



Buffalo Sabres

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Surging Blue Jackets host struggling Sabres

Associated Press

March 10, 2017

The Blue Jackets and Buffalo Sabres, two teams going in opposite directions, meet Friday night in Columbus, Ohio, for the first game of a home-and-home series on consecutive days.

The Blue Jackets are 5-1-1 since coming off their five-day break nearly two weeks ago. It's a stretch that's seen the Blue Jackets rise to second in the Metropolitan Division, five points behind division-leading Washington with 17 games left in the regular season.

Columbus posted three shutouts in their last three home games while scoring 10 goals. Their last contest, a 2-0 home victory over the New Jersey Devils Tuesday night, might have been the least impressive game since the break.

However, the Blue Jackets still got high marks from their coach with the way they grinded out the victory, scoring two goals in the final 10:21.

"That's as close as we've come to a clunker since the break," John Tortorella said. "But we found a way in the third period to generate enough energy and find a way to win."

The Blue Jackets are in the midst of their most successful season in their 16-year existence. They need four more points to break the club record of 93 the 2013-14 team earned. That team earned just the franchise's second playoff berth.

Center Sam Gagner said the various ways the team has won in recent weeks show that when they make the playoffs for the third time ever this season, the Blue Jackets will be a tough matchup for teams.

"That's the good part about this team," said Gagner, who got an assist on Oliver Bjorkstrand's game-winning goal and reached the 40-point plateau for the seventh time in his career Tuesday. "We can grind out wins. We can play with skill, and we can have patience like we showed tonight."

Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky posted three consecutive shutouts, including back-to-back blankings of New Jersey earlier this week. If he starts Friday and completes a scoreless first period, he'll break the team record for longest scoreless streak. Steve Mason went 199:28 between goals in the 2008-09 season.

The Sabres' Marcus Foligno knows Columbus well as his older brother Nick is the Blue Jackets' captain. The younger Foligno said in an interview after practice Thursday that it will be key for the Sabres to get to Bobrovsky early.

"It's just got to be a workboot game from us, and we got to make sure everyone is ready to go," he said on the team's Twitter feed.

The Sabres, meanwhile, dropped out of legitimate playoff contention. They're 1-5-2 in the last eight games, allowing at least three goals in seven of those contests. Buffalo finds itself in seventh place in the Atlantic Division.

With 66 points in 67 games, the Sabres are nine points behind the New York Islanders for the Eastern Conference's final wild card spot despite the Islanders having played one fewer game.

"We have a lot to prove with the last 15 games, with who we are and how we're going to play," Dan Bylsma said. "Pride is a big factor."

Sabres center Jack Eichel has been hot over the last five weeks. His 23 points since Feb. 1 leads the NHL. In Tuesday's 6-3 home loss to Philadelphia, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft notched three points to extend his career-high points streak to 11 games.

In the game, the former Boston University standout earned his 100th career point, becoming the third youngest Sabre to reach that milestone. Only Pierre Turgeon and Phil Housley reached 100 points as teenagers, as Eichel turned 20 earlier this season.

Despite not scoring a goal until Dec. 1, left wing Evander Kane ranks among the top 25 goal scorers in the league. His 24 goals are tied for second-most in the league since the start of December.

The home-and-home series marks the first meetings of the season. They'll conclude their three-game season series at Columbus on March 28. In recent matchups, the home team has not fared well, losing seven of the last nine contests.

Sabres set to meet a Columbus team that has its groove back

By Amy Moritz

The Buffalo News

March 9, 2017

The Buffalo Sabres have waited all season to play the Columbus Blue Jackets.

This may not be the best time for the Sabres to meeting their Eastern Conference foes.

The teams are trending in opposite directions and meet for a back-to-back weekend, playing in Nationwide Arena at 7 p.m. Friday then returning to Buffalo for a 7 p.m. matchup on Saturday.

