



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 14, 2017*

## **Eichel looks for more success as he goes West**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 13, 2017

SAN JOSE -- The evolution of Jack Eichel's career continues to include several checkpoints. The next one starts here Tuesday night.

One of the low stages of Eichel's rookie season came nearly 13 months ago when he went pointless in three straight games on the West Coast. With Ryan O'Reilly out due to injury, Eichel was Buffalo's No. 1 center on the trip through Anaheim, San Jose and Los Angeles and dealt with veterans at every turn.

He was hounded by Ryan Kesler of the Ducks, harrassed by Logan Couture and Joe Thornton of the Sharks and equally stymied in LA by Jeff Carter and Anze Kopitar. It was quite an education for Eichel as the Sabres posted a 3-1 win in San Jose but were shut out in the other two games.

Eichel meets the Sharks here again Tuesday, then moves on to Los Angeles Thursday and Anaheim Friday. And he said he's looking forward to making quite a bit more impact on this trip than he did last year.

"It was definitely a little bit of a learning curve for me last year, no doubt," Eichel told The News after practice Monday in SAP Center. "Now I'm playing with more confidence. You're a year older, playing better and feeling better about my game. To me, I'm not even close to the player I was a year ago. I feel like I'm almost a completely different player. I'm looking forward to three tough games. Good players. Good opponents. A real good test for our team and for myself.

"It's a next step for him and his career," added coach Dan Bylsma. "I agree with Jack. He's a different player now than when we stepped out here last year. It's going to be a test and one I'm interested to see Jack go through."

With 19 goals and 47 points in 48 games, Eichel has emerged as nearly a point-a-game player this season. But he's erupted since Feb. 1 with seven goals and 19 assists in 20 games. Entering Monday's play, Eichel's assist total and his 26 points led the NHL in that span, two points ahead of Chicago star and South Buffalo native Patrick Kane.

"I'm more rounded, feeling better in areas than I did last year," Eichel said. "One thing is I'm really able to slow the game down a lot more, I'm more dynamic on my backhand and I understand the game at this level a lot better. It takes time to learn the NHL game. It's not easy. It doesn't happen overnight.

"This year has been a huge step forward for me in terms of understanding hockey. You're just trying to bring that consistency more often, being aware of what type of game you're going into, knowing how you'll have to play against that team. Sometimes you have to let the game come to you and take what it gives. I'm better on the forecheck, getting more pucks back. I'm more physical, more tenacious and that opens up the offensive side."

One thing Bylsma noted was how well Eichel played in Friday's 4-3 loss at Columbus -- the game Eichel's career-high 11-game point streak was snapped.

"Along a streak of 11 games, you get a point here or point there that gets tacked on," Bylsma said. "The game in Columbus he was really good, very good in that game. He was a part of a goal he didn't get the assist on and he had plenty of opportunity himself."

Bylsma said he's marveled at all Eichel has had to deal with since entering the NHL as an 18-year-old and now advancing to age 20. Eichel has 103 points in his first 129 NHL games. In Sabres history, only Pierre Turgeon and Hall of Famer Phil Housley reached 100 points at a younger age.

"You're maturing, you're growing up. The spotlight is on you. People talk about you," Bylsma said. "There's comparisons to this guy and that guy. When you hiccup, it's the end of the world. When you don't score a goal,

you're not on pace. What was I like at 18? I was buried in my freshman year at Bowling Green with no one looking. It's a lot for a young kid go go through. He's going through it with a lot of maturity. He's evolved into a different player."

Eichel started a new point streak with two points in the final 2 1/2 minutes Saturday against Columbus. He fed Evander Kane for the tiebreaking goal with 2:29 left and then added an empty net goal to complete the Sabres' 5-3 win in a game that saw them down, 3-0, after the first period.

"You don't play as well as you want against a good team and they make you pay. That's what happened there," Eichel said. "It's 3-0 and that's what we deserved. But then we brought a lot more emotion into the game, got more invested into it. We've been on the other side of that one so it was nice to be on the winning side this time.

