalo's third straight win, matching a season best accomplished three times. Ryan O'Reilly also scored during a two-man advantage with 32 seconds left in the second period.

Now that's more like it, Lehner said.

"I don't think it's about spark. As I said before, it's the small, minor details that's been hurting us," he said. "It's not been many times this year where I felt we could complain about our effort. Slowly but surely, we're starting to put it together."

Lehner had a far different reaction following a 4-2 loss to Vancouver on Feb. 12. He challenged his teammates to look themselves in the mirror, and said coaches and fans deserved better.

The Sabres responded by rallying for a 3-2 win at Ottawa on Tuesday. They followed the victory against the Senators with a 2-0 win over Colorado on Thursday.

On Saturday, Buffalo scored three straight times after yielding the opening goal to Vladimir Tarasenko early in the first, and then hung on after Scottie Upshall scored on a short-handed breakaway with 4:57 remaining.

Penalties cost the Blues, who dropped to 7-2 since Mike Yeo replaced Ken Hitchcock as coach.

With St. Louis playing its third game in four days, Yeo said fatigue was a factor in why his team was penalized six times versus Buffalo's three.

"I thought for the first time in a while we were reaching a lot more as opposed to moving our feet," Yeo said. "And when you do that, you get caught out of position. That's when you reach. That's when you take penalties."

O'Reilly's goal came with Kenny Agostino in the box for cross-checking Jack Eichel from behind, and 26 seconds after Upshall was penalized for hooking O'Reilly.

Playing give-and-go with Rasmus Ristolainen, O'Reilly worked his way into the right circle where he spun and beat Jake Allen inside the far post.

It was the first power-play goal allowed by the Blues in 25 chances. The streak had spanned eight-plus games.

Allen made 25 saves.

Kane scored the go-ahead goal at 11:58 when he parked in front and deflected Zach Bogosian's shot from just inside the blue line.

The Sabres beat the Blues for the first time since Dec. 27, 2009, stopping an 0-8-1 drought. It was Buffalo's third win in 24 games against St. Louis dating to the start of the 1998-99 season.

Buffalo improved to 26-23-10, marking the first time the team had three more wins than losses since closing the 2011-12 season with a 39-32-11 record.

Coach Dan Bylsma credited Lehner for the team's turnaround, which followed a mediocre nine-game stretch.

"We've been a team that's been up and down and win one, lose one. And not any of us have been happy with that kind of result with our play, and Robin was one of those guys," Bylsma said. "I think he's stepped up with his play in the last six, seven games."

Lehner's best save came 20 seconds into the second when he kicked out his pad to stop Jori Lehtera.

The start of the game was delayed by about five minutes because of poor ice conditions. Referee Dean Morton announced just as players lined up for the opening faceoff that the rink had to be re-flooded due to the integrity of the ice.

Blues forward Kyle Brodziak said the reason for the delay was as a result of several ruts, which were smoothed during the brief resurfacing.

NOTES: Brodziak returned after missing 10 games with an injury to his right foot. ... Sabres D Cody Franson returned after missing four games with a foot injury. ... Baptiste was recalled from the minors earlier in the day to replace Sam Reinhart, who was sidelined by an illness. D Taylor Fedun was placed on waivers.

UP NEXT

Blues: Host Florida on Monday.

Sabres: Host Chicago on Sunday.

Sabres Hold Off Blues 3-2

WGR 550

February 18, 2017

Evander Kane netted another goal and late call-up Nick Baptiste added two points in Buffalo's 3-2 win over St. Louis. Robin Lehner finished with 37 saves, including 16 in the final period. The Sabres have won three straight games and, for now, sit one point behind the Leafs in the Eastern Conference.

Scoring

- Vladimir Tarasenko wasted little time getting the Blues on the board, netting his 28th of the season just 1:31 into the game. St. Louis had an extra attacker on the ice thanks to a delayed penalty call on Josh Gorges.
- Nick Baptiste's 3rd tied things up later in the period. Jack Eichel set up the play with a nifty backhand feed to Baptiste who cut in and beat Jake Allen, tying the game 1-1.
- Kane knocked Zach Bogosian's point shot out of the air to put Buffalo ahead at 11:58 of the 2nd period.
- Ryan O'Reilly beat Allen on the far side on a 5-on-3 power play, giving the Sabres a 3-1 lead with 32 seconds left in the 2nd.
- Scottie Upshall picked up the Blues' first shorthanded goal of the season, beating Robin Lehner on a breakaway to make it 3-2.