The Blue Jackets are putting together a late-season surge thanks to incredible goaltending and timely scoring. The Sabres are in the midst of a late-season collapse, unable to keep other teams from scoring or hold on to a lead.

"Columbus has played really well all year. They're obviously at the top of the standings for a reason," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said after the team practiced in HarborCenter Thursday morning. "They're a team that's going to make us earn what we get. We've got to manage the puck well, not feed into their transition game. You know they're not going to give up much defensively so we've got to bury the chances that we do create."

The Blue Jackets' upward trend is backstopped by goaltender Sergei Bobrovsky, who has three straight shutouts. He has a career-high six this season and no one has scored on him since Montreal's Alex Galchenyuk beat him in overtime on Feb. 28.

He's one of the reasons the Blue Jackets are hot again.

They were the darlings of the NHL earlier this season, stopping one shy of setting the league record for consecutive wins by stringing together 16 straight.

But then the team lost urgency. After the historic run ended on Jan. 5, the Blue Jackets went 7-9-1 with a 3.38 goals against average in that span.

A team meeting on Feb. 10 became a turning point. While not characterized by players as an "emergency meeting," it reportedly allowed players and coaches to open up – to talk about what was going right, what was going on, what they felt would be a more productive way for both sides to approach the losses and creeping inconsistencies.

And the Blue Jackets got their mojo back.

"Early on in the year when we watched them, from a distance, go through 16 wins in a row, they're really one of the most aggressive teams – physical team, heavy forecheck," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said. "A lot of being a dangerous offensive team with how they play. They won 16 in a row, they haven't been on that pace the last 20 games or so but they're still probably going to be the heaviest forechecking and most aggressive team that we've seen."

The pace may have cooled, but the Blue Jackets are still on a hot streak. They have four shutouts in their last seven games and have won three in a row at home.

Overall the Blue Jackets are 24-9-1 in the friendly confines of Nationwide Arena. With 90 points they sit in second place in the Metropolitan Division behind Washington, gearing up for a playoff run.

On the opposite side of the trend sit the Sabres.

Since Feb. 10, the Blue Jackets have scored 34 goals while allowing just 17.

The Sabres have scored 36 goals, but have allowed 41. They are 3-5-2 in their last 10 games and since returning from the bye week are just 1-4-2 with four games with blown third-period leads.

But there have been pockets of bright spots for the Sabres during the season, including generally playing well against good teams, including going 4-0-1 against the Ottawa Senators and 2-0-1 against the New York Rangers.

"We've played certain teams, good teams, and done well against them," Bylsma said. "I think it is a sign and it is an indicator of how we can be. You can't play the New York Rangers and beat them like we have, you can't beat the Ottawa Senators, and not see how good we can be."

"When we play really well, we manage the puck really well," Franson said. "We stay on the D-side of the puck. We don't put ourselves in situations where we're chasing from behind and accepting odd-man rushes. The last stretch of games we've doing just that – not staying above checks. There are small, little details in our game which have forced us to play more D-zone than we'd like. When we're playing really well, we're playing really well against good teams and we're managing the puck, not turning it over often. The odd-man chances we do give up we have good support."

Sabres Notebook: Gearing up for the last 15 games of the season

By Amt Moritz

The Buffalo News

March 9, 2017

There are 15 games left in the season for the Buffalo Sabres. They sit seven points out of a wild-card playoff spot. The postseason isn't part of their vocabulary any longer.

So what do the Sabres want to do with these final 15 games, the first of which is Friday against the Blue Jackets in Columbus?

"I think first and foremost for us right now we want to establish our work ethic," Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said. "Then the details – the puck management, all those other steps in the process, will come to you after that."

The Sabres worked on puck battles and defensive drills during an hour practice in HarborCenter Thursday, their first time on the ice since a lackluster performance in a 6-3 loss to the Philadelphia Flyers Tuesday in KeyBank Center.

"Competition and the compete this time of year has to be at a high level and we got it handed to us in huge doses in the Philly game," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

That meant the team got after it in practice.