"It would be nice if we brought that type of intensity and emotion to more games. It doesn't need to be 3-0, 4-1 or whatever for that to happen. We want it to be right off the bat."

## **Sabres Notebook: Reeling in Sharks has been easy fishing**

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 13, 2017

SAN JOSE -- Through playoff years, tanking years and now rebuilding years, the Buffalo Sabres have been just about automatic against the San Jose Sharks since the 2005 NHL lockout.

The height of head-shaking wins might have come Feb. 7 in Buffalo, when the Sabres wiped out a 4-1 deficit in the third period and beat the Sharks, 5-4, on Evander Kane's overtime goal. That put the Sabres at 10-0-1 against San Jose in its last 11 decisions.

The teams meet again here Tuesday in SAP Center, where the Sabres have won five straight -- and have either blanked the Sharks or held them to one goal in four of the games. But after the last meeting, you have to figure the defending Western Conference champions are going to try to come out blazing.

"We stole two points from them the last time, just stole them," winger Marcus Foligno admitted after practice Monday on the Sharks' home ice. "You know they're bringing that game up and want some revenge. You know they will be ready from puck drop."

In discussions over his two years, coach Dan Bylsma has often been amazed by some of the bizarre head-to-head series the Sabres have forged against the West. The Los Angeles Kings, for instance, have lost eight straight games in Buffalo dating to 2003 -- but have posted three straight 2-0 win over the Sabres in Staples Center, where the teams will meet Thursday night.

"We have some weird history with the West Coast teams, with them in our building or us in theirs," Bylsma said. "I don't believe in any of that but it sure seems to play out."

The San Jose dominance is particularly odd given the Sharks' perennial runs to the postseason that have included berths in the Western Conference final in 2010 and 2011 and the Stanley Cup final against Pittsburgh last June. The Sabres won here last year, 3-1, as goaltender Chad Johnson blanked the Sharks over the final 58 minutes and Buffalo snapped a tie with a pair of third-period goals.

"I just feel like you get that confidence against a team and it keeps going and going," Foligno said. "Even in that game at home, it just didn't feel like we were out of it ever. And in this building, we always seem to play a good road game. We score at critical times, late in periods. We get saves, we shut down their top players. We're looking forward for more of that."

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Looking to have an extra forward on hand for the trip, the Sabres called up winger Hudson Fasching from Rochester. In 25 games for the Amerks this season, Fasching has six goals, two assists and a minus-12 rating. The 21-year-old opened the season with the Sabres, collecting no points in six games and then left with a groin injury Oct. 30 in Winnipeg.

Hudson Fasching meets reporters Monday in San Jose (Mike Harrington/Buffalo News).

After getting cleared to play, Fasching was sent to Rochester and practiced twice before the injury became too difficult to play through. MRIs showed damage and Fasching sat nearly three months. Bylsma said it's pretty certain Fasching will see action on this trip, likely either in Los Angeles on Thursday or Anaheim on Friday. Fasching skated as an extra forward here Monday.

"It's been a fairly long process for him and he's probably still in that process," Bylsma said. "I'd like to see Hudson get up and get some games. We needed someone for the West Coast trip and Hudson is going to get that opportunity."

"That's part of the learning process of being pro. There's adversity that goes with it," Fasching said. "Injuries happen. It's learning to be mentally tough through a major injury and coming back. I'm just here and happy to be here. If I get the opportunity, I'll try to make the most of it."

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Foligno said he apologized to Columbus winger Cam Atkinson following Saturday's 5-3 win over the Blue Jackets, a game that saw Foligno accidentally step on Atkinson's shoulder and cause a dangerous 17-stitch cut with his skate blade.

The incident happened as Foligno rushed into the corner after what he felt was a hit from behind by Columbus' Brandon Dubinsky on Sabres winger Tyler Ennis, who has a recent history of concussions.

"I just came in there pretty furious. I should have let up a bit probably but I never really checked or finished Atkinson," Foligno said. "I went over top of him. He fell on the ground and before I know it I was trying to grab Dubinsky and that's how it happened. You're thankful it's not serious and you didn't catch him in the neck or the face."

