



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*February 9, 2017*

## **Sabres leave it all on the ice in the third period in February**

By Amy Moritz  
The Buffalo News  
February 8, 2017

It was a regular-season game in February. Nothing was on the line.

But when the Buffalo Sabres are trying to turn a corner as a franchise, trying to move along the rebuilding process and become a playoff team, a Tuesday in February can be a significant building block.

The buzz hasn't worn off.

Down to the last 10:57 of regulation and trailing the San Jose Sharks, 4-1, the Sabres scored three goals in a span of 3 minutes, 28 seconds to tie the game. Before you knew it, Evander Kane was finishing off a break with Jack Eichel in overtime to give the Sabres a dramatic 5-4 win over a San Jose team that made a run to last season's Stanley Cup Final and remains among the top teams in the Western Conference.

The Sabres have had a penchant for rallies this season. Nothing, however, was quite like what happened on Tuesday in KeyBank Center.

"In some of those previous games ... we played a whole heck of a lot better," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said after Tuesday's win. "In those games we stuck with it and stuck with it and had a belief that we're going to be able to get a goal or be able to come back in a game."

Tuesday was "a different feel," Bylsma said. "We weren't really happy with how we played. We weren't real happy with how the game was going through the first two and you really just want to leave it all out there with how you play in the third period. That was the talk on the bench. That was the guys and their emotion. Just leave it out there, get one and see what happens. It was 3-1 at that time. It gets a little bit uglier for us but the guys really stayed with it. We kind of had that feeling we needed one play. We got the one play on the power-play goal and you could feel the momentum building. Guys just had a sense and a belief that we were going to be able to keep coming and keep coming and come back in this game."

### **To recap the comeback:**

The Sharks took a 4-1 lead about six minutes into the third period. The Sabres started their comeback at 9:03 with a power-play goal from Ryan O'Reilly. Then came scores from Kane and Kyle Okposo to tie the game.

Kane scored 1:05 into overtime to give the Sabres the improbable win.

### **To recap the historical significance:**

It was the first win by the Sabres when trailing by three goals since a 4-3 victory over the New York Islanders on Dec. 27, 2014.

It was the latest the Sabres started a three-goal comeback since defeating Boston, 5-4, in a shootout on Nov. 2, 2006.

In that game, the Sabres started their come back at the 11:11 mark of the third when Maxim Afinogenov scored from Derek Roy and Thomas Vanek. The two set up Afinogenov again with 2:30 left in regulation, then Ales Kotalik tied the game with 1:35 left. The Sabres went on to win the shootout.

As far as non-shootout comeback wins, the Elias Sports Bureau noted Tuesday was just the second time in franchise history where the Sabres trailed by three or more goals in the final 11 minutes to earn a win.

The other was back on March 10, 1976 when the Sabres were down 6-2 to the Pittsburgh Penguins but scored five goals in the final 8:35 for a 7-6 win. The game-tying and game-winning goals were scored by Gilbert Perreault.

### **Up next against the West:**

The Sabres had a scheduled day off Wednesday and return to KeyBank Center Thursday to host the Anaheim Ducks. The next seven Sabres' home games are against Western Conference teams. Which is good news for the Sabres.

While they've struggled to make progress against teams in the Atlantic Division and Eastern Conference, which ultimately helps the most in trying to qualify for the playoffs, they have had success against teams from the West.

The Sabres are 12-1-3 in their last 16 home games against teams from the Western Conference and are 10-4-2 in all games against the West this season. They are 12-17-8 versus teams in the East.

Their next two games are against Pacific Division teams (Anaheim Thursday, Vancouver Sunday) and the Sabres are 13-0-3 in their last 16 home games against that division. The last time the Sabres lost in regulation to a team from the Pacific was a 3-2 loss to Edmonton on Nov. 7, 2014.

## **The traditional morning skate is increasingly turning optional**

By Amy Moritz  
The Buffalo News  
February 8, 2017

When the Buffalo Sabres were in New Jersey on Monday, they did not take a morning skate.

When the team returned to Buffalo on Tuesday to host the San Jose Sharks, they did not take a morning skate. Playing five games in seven days prompted coach Dan Bylsma to cancel the traditional pre-game practice. It was a product of the schedule, but the benefit of a morning skate has been questioned around the National Hockey League the last few seasons.