Game Notes

- Kane (8 G, 6 A) has 14 points in his last 13 games and 6 goals in his last 6 games.
- Eichel (5 G, 12 A) has 17 points in his last 17 games and leads the NHL with 10 assists in the month of February.
- O'Reilly (3 G, 4 A) has 7 points in his last 7 games.
- With a goal and an assist, Baptiste recorded his first career multi-point game.
- Rasmus Ristolainen picked up his 100th career point, assisting on O'Reilly's power play goal.
- Lehner has faced 35 or more shots in 10 of his last 12 games.

1st Period

Goals

1:31 - STL - Vladimir Tarasenko (28) (Jaden Schwartz, Joel Edmundson)

9:34 - BUF - Nicholas Baptiste (3) (Jack Eichel, Evander Kane)

Penalties

6:19 - STL - Magnus Paajarvi (2 min., hooking)

11:12 - STL - Jake Allen (2 min., delay of game)

13:12 - BUF - Jake McCabe (2 min., holding)

2nd Period

Goals

11:58 - BUF - Evander Kane (20) (Zach Bogosian, Nicholas Baptiste)

19:28 - BUF - Ryan O'Reilly (PPG) (13) (Rasmus Ristolainen, Kyle Okposo)

Penalties

4:06 - STL - Jori Lehtera (2 min., tripping)

17:47 - STL - Kenny Agostino (2 min., cross checking)

19:02 - STL - Scottie Upshall (2 min., hooking)

3rd Period

Goals

15:03 - STL - Scottie Upshall (SHG) (6) (Unassisted)

Penalties

11:08 - BUF - Matt Moulson (2 min., interference)

14:26 - STL - Kevin Shattenkirk (2 min., holding)

Goaltending

STL - Jake Allen (25 saves, 28 shots)

BUF - Robin Lehner (37 saves, 39 shots)

Power Plays

STL - 0 of 3

BUF - 1 of 6

From The Locker Room: Sabres-Blues

WGR 550

February 18, 2017

Nick Baptiste and Evander Kane each had a goal and an assist while Robin Lehner stopped 37 shots. See what they told reporters after the game.

Nick Baptiste

"All the guys have been playing well. I know [Carrier's] been great, brings lots of energy. Justin [Bailey's] been playing great. Evan [Rodrigues] has been up for a short time, but I think he's been playing great since he's been up. Trying to play my game and do whatever I can to stay up here."

"You try and push the pace against defenseman. They're skating backwards when you're attacking them. Trying to get them and make plays so they can haul you down and get our guys out there that are on the power play to score goals."

Evander Kane

"They came out pretty strong, kind of like how Colorado did the other night there, in the first few shifts. Once we got that goal we kind of settled in. Obviously we knew we were playing a much better team in St. Louis this afternoon. They scored first and we needed to respond and that's what we did."

"It's not [Baptiste's] first call-up, but obviously it's a tough one. He gets a call in the morning for an afternoon game. Never easy making an hour and a half drive down the street, so great effort by him. I'm sure he's happy about it and we're happy for him because he helped us win."

Robin Lehner

"Rodrigues and Bailey have been playing really well for us lately. I think Baptiste had a really good game today too. That's what we need. It's not just about this club, it's about Rochester. It's about the whole organization and we all have to contribute somehow."

5 Observations: Sabres take down Blues 3-2

By Matt Bove

WKBW

February 18, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres haven't had three more wins than regulation losses since 2012. That all changed on Saturday afternoon, with a 3-2 in over the St. Louis Blues.

Five observations from Saturday's win:

Salubrious Second

Standing ovation for [#Sabres](#) as they head into the locker room after the second period.

Are the Buffalo Sabres all of a sudden a solid second-period team? That may be a stretch, but on Saturday the Sabres outscored a high-powered Blues team 2-0 in the middle frame.

It by no means was a perfect period, but it's the second game in three days where the Sabres have looked like the better team in the second.

Less than a week ago players were talking about how bad they've been in the second period and how it was something that needed to be fixed. Since the Sabres are 3-0 and have scored two more goals than their opponents in the second.

Killer penalty kill

The Sabres penalty kill hasn't been very good this season, and that's putting it lightly, but on Saturday they were great.