Foligno said he talked briefly to his older brother, Nick, like he does after each Sabres-Blue Jackets game. The Foligno brothers had one shoving match during the game as the final 30 minutes grew particularly ornery on the second half of a back-to-back between the teams.

"I think he was a little bit ticked off after last game," Foligno said with a smile. "It was a quick couple minutes and he had to get his flight. But I'm always texting with him. And from a family perspective it was a 50-50 split of the series so that's probably good for everybody."

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The Sabres added a free agent college defenseman late last season in Minnesota State's Casey Nelson, who has spent the bulk of this year in Rochester, and are reportedly in line to add another. TSN reported Monday that St. Lawrence's Gavin Bayreuther may sign as soon as Tuesday and that Buffalo is battling for his services along with Dallas, New Jersey and Colorado.

The 6-foot-1, 195-pound Bayreuther is a left-handed shot and is second in the nation this year among defensemen in points per game at 0.97 (29 points in 30 games) He had eight goals while leading the team in assists (21) and points, and also had a plus-9 rating.

## **Sabres' Nick Deslauriers finally playing, contributing**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 13, 2017

BUFFALO – When Sabres coach Dan Bylsma charged Nick Deslauriers with creating some energy, the gritty winger's first instinct, of course, was to fight.

But these days, those opportunities are scarce. Deslauriers has only fought four times this season. He certainly wasn't going to find one enjoying a rare shift on the first line with the listless Sabres down three goals Saturday.

"I would've loved to get a fight there, but I don't think there's a player out there that would've been good for that," Deslauriers said following the Sabres' 5-3 come-from-behind win against the Columbus Blue Jackets inside KeyBank Center.

So Deslauriers said he simply wanted to "bang bodies" playing beside top center Ryan O'Reilly and 25-goal winger Evander Kane.

"Put it deep, get a good forecheck," Deslauriers said.

On the first shift of the second period, the Sabres got the puck deep, and sure enough, Deslauriers grabbed control behind the net. He then fed defenseman Jake McCabe, who one-timed the backhand pass from the left circle.

"We knew what we were going to do," Deslauriers said. "That's what probably brought the success there. Caber just screamed really loud for that puck, and I just gave it to him right on the tee."

Just 18 seconds into the second period, Deslauriers created some critical momentum that buoyed the Sabres' roaring comeback.

"I didn't necessarily think it was going to come in the form of a backhand pass from behind the net ... for a goal," Bylsma said. "To his credit, he gave it. I think it energized our team – not just the play, not just the goal – but (all of) the play from him."

Deslauriers hasn't played or created much this season, the most frustrating of his four-year career. If he dresses for tonight's tilt against the San Jose Sharks, the start of a four-game road trip, it will only be his 37th appearance. He recently sat four straight contests and 12 of 22 as a healthy scratch.

Deslauriers enjoyed regular duty throughout his career before a knee injury he suffered Oct. 29 sidelined him 19 games.

When he returned, he usually skated sparingly. He recently skated as a center, a position he had never played.

But Kyle Okposo's rib injury has created a regular spot for him, and Deslauriers has seized some of his limited opportunities and earned more ice time, skating at least six minutes in four of the last five games.

"I feel great," he said. "It's obviously not fun to be in the stands. But it feels good. I know my job. It's a tough spot where I am."

Deslauriers, 26, became the last Sabres regular to record a point when he assisted on Evan Rodrigues' first-period goal in Friday's 4-3 loss in Columbus.

"It's just (a) bonus getting points," he said. "It's not my thing. If I can help in either way, it's good."

Deslauriers hasn't scored a goal since March 18, 2016, a 46-game drought. If he keeps playing with O'Reilly, it might finally come. O'Reilly assisted on three of Deslauriers' six goals last season.

"If you look at the average of points I have with O'Reilly, I think it's really good," Deslauriers said. "It's any options I get to create space for those good players that can handle the puck, I'm just there to do that."

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The Sabres, who haven't had an extra forward since Okposo was hurt, recalled winger Hudson Fasching from the Rochester Americans on Monday before they flew to San Jose.