"Just bringing your work boots today," Sabres forward Marcus Foligno said. "That was pretty much the message. It was a good practice. I thought we responded well."

When asked how much pride should factor into the final 15 games of the season, Bylsma responded, "100 percent."

"We're still trying to win hockey games and we're still trying to get points. We have a lot to prove the last 15 games with who we are and how we're going to play. Pride is a big factor.

"With the 15 games you should have no misunderstanding and you should have no questions about who the Buffalo Sabres are and how they play. That's something that I think we haven't gotten to yet and something with the 15 games we are playing we need to take as a challenge to establish with our group."

While Bylsma wants to establish the Sabres identity, players have seen that identity in spurts throughout the season.

"I think our identity is that we're a hard-working team," Franson said. "I think when teams think of playing Buffalo, you're going to have to work. We have holes in our game like everyone else does. We're a work in progress, more so than we should be right now. But we're working on that. We know what our flaws are and we're going to correct them."

"Physically we're quick, we're tenacious," Foligno said of the team's identity. "It's physical hockey. It's got to be fast hockey. It's a team that doesn't give up. I think we try to work to the end. Obviously we've had some slow starts and bad periods but it's got to be a full-60 from us and that's when we're at our best."

Foligno was able to talk specifics about the Blue Jackets in an informal pregame scout with the media.

That's because he tends to watch the Blue Jackets as often as he can to catch his brother, Nick, who is the captain in Columbus.

The two have squared off many times, but that doesn't dampen the excitement when the brothers get to clash.

"Yeah, it's always fun," Marcus Foligno said. "We haven't played each other yet this year. Every summer going into it you're excited to play each other so it just happens to come in the last month of the season. We play each other three times in a week. It's going to be fun. It's always good to see him but I just hope we come out as the winners."

Technically, the Sabres and Blue Jackets play three times in 19 days – in Columbus on Friday, in Buffalo on Saturday and again in Columbus on March 28.

Sabres' Bylsma say he's hard on young stars

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 9, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- Dan Bylsma raised some eyebrows after the Flyers game when he criticized Jack Eichel for trying to go through three players before the first Philadelphia goal. Many didn't understand why he'd say that because Eichel had three points in the game. The Sabres head coach admitted he is harder on the younger players, "You're going to hate this answer, but yes."

"Jack is a star player, no question, but he's a young player as well and he's got to learn that and that's a process we're going through."

Some didn't notice, but Eichel also got benched for the turnover. Bylsma said, "Did he miss a few shifts after that play? He did and it's got to be an indicator of what he's got to get better at and our whole team needs to be better at."

Eichel isn't one to pout, even if he disagrees with the coach. I've heard him say multiple times in interviews that "I'm not the coach". Bylsma said, "I liked the response, I thought he understood why and I thought he played pretty inspired and pretty passionate after that."

"I've told Jack he needs to have five turnovers per game. If he's not having a turnover, then he's not trying to do the right thing."

"There's a time and a place for those attempts, but that wasn't a good one."

If you look at the scoresheet, you really won't get a feel for stats. Very often they're wrong across the league and you might be surprised at how many turnovers there are in a game. "We calculate the game to have 100 turnovers, 50 per side, so it's not like we're talking about no turnovers will happen, we're going to have turnovers. Every player probably has at least one turnover in a game. It's just a learning process that we're going through as a group," Bylsma said.

Thursday's practice at HarborCenter came after a day off and was more intense than normal. Bylsma stressed defensive zone drills and was very unhappy with how his team competed against Philadelphia, so that was mixed in too, "Right on point and right on task. The compete at this time of year has to be at a high level and we got it handed to us in huge doses in the Philly game."

Thursday's lines:

Kane O'Reilly Bailey
Moulson Eichel Reinhart
Foligno Girgensons Gionta
Deslauriers Rodrigues Ennis

The Sabres open and home and home series in Columbus on Friday.