In the final minutes, the Blues went to the man-advantage after a questionable tripping call on Robin Lehner. It was a perfect opportunity for the Blues to tie the game and send things into overtime, but the penalty kill stepped up when the Sabres needed it the most.

Jack Attack

In the first period, Jack Eichel took over.

It started when he flew into the offensive zone on a Sabres power play, pulling off a ridiculous move to juke around Blues defender Joel Edmundson. Eichel then slid a perfect pass across the ice to teammate Ryan O'Reilly, who wasn't able to put it home.

While the aforementioned play was the prettier, a few minutes later Eichel created another scoring chance when he flew by two Blues defenders at the far blue line. As he entered the zone Eichel hit Nicholas Baptiste with a perfect backhand saucer pass, tying the game at one.

Eichel didn't find the back of the net, but he reminded us how talented he is when he has the puck. For what it's worth, Eichel was on the ice for all three Sabres goals.

I'll be missing you

Baptiste scored a goal and had an assist, but the Sabres still could've used Sam Reinhart, the man Baptiste was replacing in the lineup.

His absence was most noticeable on the power play, where he was replaced by Matt Moulson. Not surprisingly, the Sabres league-best power play was only okay and finished the night 1-for-6, scoring their only goal with a two-man advantage. I'm not suggesting that Reinhart would've single-handedly fixed Saturday's man-advantage woes, but he could've helped.

Luckily for the Sabres, Reinhart missed the game because of an illness and isn't expected to miss much time.

Side note Baptiste was pretty fun to watch on Saturday afternoon. I'm not exactly sure what the Sabres can do, but it would be nice to see him get some more playing time. It doesn't hurt that he played with Jack Eichel and Evander Kane, but credit where credit is due.

Oh hey, Evander Kane

In the second period, a sold out KeyBank Center erupted when Evander Kane 'scored' on a two-on-one, or so they thought. The puck didn't go in -- it clanked off the post and fell to the ice without crossing the goal line. No goal.

Have no fear, Kane scored for real a few minutes later to give the Sabres a 2-1 lead on a deflection in front of the net. The goal is Kane's 20th of the season, the first member of the Sabres to reach the 20-goal mark.

Lately, Kane has been on fire and has 14 points (8G, 6A) in 13 games. Once again Kane scored while at even-strength and is now tied for sixth in the NHL with 19 even strength goals.

As the trade deadline rapidly approaches talk of trading Kane will run rampant. If the Sabres can get a bonafide top-tier defender then I understand the logic, but for any less I think the Sabres need to keep Kane. He's scoring at an incredible rate and looks like the player General Manager Tim Murray traded for two years ago. There's off the ice issues to keep in mind, but on the ice, Kane has been fantastic.

Robin Lehner, Sabres defeat Blues

By Joe Yerdon

NHL.com

February 18, 2017

BUFFALO -- Robin Lehner made 37 saves and Evander Kane and Nick Baptiste each had a goal and an assist to help the Buffalo Sabres to a 3-2 win against the St. Louis Blues at KeyBank Center on Saturday.

Kane gave the Sabres a 2-1 lead with 8:02 left in the second period when he deflected a shot by Zach Bogosian, after a pass by Baptiste, past Blues goalie Jake Allen for his 20th goal of the season, and 19th at even strength.

Kane has scored 20 goals three times in his career, including in back-to-back seasons with the Sabres.

"The even-strength goals say it all," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "It's hard to score in this league. It's hard to get even-strength goals in this league, and he's leading the league since Dec. 1. It hasn't been just him and his shot coming down the wing. He's got a lot of different ways and a lot of tough ways. A goal at the net, a tip-in goal, but I liked his play along the boards. That's what I look to more than that."

Buffalo (26-23-10) has won three straight games. St. Louis (31-23-5) had a six game win streak ended.

"[The win streak] was good, but it only means we can start a new one," Blues defenseman Colton Parayko said. "Win this [next] one going into break."

Ryan O'Reilly made it 3-1 with a power-play goal with 32 seconds left in the second period. With Buffalo on a 5-on-3 man advantage, O'Reilly received a pass from Rasmus Ristolainen, who skated to the right faceoff circle and took a shot that beat Allen for his 13th goal. Ristolainen's assist was his 100th NHL point.