Fasching, 21, began this season with the Sabres. He hasn't played an NHL contest since suffering a groin injury Oct. 30. The Sabres sent him to the AHL in early November, and he missed two months because of the injury.

The rookie has six goals and eight points in 25 games with the Amerks. He had zero points in six NHL appearances earlier this season.

## **Sharks seek to end futility against Sabres**

The Associated Press

March 13, 2017

The San Jose Sharks haven't lost many games this season. Perhaps their most stunning one of the season came in western New York against a franchise trying desperately to get back to the postseason for the first time in six years.

The Sharks look for a measure of revenge and to end a long streak of futility against the Buffalo Sabres on Tuesday night at SAP Center in San Jose.

During their matchup on Feb. 7, a power-play goal by Joe Pavelski gave the Sharks a seemingly insurmountable 4-1 lead with just under 14 minutes left in regulation. Buffalo responded with goals by Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane and Kyle Okposo against Martin Jones in a 3:28 span to eventually force overtime.

Kane scored 65 seconds into the extra session to give the Sabres (28-29-12) the 5-4 win.

"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 after that contest. "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."

Since February 2010, the Sabres have found plenty of ways to defeat the Sharks. Over the last 11 meetings, Buffalo has posted a 10-0-1 record while outscoring them 36-19. The Sabres also go for their sixth straight win in northern California.

Special teams could be the difference in this game.

San Jose (41-20-7) hasn't allowed a power-play goal through the first three games of its season-high six-game homestand, killing off all nine short-handed instances. Buffalo is 8-for-22 on the power play over its last six games, and leads the league in power-play conversion (23.7 percent) and man-advantage goals (50).

The Sabres are 13th in the Eastern Conference and their hopes of ending their playoff drought aren't promising. This contest begins a four-game road trip, and seven of the club's final 13 games are on the road where the Sabres have dropped four in a row and seven of nine to fall to 11-17-6.

Buffalo's best record against any division comes against the Pacific. The Sabres are 6-4-1 and averaging 3.72 goals per game against that division, and will travel to Los Angeles and Anaheim before wrapping up their trip in Detroit.

Like its stunning win last month, Buffalo rallied from a deep deficit to get the victory its last time out. The Sabres allowed three goals in the first 10:47 before getting goals from five players to top the Columbus Blue Jackets 5-3 on Saturday.

"We came out in the second with nothing to lose," defenseman Jake McCabe told the Buffalo News after scoring one of the goals. "It's been a rough stretch here and it's getting to the point now you have to have a short memory."

"We know what's expected of us, what we've been told to do. We have to go out there and perform."

Jack Eichel and Kane each had a goal and an assist for Buffalo to remain red-hot.

Since Feb. 1, Eichel leads the league with 19 assists and 26 points. Despite missing the first 21 games of the season with a high ankle sprain, Eichel has still registered 47 points -- nine short of his total in 81 games as a rookie last season.

Kane has posted 11 of his team-high 25 goals over his last 16 contests, and needs five more markers to reach 30 for the second time in his career.

Buffalo faces a San Jose team that begins play with the largest lead over any of the NHL's four division leaders, and has a game in hand over two teams chasing it in the Pacific, the Anaheim Ducks and the Calgary Flames.

"It's always going to be a race to the end, and everyone wants to be in that top spot. You want to get home ice. I think we always are watching who we'd be playing or how other teams are faring," Sharks defenseman Paul Martin told the league's official website.

The Sharks have taken two of three during their extended homestand after ripping the Dallas Stars 5-1 on Sunday. Pavelski scored twice, including his first short-handed marker since Feb. 1, 2014 -- a span of 259 games.

Pavelski has five goals in his last four games and was named the NHL's first star of the week on Monday. The Sharks' captain needs one more tally to tie Brent Burns for the team lead.

However, Pavelski hasn't scored a goal in four straight home games versus Buffalo.

Neither Jones nor rookie backup Aaron Dell have faced the Sabres in San Jose. Dell, who defeated the Stars on Sunday, could be in line to make consecutive starts.

Overall, Dell is 10-4-1 with a 1.82 goals-against average, a .938 save percentage and one shutout. At home, however, Dell is 6-0-0 while allowing only eight goals on 155 shots faced.