It's become a hot topic this season after coach John Tortorella decided to end the practice with the Columbus Blue Jackets, who went on to have a 16-game win streak this season and sit in second place in the Metropolitan Division and Eastern Conference.

Their success without the morning skate has turned heads around the league, much to the joy of some players who aren't big fans of the practice.

"I'm not a big morning skate guy," Sabres forward Kyle Okopso said. "It just doesn't make a lot of sense to me. If you were a football team that had a game at night and they went out and practiced in the morning, you'd probably say they're nuts. It's something that started a long time ago and I think in hockey traditions die pretty hard. They take a long time to kind of go the other way. Saying that, I played a lot of my career skating in the morning so it's fine but I would prefer not to."

This particular hockey tradition began in the 1970s. The format goes something like this: The home team skates at 10 or 10:30 followed by the visitors around 11:30. Each team is on the ice for about 30 minutes doing skating drills, taking some shots, maybe working on faceoffs. Scratches and the backup goalie usually stay out a bit longer. Then players meet with reporters before leaving the rink – back home or to the hotel – to eat and sleep before returning to the rink a few hours later to prepare for the game.

This is where Tortorella sees a flaw in the system.

"We bring them in here one time a day on practice days, but on game days we bring them in twice," Tortorella told the Columbus Dispatch earlier this season. "It doesn't make any sense."

Many teams have moved to making the morning skate optional, allowing players to decide for themselves if they need the pre-game ice time.

"I think it depends on how much you play, the schedule, the individual," Sabres forward Tyler Ennis said. "I think with how fast the game is and how intense games are now, a lot of times rest is really important."

When he takes morning skate, Ennis said he is "just trying to get the hands going, making sure you're tape-to-tape with passes and just trying to get a little sweat. The biggest part is just making sure you're mentally sharp."

And for many players, the desire to take the morning skate depends very much on the schedule. With a pair of back-to-back games this week, the time off can be useful.

"It all depends on what you need," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe said. "In this kind of schedule coming back from the road, you take your rest. But after a day off, a lot of guys want to get on the ice and feel the puck again. Each game can vary with the situation. I like them. If I feel like I don't need to go out there, I'll take the option. But each guy is different and each situation is different."

## **Sabres finding comforts of home**

By Jerry Sullivan  
The Buffalo News  
February 8, 2017

One year ago today, the Sabres lost to Florida, 7-4, giving them a home record of 9-16-3 and putting them on pace for the worst home record in their history.

Slowly, they came around. They finished 7-3-3 at home a year ago. After a slow start to 2016-17, the Sabres have finally found their winning personality at KeyBank Center, where they expect to win and are never out of a game.

Over a one-month span from Jan. 7 to Feb. 7, starting with a 4-3 win over Winnipeg here, they won five times after trailing in the third, three at home.

Tuesday's 5-4 OT win over San Jose, when they rallied from a 4-1 deficit in the third period, was the most dramatic evidence yet. The Sabres are 6-0-1 in their last seven at home. Tonight against Anaheim, they'll look to go eight straight at home with a point for the first time in five years.

They're a flawed team on the rise. But to become a contender, they need to own home ice. Jack Eichel seemed miffed when fans booed Tuesday. Fans had good reason, but they should also realize this isn't the same lifeless Sabres of years past.

## **Sabres' Tyler Ennis showcasing tenacity**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
February 8, 2017

BUFFALO – To illustrate Tyler Ennis' growing comfort and tenacity, Sabres coach Dan Bylsma cited a defensive play, not a slick offensive move, the speedy winger made late in Tuesday's 5-4 overtime win against San Jose.

Shortly after the Sabres tied the contest, they nearly got caught without a defenseman during a change. The 5-foot-9, 175-pound Ennis suddenly had to win a puck battle.

"If he doesn't ... there's a real good chance it's going into an odd-man rush for them," Bylsma said following the game. "It was right along the wall along the blue line. He won the puck battle, stayed with it (and) got it back down low. I think that's kind of been an area he's improved in his game in the last couple games."

Ennis, who returned Jan. 16 after groin surgery sidelined him 30 games, has finally found a groove in the last week.

Despite not having a permanent line – Bylsma has been moving Ennis from the fourth trio up to scoring combinations – he has a four-game point streak entering tonight's home tilt against the Anaheim Ducks at KeyBank Center.