Scottie Upshall made it 3-2 with a shorthanded breakaway goal with 4:57 left in the third period. Upshall deflected a pass by Jack Eichel and raced past Sabres defenseman Cody Franson and beat Lehner with a backhand shot for his sixth goal.

Lehner made 16 of his 37 saves in the third period.

"We're playing one of the best hockey clubs in the NHL," Lehner said. "They're going to have chances, they're going to have shots; it's a big hockey team over there. I think we played a [heck] of a game."

Vladimir Tarasenko gave the Blues a 1-0 lead 1:31 into the first period on a delayed penalty call. Tarasenko came on as the extra skater and took a pass from Jaden Schwartz and put a shot past Lehner for his 28th goal.

Baptiste made it 1-1 9:34 into the first period for his third goal. He was recalled from Rochester of the American Hockey League on Saturday and replaced Sam Reinhart who missed the game with an illness.

"It was a great play; [Jack Eichel] does it all the time," Baptiste said. "When I play with Jack, I want to just open up space for him, give him the puck and get to the net and use my shot to my advantage."

Allen made 25 saves for St. Louis.

Goal of the game

Upshall's goal got the Blues to within one, and was the first shorthanded goal of the season for St. Louis.

Save of the game

Lehner came up with a lunging pad save against Jori Lehtera 19 seconds into the second period to keep the game tied 1-1.

Highlight of the game

Eichel weaved through the defense of St. Louis and opened up the ice for Baptiste to score.

Unsung performance of the game

Sabres defenseman Cody Franson returned after missing the past three games with a foot injury and had one hit, one block and one shot on goal in 17:12 of ice time.

They said it

"Obviously, we took too many penalties, but 5-on-4, we were doing a heck of a job. But you put the league's number 1 power play in a 5-on-3 and you make things pretty tough on yourself. But even then, we still had plenty of time. That was a tough goal for us to put them up a couple going into the third period, but we kept fighting. We generated some looks around the net. Their goalie stood real tall and we get back to work now." -- *Blues coach Mike Yeo*

"For a good eight games, we've been win one, lose one, we've been every other game and now we're looking at stringing three together, being four of five here and when you're playing games that close together it adds up pretty quickly when you can win three in a row, you can get four of five and add eight points to the column. And it was against a good team, a hot team tonight against St. Louis and we've got one more chance at it before the break here." -- *Sabres coach Dan Bylsma*

Need to know

Kyle Brodziak returned to the Blues lineup after missing the past 10 games with a right foot injury... The Sabres are 5-2-0 in afternoon games this season... Kane has 14 points in the past 13 games.

What's next

Blues: Home against the Florida Panthers on Monday (8 p.m. ET; NHLN, SN, TVA Sports, FS-MW, FS-F, NHL.TV)

Sabres: Home against the Chicago Blackhawks on Sunday (6 p.m. ET; NBCSN, NHL.TV)

Kane, Baptiste tally 2 points each in win over Blues

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

February 18, 2017

If the season-long struggles of the Colorado Avalanche made the win on Thursday for the Buffalo Sabres any less convincing, then their test against a St. Louis team that rode a six-game winning streak into town on Saturday afternoon was an opportunity for Buffalo to really show what it's made of.

The Sabres overcame a slow first few minutes and then thrived in two areas that have been their Achilles heels all season - the second period and the penalty kill - to grind out a 3-2 victory over the Blues, extending their own winning streak to three games.

Nicholas Baptiste and Evander Kane each tallied a goal and an assist for Buffalo, while Ryan O'Reilly notched the eventual game-winning goal during a 5-on-3 power play late in the second period.

The first few minutes of the game had it looking like it might've been a long afternoon for the Sabres. Vladimir Tarasenko opened the scoring a mere 1:31 into the contest after a delayed call, and the Blues pinned the Sabres in their own zone for the next few shifts after that.

"That could've killed our momentum," Kane said. "But we stuck with it, we stayed confident."

Ironically, the play that got the Sabres back into the game came from the guy who woke up thinking he'd be playing in Rochester. Baptiste said he got word around 9 a.m. that he'd been recalled to replace Sam Reinhart, who woke up with the flu. He drove from Rochester to Buffalo, and was placed on one of the Sabres' top lines alongside Kane and Jack Eichel.

The quality that sticks out immediately when looking at that trio is the speed that each of those three players possess, and it was that speed that led to Baptiste's game-tying goal midway through the first period. Eichel burned three defenders - two at one blue line and another at the next - and deked to create room as he darted toward the slot.