## **Fasching expected to join lineup during 3-game trip**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 13, 2017

**SAN JOSE** - When we last saw Hudson Fasching with the Buffalo Sabres, he was leaving the ice with a groin injury early during a game in Winnipeg. That was on Oct. 30, a mere six games into the season. Fasching, a first-year pro, had made the team out of training camp.

In the four and a half months since, Fasching's rookie season has been marred by that same injury. What was initially prescribed as a short-term ailment revealed itself to be worse, and as a result he's been limited to just 25 games for Rochester.

Fasching was back with the Sabres when they took the ice for practice on Monday in San Jose, where they will begin a three-game California road trip on Tuesday night.

"It's been a long process," Fasching said. "It's an injury that took me out for a while and it's my first major injury along my career. Not [only] pro, even through college. It's been hard, mentally you just try to stay with it. But it is what it is and I feel good now. It's made me stronger, for sure."

It was around this time last year when Fasching ended his college career at the University of Minnesota and signed his pro contract with the Sabres. He was advertised as a power forward with scoring ability, and the goal he scored in his NHL debut was an indication of those abilities.

Between the seven games Fasching played with the Sabres last season and the manner with which he stuck out at training camp in October, it's no surprise that the team would want to see him in the NHL again before long.

Whether it's on Tuesday against the Sharks or not, coach Dan Bylsma said to expect to see Fasching in the lineup at least once during their current road trip.

"Finally getting healthy and having be to in Rochester and get his game, that's been a fairly long process and he's probably still in that process," Bylsma said. "Whether it was yesterday, today or tomorrow, I'd like to see Hudson get up and get in some games."

Fasching called the season so far a learning experience, having gone through his first rehabilitation process in what began as a promising campaign. But he chalks it up as part of being a professional, and the good news is that he's better now.

"Obviously it takes a while to get back but right now I feel good," he said. "I feel like my game is in a good spot. I try to keep progressing forward. It's back to where it needs to be, I just need to keep growing."

### **Deslauriers glad to provide spark**

When the Sabres mounted their comeback in the second period against Columbus on Saturday night, it began with an unexpected line combination taking the ice to start the second period. Evander Kane and Ryan O'Reilly, two regulars on the top line, were joined by Nicolas Deslauriers on the wing.

Bylsma reasoned afterward that he put Deslauriers on the ice to inject some energy into a team that had lacked it through the first 20 minutes. Most of the time, that would entail fighting.

What Bylsma got on this occasion was a feed from Deslauriers, circling behind the net, up to Jake McCabe to set up the game's first goal.

"I think he just said I was going with [O'Reilly] and Kaner," Deslauriers said. "I know my job. I know what I have to bring. Sometimes it's by fighting but in that situation, there was not anybody that I think was going to say yes if I asked him. I think it was just a good forecheck, finish my hits and create space for those two guys.

" ... Nobody thought it was going to be like that but it kind of helped us out a little bit."

When asked after the game what launched the comeback, Kane immediately mentioned Deslauriers' name. It's a testament to how popular the forward is among his teammates, even in a trying season that has seen him sit as a healthy scratch at times and go scoreless through his first 34 games prior to Friday.

"When I try to bring something, lately it's been fighting and now, when you get on the board and help the guys do something else like that, it's fun," Deslauriers said. "All of the guys have been supportive. Sometimes I can play nine minutes, I can play four or six. It's just the job that I have is not always in the spotlight, but it's fun to hear that from him specially."

Deslauriers now has assists in two straight games. His road trip, however, didn't get off to quite as strong of a start. He had to be tended to after being caught in the nose by the stick of Cody Franson, who was wearing a cage himself after taking a puck to the mouth in Saturday's game.

"I think he was scared to just be by himself with that scar," Deslauriers joked.

### **Lines at practice**

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

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

40 Robin Lehner  
31 Anders Nilsson

## **Lehner continues to embrace his time in Sabres' net**

By John Vogl  
The Buffalo News  
March 12, 2017

One night after setting a personal record for games played, Robin Lehner was supposed to rest. Instead ...