Column: Sabres throw in towel on Rochester Amerks' behalf with O'Reilly move

By Leo Roth

Rochester Democrat & Chronicle

March 9, 2017

By its very nature, a minor league professional sports franchise is ripe for indignity.

Every call-up is a harsh reminder of why that franchise exists: To serve the parent club. To be at its beck and call. To ask "How high?" when told to jump.

But seriously, Buffalo?

Reassigning Rochester Americans veteran center, team captain and second-leading scorer Cal O'Reilly to the division rival Toronto Marlies was an act of indifference I haven't seen in quite some time.

On the same day Rochester hosted Toronto, no less.

For O'Reilly, 30, Wednesday's move at the AHL trade deadline was awkward and yet highly convenient as he merely had to move his gear down a hallway at Blue Cross Arena from one dressing room to another.

For the Amerks it was decidedly inconvenient to lose one of the AHL's top playmakers. Furthermore, the relationship between Rochester hockey fans and the parent Sabres under Pegula Sports and Entertainment, already strained by three seasons of losing, may have hit an all-time low.

Coming at a time when the Sabres, locked in complicated negotiations for a new lease to keep their top prospects playing in Rochester's antiquated arena, should be building goodwill and a winning atmosphere, not making a weak product weaker.

We get that it's a business.

We get that the Amerks, whose 50 points have them nestled near the bottom of the 30-team AHL, will likely miss the playoffs for a third consecutive season.

We get that O'Reilly, older brother of Sabres' star Ryan, becomes an unrestricted free agent this summer and is likely not in Buffalo's plans anymore.

We get that GMs want their prospects playing when the farm team has been eliminated from the playoffs.

That sometimes veterans, if they give their blessing, are shipped to playoff contenders so they can play some meaningful hockey come spring, a little way of saying "Thanks."

But the O'Reilly deal stinks worse than a hockey bag left forgotten in a car trunk.

There were 19 games to play when Sabres GM Tim Murray reassigned/loaned/gave away O'Reilly and no doubt explored ways to move other veterans out.

Why Murray made any move that helps the Toronto Maple Leafs, Buffalo's top rival, is puzzling to say the least. To think that O'Reilly is now mentoring Maple Leafs prospects, maybe through a long playoff run, is galling.

And what's more galling is Amerks fans having to pay full prices for tickets the rest of the season with one of the team's best players and its leader no longer in the lineup. That's like being asked to support TGI Fridays when the top cook has been "reassigned" to Applebee's.

At least there was enough decency not to play O'Reilly on Wednesday against Rochester.

The Amerks won 4-3 on rookie Alex Nylander's goal with 1:20 left. That sparked a nice feel-good moment, right up to the second the Amerks returned to the dressing room and saw O'Reilly's name plate missing.

Signing O'Reilly to a two-year, \$1.4-million one-way NHL contract two seasons ago was an encouraging sign that Buffalo was finally getting serious about putting a winner in Rochester. With 71 points in 94 games wearing the Amerks' shield, O'Reilly did his part.

Adding veterans such as Tim Kennedy, Patrick Mullen and Mat Bodie during various stages of this season was also a nice sign Murray was paying attention, giving first-year coach Dan Lambert a chance to try and fight through the recalls and injuries.

But the O'Reilly move was Murray throwing in the towel with six weeks to go in the season.

How are future Sabres supposed to learn how to win when the GM has quit trying?

Sabres' Jack Eichel responds to benching

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 9, 2017

BUFFALO – Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said he implores slick center Jack Eichel to have five turnovers a game.

Wait, what? Bylsma really wants the second-year star to give away the puck?

"If he's not having a turnover, then he's not trying to do the right thing," Bylsma explained this afternoon inside HarborCenter. "There's a time and a place and a situation for those attempts."

Turnovers, of course, are common. Bylsma said he expects about 100 in a game, 50 for each side.