"Skating, jump, compete – I think that's really been the biggest thing, compete has been at a higher level," Bylsma said.

Earlier Tuesday, Ennis, 27, helped buoy the rollicking comeback by carrying the puck into the San Jose zone before Evander Kane's wraparound goal narrowed it to 4-3. The Sharks challenged Ennis was offside, but replays were inconclusive. Ennis also assisted on Matt Moulson's power-play goal that opened the scoring.

Ennis, a three-time 20-goal scorer, roared out of the gate after missing two months, scoring 19 seconds into his return. But he struggled over the next two weeks.

In demoting him to the fourth line last week, Bylsma said Ennis "had to do a lot more with what he's bringing."

So what has changed for Ennis?

"Getting healthier and being determined to make the playoffs," Ennis said. "Every game now is so important. I have to make plays. I'm not a guy who chips it in and chips it out. I'm a guy that makes plays. I have to think like that. I have to think like I'm a difference-maker."

When Ennis scored his third goal this season late in Monday's 2-1 loss in New Jersey – he did a spin-o-rama below the right circle and shot the puck from past the goal line – he appeared to channel former teammate Jochen Hecht, who attempted all sorts of odd-angle shots.

"Jochen was a good player," Ennis said. "I loved playing with him and (Jason Pominville), we had a good line. Maybe I subliminally picked up some pointers from him, did the sharp-angle, tight shot."

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The Sabres, who rank sixth in the Atlantic Division and 14th in the Eastern Conference with 54 points, play their next seven home games against Western Conference opponents.

With the "loser point" for reaching overtime a non-factor in the standings for those contests, the Sabres could make up some ground.

Right now, with a game in hand, they trail Philadelphia by five points for the final wild card spot. Of course, five teams are ahead of the Sabres in that race. They trail third-place Toronto, which has a game in hand, by six points in the Atlantic.

The Sabres are 12-1-3 in their last 16 home tilts against Western opponents and 10-4-2 overall against the West this season.

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Kane, who scored Tuesday's overtime winner off a nifty feed from Jack Eichel, has scored all 16 of his goals in the last 30 games.

Since scoring his first goal Dec. 3, he is tied for fifth in the NHL in goals and leads the league with 15 even-strength scores. He ranks fourth with 119 shots in that span.

## How much are you enjoying these comebacks?

By Lauren Hall

Buffalo Sabres

February 8, 2017

What. Just. Happened.

That about sums up my thoughts on Tuesday night's comeback win over San Jose at KeyBank Center, giving the Sabres two points in a game that was looking bleak going into the third period. As I happened to explain to a fan during the second period of the game, I love an exciting third period even more than most people might.

It's usually the first chance I get to truly watch the game, with all the running around I do the floor during the first two periods and intermissions as the in-arena host. It was amazing to feel the building come back to life a little more with each of the four unanswered goals and be part of each and every celebration!

Tuesday's game will not just be remembered for the way it ended, but also because it was the first time we celebrated "You Can Play" night as an organization. The **You Can Play project** has partnered with the NHL since 2013, and encourages athletes and fans to practice inclusion, acceptance, and respect for all other athletes, no matter their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Our guys showed their support for You Can Play, and the NHL's "Hockey is for Everyone" month, by using multicolored tape on their sticks (or in Evander Kane's case, the letters on his jersey), during warmups. **The sticks are up for auction here.**

If you want a Sabres pride T-shirt like the one I wore to the game (which sold out in one day), they are in the process of restocking them at the Sabres Store. Call (716) 855-4140 to reserve yours!

Another memorable moment happened during our home win over Ottawa on Saturday.

When I saw a man holding this sign in the concourse before the game, I said, "We have to put you on the video board with that."

Then when he appeared in both a taped feature and then live from his seats in the 100 level, the crowd went wild! We were especially glad we got to send them home with a Sabres win!

Valentine's Day is in less than a week, and if you're coming to Thursday's game against Anaheim, you might win a diamond!

We worked with Reeds Jenss for this special giveaway. At the gates that night, we'll be handing out gift cards good for \$50 off your next jewelry purchase of \$95 or more at Reeds. Make sure you save your card and take it in to one of their locations before Valentine's Day (Tuesday, Feb. 14) and have it scanned. You could be one of five lucky fans to win a half-carat diamond!