"That was maybe the best he's looked all year in net," Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said.

Lehner's perfect relief performance Saturday gave him 49 appearances in Buffalo's crease this season. He played in 47 junior games back in 2009-10, so he'd been waiting a long time to be trusted with this kind of workload.

"It's nice," Lehner said in KeyBank Center. "You think you've got to deserve it to keep playing. I think I just prepare myself to play every game.

"Right now it's mixed emotions. I really want this team to do well. Personally, it's nice to play a lot. Long season, there's going to be ups and downs, but I've been battling hard. It's been going good."

Buffalo's up-and-down season was reflected during Saturday's 5-3 victory over Columbus. The Sabres were lifeless and outclassed for 20 minutes while falling in a 3-0 hole. During the second and third periods, they showed emotion, displayed scoring ability and got 24 saves from Lehner.

"As I said, it goes up and down, especially – I don't know if 'young team' is the right word, but 'not-matured team' yet," Lehner said. "We have a long way left to go. We have some really big bright spots in our game, some good players, but you've got to find a way to be better at all things in all areas."

The 25-year-old included himself in that statement. He's 19-20-8 with a .921 save percentage, which ranks eighth in the NHL. The crease has essentially been his since mid-January. He's appeared in 22 of the last 27 games, going 10-8-3 while matching his season save percentage of .921.

"I'm learning to handle things," he said, "like just getting more experience, handling the ups and downs and handling the positives, the disappointments. Forget games, go to the next one. Forget goals, go to the next save.

"It's just learning more and more about the game of hockey. I've played my whole life, but it's a learning curve for all of us in the room right now. It's very obvious the parts of our game that's not working."

Breakaways, specifically shootouts, have been Lehner's sore spot this season. Lately, teams have had success shooting high on the 6-foot-4, 239-pounder.

He excelled in those areas Saturday, most notably after the Sabres made it 3-2.

"He made some pretty huge stops for us on breakaways and two-on-ones," left wing Matt Moulson said. "He's a battler when he's in there."

No one questions Lehner's passion and competitive attitude. While there have been doubts about his ability to be a game-changing No. 1 netminder, he clearly wants to be. In a hockey city that's been blessed in net since Roger Crozier won the opening game, the goalie is a focal point. Lehner has learned that, and he's embraced it.

He speaks his mind at time when toes don't like to be stepped on.

"I'm fine taking positives, and I'm fine taking negatives, too," Lehner said. "It's a city that wants to be successful, and we want to be successful. I'm happy to be on both sides of that coin."

"I'll speak my mind. I will speak and say what is wrong, and if people have a problem with it, it's their problem. At the end of the day, my main goal is to try to help this team be successful. I think everyone on our team just wishes we could make it happen."

The victory over the Blue Jackets ended a three-game losing streak and moved the Sabres to 2-6-2 in the last 10. Only 13 games remain, starting Tuesday in San Jose, and the Sabres (28-29-12) still have a lot to learn.

The coaches and some players believe a systematic game is the key to success. Others believe freewheeling hockey can help. They have to find a balance that works or make believers out of the others.

Each side can point to numerous instances to bolster their case. The second and third periods Saturday point to the players' freewheeling nature.

"Maybe we just play a little bit more," forward Tyler Ennis said. "Maybe we don't worry so much about exactly where to be on the ice. Maybe we just say" forget "it and go do a little more, try to create a little bit more."

It helped that Lehner was perfect behind them.

"He was excited to go," Ennis said. "He was just telling us to go after it, don't sit back, just go after it. Even when we were tied up, he said go after it. We did, and he did a great job."

With five back-to-backs remaining, it's reasonable to assume Lehner will head to the crease eight more times. That would give him 57 appearances, the most since Ryan Miller had 61 in 2011-12.

They won't all be as perfect as Saturday, but Lehner wants them to feel just as important for himself and the Sabres.

"It's a team game," Lehner said. "A lot of things have to click. The league is too good these days. I think there's a lot of positives, though. I think we're competitive every night, and we've just got to keep working at it."