Still, not every turnover is acceptable. Eichel had a brutal one – he tried to beat three defenders through the neutral zone – that led to Philadelphia's first goal in Tuesday's 6-3 win against the Sabres.

Bylsma, who wants to be tougher on his young stars, briefly sat Eichel after that miscue.

"Jack is a star player, no question," Bylsma said. "But he's a young player as well. He's got to learn that. That's a process we're going through. Did he miss a few shifts after that play? He did."

Eichel finished the game with two goals and three points, a response Bylsma liked.

"He understood it," Bylsma said of the benching. "He understood why. I thought he played pretty inspired and pretty passionate after that point."

After Tuesday's loss and a day off, Bylsma had an uptempo practice today.

"The competition and the compete this time of year has to be at a high level," he said. "We got it handed to us in huge doses in the Philly game."

The Sabres play Friday in Columbus.

Sabres want to establish identity in final 15 games

By Bill Hoppe
Olean Times Herald
March 9, 2017

BUFFALO – Technically, the Sabres are still alive in the playoff chase. Thanks to seven losses in eight games, it only seems like they've been eliminated.

But realistically, the seventh-place Sabres are finished. They must climb four teams and make up at least seven points to reach the final wild card spot.

The odds of that happening? Try 0.2 percent, according to sportclubstats.com.

Fifteen games are left, starting with tonight's road tilt against the Columbus Blue Jackets. The Sabres, of course, haven't given up on the playoffs. Still, they probably know they'll miss again, extending their franchise-record streak to six seasons.

That means the last month is about – you guessed it – playing for pride.

"We're still trying to win hockey games and we're still trying to get points, climb in the standings," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said Thursday following practice inside HarborCenter. "We have a lot to prove in the last 15 games with who we are and how we're going to play this, and pride is a big factor."

The Sabres want to use the final stretch to establish an identity.

"You should have no misunderstanding and you should have no questions about who the Buffalo Sabres are and how they play," Bylsma said. "That's something we haven't gotten. It's something with the 15 games that we are playing that we need to take as a challenge to establish our group."

The Sabres, despite their weak standing, have shown they can be a difficult opponent. They have earned 15 of their 27 wins against teams currently in playoff spots.

"We've played certain teams, good teams, and done well against them," Bylsma said. "It is a sign. ... You can't play the New York Rangers and beat them like we have, the Ottawa Senators and where they're at. We can't play the games we've played and not see how good we can be."

What kind of identity have the Sabres showcased throughout those contests?

"We're physical, we're quick, we're tenacious, we're mostly in the offensive zone a lot," Sabres winger Marcus Foligno said. "It's physical hockey. It's got to be fast hockey. It's a team that doesn't give up. I think we try to go right to the end.

"Obviously, we've had some slow starts, some bad periods. But it's got to be a full 60 from us. That's when we're at our best."

Sabres defenseman Cody Franson said: "Our identity is that we're a hardworking team. We had a hiccup in the last few, but I think when teams think of playing Buffalo, you're going to have to work. We've got holes in our game like everybody else does, we're a work in progress more so than we should be right now."

The Sabres have been terrible lately. They're 1-5-2 since briefly getting into the thick of the playoff chase before their bye two weeks ago. In Tuesday's 6-3 loss to Philadelphia, they looked awful, allowing six even-strength goals.

"The Philadelphia game was a rough one, obviously not our greatest effort," Foligno said. "We got schooled for it. We got 15 games. Every game's huge. It's got to be the identity of our team that comes out in these next 15 games."

The Sabres get the Blue Jackets, a quiet powerhouse coached by fiery former Buffalo assistant John Tortorella, tonight and Saturday at home. The teams haven't met yet this season.

The Blue Jackets, incredibly, won 16 straight games earlier this season, falling one short of the NHL record. They're 42-17-6 overall.

They don't have a star-laden roster. Their top scorers, for example, are Cam Atkinson and Alexander Wennberg. But their tenacious style, Bylsma said, has turned them into "a dangerous offensive team."