The extra space allowed Eichel to tap a backhand pass to an oncoming Baptiste, who scored his third goal of the season between the pads of St. Louis goalie Jake Allen.

"I think we had a lot of speed on our line," Baptiste said. "Jack's so good with the puck, you've got to get open for him. On that play when we scored, he cut to the middle and I was able to find a hole. He put the puck on my tape and it was just a great play."

"He's a guy that can skate, a guy that has some good finish and some good offensive instinct and he knows how to put the puck in the net," Kane said of Baptiste. "That was pretty much on display for his first goal there, kind of making a nice move and seeking one through the goalie."

The Sabres turned their game around after Baptiste's goal, nearly taking the lead when Kane rang a shot off the post on a 2-on-1 rush with Eichel in the second period and then actually taking the lead when Kane tipped a Zach Bogosian shot past Allen.

Dan Bylsma has said that the amount of penalties the Sabres draw is an indication of how they're playing. On Saturday, they drew six, including two that gave them a 45-second 5-on-3 advantage at the end of the second period. O'Reilly capitalized with a far-side shot from the right of the net to extend Buffalo's lead with 31.3 seconds on the clock.

That lead held through most of the third period, and the game looked all but over when Eichel drew a holding call against Kevin Shattenkirk to give Buffalo its sixth power play with less than six minutes remaining. Then Scottie

Upshall intercepted a pass and sped to beat Lehner on a shorthanded breakaway - just the first shorthanded goal scored by the Blues all season and the second allowed by the Sabres - to bring the Blues within one.

If the people at KeyBank Center were biting their nails after Upshall's goal, they might have taken off an entire finger when Lehner was called for tripping Alexander Steen with 1:12 remaining. Lehner disagreed with the call - he said Steen had skated through his crease, a claim supported by video evidence - but it gave the Blues a 6-on-4 advantage once they pulled Allen nonetheless.

The Sabres came up with some key blocks on the ensuing penalty kill, however, and a broken stick on a Tarasenko shot all but ended the Blues' comeback hopes. Lehner exhaled with a fist pump at the sound of the final horn.

"It wasn't the perfect third, but when you win the game that's all you can ask for," O'Reilly said.

While their competitors do hold games in hand, the win brought the Sabres within one point of the second wild card berth in the Eastern Conference at game's end. (Toronto, currently in that spot, will have a chance to restore their three-point lead on Saturday night.)

"It's good. We want to keep climbing but we don't want to be looking at that board too much. We just want to keep looking toward the next game," O'Reilly said. "We've got Chicago coming in and, again, that's a very skilled team that has found ways to win games and it's not going to be easy. That's our focus now.

"We're not satisfied at all. We're happy to get the points, but we're going to do a bit of reflection, adjust a couple things and get ready."

Notes and numbers

Will Kane ever stop scoring? His goal was his 20th of the season, all of which have come since Dec. 3. He only scored 20 goals in all of last season, and that was in 61 games. Perhaps more impressively, 19 of his goals have been at even-strength, a category in which he leads the NHL over that span.

Kane said the numbers don't matter, but his coach expounded on his recent stretch for him.

"It's hard to score in this League, it's hard to get even strength goals in this League and he's leading the League since Dec. 1 in doing so," Bylsma said. "It hasn't been just him and his shot coming down the wing, he's got it a lot of different ways and a lot of tough ways."

A few other players currently on hot streaks: Eichel has five goals and 12 assists for 17 points in his last 17 games, O'Reilly has three goals and four assists for seven points in seven games, and Lehner now has a .935 save percentage in 15 games since the beginning of January.

Ristolainen, meanwhile, earned the 100th point of his NHL career on O'Reilly's goal.

Update on Reinhart

Bylsma didn't rule out the possibility of Reinhart returning to the lineup against Chicago on Sunday, but he also couldn't full commit to it.

"I hope that will be the case but I don't know," he said. "He kind of came down this morning with the flu, being sick, and we're doing everything we can to try and get him ready for the game tomorrow so we'll see."

Up next

The Sabres will play one last game before taking off for their bye week when they host the Chicago Blackhawks at KeyBank Center on Sunday evening. Chicago won the first matchup between the two teams 4-3 in overtime on Jan. 5.

The game can be seen on NBCSN, with puck drop set for 6 p.m.