Also coming up this month is our annual Sabres Blood Drive with Unyts. Hundreds of fans have already signed up to donate in the Lexus Club at KeyBank Center **on Monday, Feb. 13.**

Prizes for donors include tickets to games and a chance at an arena tour from Coach Dan Bylsma! If you can't make it on the 13th, you can donate at any Unyts Neighborhood Donation Centers between Saturday, Feb, 11 and Thursday, Feb, 16, and still have a chance at the prizes. Visit <http://unyts.org/team-unyts> to make your appointment!

Later this week, you'll be able to see a special piece we have been working on from our recent road trip to Nashville. While in town to cover the Parents Trip, we were also able to make a special moment happen for a big Jack Eichel fan who lives in a suburb of the Music City.

Inspired by Dan Dunleavy's now famous "Add One to the Eichel Tower" call, 8-year-old C.J. Gworek and his dad, John (who grew up in Buffalo), have gained internet fame by building a tower made of pucks named after Jack. They number each one and add to it every time Jack scores.

Throughout the last year of doing this, C.J. has always wondered if Jack knew about it. He got his validation when Jack came out to meet him after morning skate the day of the game against the Predators at Bridgestone Arena.

You can see our full video feature of their interaction, and C.J. adding a couple extra pucks to the tower after the game that night thanks to Jack's two goals, here at Sabres.com on Friday.

Which brings this blog post full circle... to another crazy comeback. The game in Nashville provided us with plenty of great material for our behind-the-scenes feature about that leg of the annual parents' trip.

You think watching a team erase a two-goal deficit and win in overtime is exciting? Try watching it with a room full of the people who've been there rooting them on since their first time in skates.

The clip of Jack's dad reacting to his game winner with the other parents perfectly captures the emotion of the night. The photos and videos from their celebrations outside the locker room are equally as sweet, like the group hug Ryan and Cal O'Reilly got from their parents, Brian and Bonnie.

And speaking of these guys back when they were in their first pair of skates, here's a bonus feature from the trip.

We had fun quizzing the parents on some of the most important numbers of their sons' early playing careers, and is that shade Sam Gionta is throwing at his son on the skate size question? You decide!

## **Sabres look to keep momentum going versus Ducks**

The Associated Press

February 8, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- Two days after a shocking upset victory over the best team in the Pacific Division, the Buffalo Sabres look to do it again against the next-best team in the Pacific Division.

The Sabres (22-21-10) host the Anaheim Ducks (28-17-10) on Thursday. The game comes after a thrilling comeback win over the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday, when the Sabres erased a 4-1 deficit with three goals in a span of 3:28 midway through the third period and won in overtime.

"We've kind of had a few games like that this year where we've had to come back," Sabres center Tyler Ennis said. "I think we've got a lot of character and we knew this is playoff hockey and we can't lose."

Evander Kane scored the winner 1:05 into overtime on his second goal of the game. Kane, receiving a feed from Jack Eichel on a 2-on-1 rush, placed a one-timer into the net before sacrificing his body and crashing hard into the boards. Matt Moulson, Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo also scored for the Sabres.

"That's probably the worst we've played and gotten a win, but in saying that we never gave up and it's a huge win for us," Okposo said. "We've got to get two points. We've been saying it for a couple months, we've got to find ways to win games and I guess that's one of the ways."

"I think we just stuck with it. Once we got that power play and we got the goal and we had the other one right away and I think we all started to believe on the bench. After they scored their fourth goal ... we just kept playing, we kept going, we kept working."

The Sabres are much-improved in the second half of the season, but need quite a run in order to make a playoff push. They are five points out of a wild-card spot and in a three-way tie for last in the Eastern Conference.

Unlike the Sharks, the Ducks come to Buffalo on a rare losing streak. The Ducks lost their first three contests on a six-game road trip and are coming off a 4-1 defeat to the New York Rangers on Tuesday despite putting 44 shots on Henrik Lundqvist.

"We need to continue supporting each other," defenseman Cam Fowler told the team website. "It's never as bad as it seems when you're going through a rut like this. We have to pull each other along and focus on the things we've done well so far."

Ryan Kesler leads the Ducks in points with 42 (18 goals, 24 assists).

Goaltender John Gibson has a goals-against average of 2.30 and a save percentage of .920. He allowed three goals on 19 shots against the Rangers but was much better in Friday's loss to the Florida Panthers, stopping 35 of 37 shots.