"They're really one of the most aggressive teams, physical teams, heavy forecheck teams than anybody we've seen," he said.

Goalie Sergei Bobrovsky, meanwhile, has posted shutouts in the Blue Jackets' last three wins.

"They're obviously at the top of the standings for a reason," Franson said. "They're a team that's going to make us earn what we get. We got to manage the puck well, not feed into their transition game. They're not going to give up much defensively, so we got to bury the chances we do create."

Preview: Blue Jackets vs. Sabres

By Alison Lukan

Columbus Blue Jackets

March 9, 2017

GAME 66: BLUE JACKETS VS. SABRES

NATIONWIDE ARENA, 7:00 P.M.

TV: FOX SPORTS OHIO / FOX SPORTS GO

RADIO: 97.1 & BLUEJACKETS.COM

If you're following the Blue Jackets, you know how tough the Metro Division is. Buffalo comes to Nationwide Arena Friday to face their third Metro opponent in a row in the first game of a back-to-back home and home series between the Jackets and the Sabres.

Friday is the first time these two teams will have met all season, and when the puck drops, it means the Jackets have finally faced off against all 29 other NHL teams.

Buffalo (27-28-12) comes to town having lost their last three games, including their last two to Metro members, Pittsburgh and Philadelphia.

The Sabres may be struggling to find wins at the moment, but Jack Eichel continues to produce offense for Buffalo. He's on a career long 11-game point streak (5-10-15), which is currently the longest in the NHL. His two goals against the Flyers on Tuesday put him over 100 career points (42-59-101) in just 127 career games.

On the home bench, the Jackets (42-17-6) are riding a 5-1-1 record since the bye week, and have four shutouts, including three consecutive shutout performances by Sergei Bobrovsky.

Here are five things to watch for:

GUARANTEE YOUR PLAYOFF TICKETS

One for the record books?

The next time the Jackets win a game, it will be the 43rd of the year and will tie a franchise record for wins in a season (2013-14). The next time the Jackets win at home it will be the 25th time they've done that this season and that too ties a franchise record for home wins (2008-09).

Top nine.

Oliver Bjorkstrand re-joined the Jackets from the Cleveland Monsters Feb. 15 and has proven to be an integral part of the team since. In a league where many teams will talk about their "top six," with Bjorkstrand playing with Sam Gagner and Scott Hartnell, Jackets head coach John Tortorella says he has three strong offensive lines. "(Gagner's line) was the most consistent line in the last two games against New Jersey," Tortorella said.

More forward flexibility.

Even with the performance of Hartnell-Gagner-Bjorkstrand, Tortorella has been able to play with his lines if he feels it's necessary. The most common change we've seen of late is swapping Saad and Bjorkstrand for a few shifts here and there in recent games. Tortorella praised Saad's ability to play on the left or right side as the key to having such a degree of flexibility among his forward group.

Defensive Depth.

All season the Jackets have talked about the need for defensive depth through the season, knowing that the blue line would be tested through 82 games. Ryan Murray, who did not play Tuesday against New Jersey (lower body), did not practice Thursday, but the Jackets, per design, have their pick of seven healthy defenseman they can put into the lineup in the event Murray cannot play against Buffalo.

Brotherly love.

When the Jackets play the Sabres, it's always an opportunity to see captain Nick Foligno play against his brother, Marcus. Now in his fifth season with Buffalo, the younger Foligno has played in all 67 games for Buffalo this year and has 12 goals and eight assists.

PROJECTED CBJ LINEUP:

Foligno - Wennberg - Saad

Hartnell - Gagner - Bjorkstrand

Jenner - Dubinsky - Atkinson

Korpikoski - Karlsson - Tynan

Werenski - Jones

Johnson - Savard

Murray - Quincey

Korpisalo

Sabres seek to establish identity over final stretch

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 9, 2017

One of the self-assessments that came from the Buffalo Sabres following a disappointing 6-3 loss to Philadelphia on Tuesday night was that the players skated like they weren't ready to play. They struggled to move their feet and ultimately got outworked by an aggressive Flyers team.

It's no coincidence, then, that they returned from an off day on Wednesday with a practice that emphasized hard work at HarborCenter on Thursday morning. The hour-long session included up-and-down skating and 5-on-5 battle drills throughout.

"Bringing your work boots today, that was pretty much the message," forward Marcus Foligno said. "It was a good practice."

The loss to Philadelphia was Buffalo's seventh in its last eight games. The Sabres were able to hang around the wild card race for much of that stretch, but that game made the climb steeper than ever: They sit seven points back with 15 games remaining.

Object No. 1, of course, is still to win as many games and make up as much ground in the standings as possible. But this final stretch of the season also stands as an opportunity for a young team to learn from its mistakes and take a step toward fully establishing the identity it's shown in spurts this season.

"I think with 15 games you should have no misunderstanding and you should have no questions about who the Buffalo Sabres are and how they play," coach Dan Bylsma said. "That's something we haven't gotten to. It's something that, with the 15 games that we are playing, we need to take as a challenge to establish."

So, what is the Sabres' identity? In spite of their most recent loss, the players say it actually does start with their work ethic.

"I think our identity is that we're a hardworking team," defenseman Cody Franson said. "We had a hiccup in the last few, but I think when teams think of playing Buffalo, you're going to have to work. We've got holes in our game like everybody else does. We're a work in progress more so than we should be right now."

"We're physical, we're quick, we're tenacious," Foligno said. "We're mostly in the offensive zone a lot. It's physical hockey. It's got to be fast hockey. It's a team that doesn't give up. I think we try to go right to the end. Obviously, we've had some slow starts, some bad periods. But it's got to be a full 60 from us. That's when we're at our best."

Buffalo's first chance to respond will come in a home-and-home set against the Columbus Blue Jackets, a team the Sabres have yet to meet this season. Still, Foligno has some familiarity with them. His brother, Nick, captains the Blue Jackets, and thus Marcus has a good idea of what's helped turn them from a team toward the bottom of the standings one year ago into one of the League's best this season.

"I definitely try to watch Nick as much as I can," he said. "That team, they work. It's easy to say. They're a 60-minute team. They play hard. They're smart."

In other words, the Blue Jackets bring their work boots. Once the Sabres can do the same for three whole periods game in and game out, they might take that next step too.

"That just goes to show you we're still in a learning process and we've got guys that need to mature," Foligno said. "We've got a lot of skill, a lot of work ethic on this team. It's just putting it together for 60 minutes, and that just comes down to maturity."

Eichel rebounds from misplay

After the game on Tuesday, Bylsma was particular in pointing out his displeasure with the manner in which Philadelphia earned its first goal. The play began with Jack Eichel attempting to carry the puck through three defenders in the neutral zone, creating a turnover that ended with the puck in Buffalo's net.

Eichel was benched for next few shifts after the misplay. The message from the coach wasn't for Eichel to avoid risks completely, but rather to pick his spots better.

"I implore Jack, he needs to have five turnovers a game," Bylsma said. "If he's not having a turnover, then he's not trying to do the right thing. There's a time and place and a situation for those attempts that was not one of them.

"Jack's a star player, no question. But he's a young player as well. He's got to learn that. That's a process we're going through. Did he miss a few shifts after that play? He did."

When Eichel did get back on the ice, he was Buffalo's most impactful player offensively. He scored two goals and had an assist, improving his career-best points streak to 11 games.

"I liked his response," Bylsma said. "He understood it. He understood why. I thought he played pretty inspired and passionate after that point."

Thursday's practice

9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 56 Justin Bailey
26 Matt Moulson - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
82 Marcus Foligno - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 12 Brian Gionta
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 63 Tyler Ennis

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

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson