



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

March 16, 2017

Sabres intrigued by reported Winter Classic matchup with Rangers

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2017

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. -- There's plenty of hockey fan in Jack Eichel and one game that's been appointment television for the Buffalo Sabres' center since he was 11 years old is the NHL Winter Classic. It looks like Eichel is about to get off his couch and get some star billing in the game.

According to reports Wednesday in *Newsday*, plans are being finalized for the Sabres to meet the New York Rangers in the next Winter Classic on Jan. 1, 2018 at Citi Field in Queens, the home of the New York Mets. With Buffalo one of NBC's top local television markets, an American star like Eichel is sure to get plenty of attention in one of the league's premier showcases.

"Being part of the whole buildup to the event and being able to play outside would be great," Eichel said after practice Wednesday at the Los Angeles Kings' facility. "It's something you watch growing up every year, an event everyone looks forward to. In my house, I can tell you it was highly watched. It would be awesome, super cool. I know nothing is set in stone yet but to maybe play in New York City against the Rangers would be a lot of fun."

The Winter Classic has never been held in New York. There were two Stadium Series games played in Yankee Stadium in 2014, matching the Rangers against both the New York Islanders and New Jersey Devils. Sources confirm the plan is for the Sabres to be the home team, because the tax arrangement between Madison Square Garden and New York City does not allow the Rangers to play a home game in another facility. The Sabres are thus expected to have only 40 home games in KeyBank Center during the 2017-18 season.

The NHL generally does not announce its plans for the game until the summer. There had been chatter for more than a year that the Sabres were interested in hosting the 2018 game in a nod to the 10th anniversary of their iconic shootout loss to Pittsburgh played in the snow of Orchard Park on Jan. 1, 2008. But that speculation was put to rest when plans were announced last year for an outdoor game as part of the 2018 World Junior Championships.

Team USA and Team Canada will be playing in Orchard Park on Dec. 29 and officials from the Sabres and Bills have said it would be impossible to turn the stadium around in 3-4 days to accommodate two crowds in the 70,000 range. Having the Sabres involved, even out of town, would be a tribute to them as the first hosts.

Eichel said he vividly recalls the first Classic, the Penguins' 2-1 win over Buffalo in Ralph Wilson Stadium that was cemented on Sidney Crosby's shootout goal against Ryan Miller.

"I was watching that at home a long time ago and what you remember most is the weather," Eichel said. "You hear all different things from guys who have played in it. You hear terrible experiences with conditions, whether it's too cold, or snowy or hard to see and rainy but I've heard guys say ice was nice and hard and good temperatures. It really all depends on the weather."

Defenseman Cody Franson played for Toronto in the 2014 Winter Classic against Detroit in front of a league-record crowd of 105,491 in Michigan Stadium.

"It was probably one of the coolest experiences of my life," Franson said. "You're talking 110,000 people or so and it was snowing and cold. They were doing music with the crowd, everybody jumping, and it had that college atmosphere. It was also one of the hardest games to play in. The snow, the cold, shoveling. The cold plays on you. I use a grippy stick and when it's that cold, there's no grip on your stick."

Coach Dan Bylsma led the Penguins during the 2011 game in Heinz Field, a loss to the Washington Capitals. It was the first time the league had done a reality show following the teams in advance of the game. The premiere of the HBO series, which spent a lot of time with Bylsma in his home and at the rink, was a critically acclaimed production that has become an annual outgrowth of the game.

"It was more than one game. In some ways, it felt like the Super Bowl a little bit," Bylsma said. "You're building for four weeks. There's a lot of pomp and circumstance. A lot of what you're talking is talking about the game that's coming up down the road even though you're playing the regular season games as we go along."

The Winter Classic, more of an experiment in 2008 until the Sabres-Penguins game quickly made it must-see TV, has been staged in locales like Fenway Park and Wrigley Field. The Rangers previously played in it in 2012, when they beat Philadelphia in Citizens Bank Park, home of the Phillies. This year's game featured the St. Louis Blues and Chicago Blackhawks in Busch Stadium.

Teams routinely break out new sweaters for the game and the "Road to the Winter Classic" reality show has been shown in recent years on the Epix network. There is also usually a game featuring alumni of the two teams the day before the main event.

"It would be unbelievable," said Sabres center Ryan O'Reilly. "I've never played in one and I've always wanted to. It's a really cool event the NHL does. They do a great job of selling that game and promoting it. It's a fun thing to be a part of for sure."

"I know every guy on the ice on the team would be thrilled to play in one of those. Especially with a rival like the Rangers. Being in Buffalo, you know a lot of people hate the Rangers."

"It's a unique opportunity, a special thing," Bylsma said. "There's a lot about it that's special. You're playing the game outside going back to the roots, but it's a carnival-type setting. It would be a huge opportunity for this organization to have that."

For his part, Eichel would want to make all the buildup worth his time.

"It would be different than just another game," he said. "There's more at stake because you'd really want to say you won your game in the Winter Classic. There would be some personal satisfaction there."

Sabres Notebook: With game out of reach, Bylsma sat Eichel's line

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

March 15, 2017

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. -- What was Dan Bylsma thinking when he sat Jack Eichel's line for the final five minutes Tuesday night in San Jose? Quite simply, nothing more than time and score as well as upcoming schedule.

Eichel, Sam Reinhart and Matt Moulson were on the ice for the final three goals of Buffalo's 4-1 loss to the Sharks in SAP Center. Eichel accidentally put the puck past Robin Lehner for the go-ahead goal in the final minute of the second period and made a turnover that led to the Sharks' third goal. Reinhart and Cody Franson combined to drop coverage on Joe Pavelski on that play.

Eichel, who scored his 20th goal of the season just 70 seconds into the game, played a career-low 14:06 in the game. Reinhart played 14:35, one of his lower totals of the season.

Following practice Wednesday in the Kings' suburban facility, Bylsma said there was no message being sent to anyone on the line.

"The second goal in the game that goes off Jack is a fluke," Bylsma said. "It's a one-in-a-million situation that happens and finds its way in the back of the net. But at the 4-1 point, it was more things weren't going that line's way and we're playing a lot of hockey here in the next little bit. It was 4-1 and they didn't get back on the ice."

Bylsma said he's looking for big things from Eichel in Thursday's game against the Los Angeles Kings and again Friday in Anaheim against the Ducks. He said he liked how Eichel went hard to the net on a couple of possessions in the third period in the wake of his faux pas off a Cody Franson pass that gave the Sharks the lead.

"One thing Jack has done really well is respond in the game to different situations," Bylsma said. "Whether it's a mistake or turnover or a power play that hasn't gone well, I think he's done a remarkable job lately playing that way. The last stretch of games, he's been the guy with the go-after it attitude and the keep-playing attitude. That's what I've liked about Jack the last 10 games."

The Sabres may have double Justin trouble for Thursday's game.

Defenseman Justin Falk (calf) has been ruled out of both remaining games this week and winger Justin Bailey (foot) is questionable after both were struck by shots. Bailey was dinged Tuesday while Falk has been playing with the injuries for the last couple of games. Neither practiced Wednesday.

The Sabres are expected to call up Taylor Fedun from Rochester to replace Falk, provided he can get a flight west in time out of the Rochester snow. The Amerks' game with Binghamton Wednesday night in Blue Cross Arena was postponed due to the weather and will be made up April 5.

Bylsma added there's a good chance Hudson Fasching will draw into the lineup Thursday, either to replace Bailey or in another spot. Fasching has not played an NHL game since Oct. 30 in Winnipeg and missed nearly three months with a severe groin injury.

"It will be an opportunity for him very similar to last year when he played seven games to show what he can do," Bylsma said. "He's a big guy physical along the wall. That's what we need to see him do."

Eichel's own-goal Tuesday came when he failed to corral Franson's backhand pass to the front of the net to set up a breakout. The puck hit Eichel in the right skate and went through Robin Lehner's legs.

"It's obviously not something that's normal. It stinks," Eichel said after the game of the goal credited to San Jose's Michael Haley.

"It's just a real tough bounce," Eichel said. "'Franny' is making a good play to me in front of the net, we're trying to break the puck out and I end up hitting my back skate and it goes through Lenny's legs. ... I went to pull it from behind me to in front of me and I hit it off my own skate."

Franson said he and Eichel have worked on the play in practice and replays showed Eichel calling for the puck.

"I didn't think Haley was in position to do much," Franson said. "'Eichs' was right in that area and it's unfortunate. Eichs makes that play 99 times out of 100. The ice was pretty soft, the puck was bouncing around and those are ones you just chalk up to bad luck."

The Sabres have lost three straight games in Staples Center to the Kings -- and all of them have been by 2-0 scores. Their last goal at Staples was scored by former captain Craig Rivet at 1:07 of the third period in a 4-3 shootout loss on Jan. 21, 2010. So the current scoreless streak in the building for Buffalo is 203 minutes, 53 seconds.

Los Angeles entered play Wednesday four points behind St. Louis for the final wild-card slot in the West, pending the Blues' game later Wednesday in Anaheim.

The Kings will be playing the final game of a seven-game homestand and are currently 3-2-1 in the first six. They're coming off a 3-2 loss Tuesday to Arizona -- in a game that stretched to 11 rounds of a shootout.

Report: Sabres to face Rangers in New York Winter Classic

By Bill Hoppe

Olean Times Herald

March 15, 2017

BUFFALO – The Sabres will likely play the New York Rangers outdoors in the 2018 Winter Classic at Citi Field, according to Newsday.

The game, scheduled for New Year's Day, has never taken place in the New York City area.

The Sabres, of course, hosted the first Winter Classic in 2008 at what is now called New Era Field. The game against the Pittsburgh Penguins, a 2-1 shootout loss, was a rousing success and has become iconic in Buffalo sports.

The NHL might want the Sabres to commemorate the 10th anniversary with another appearance. They also have slick center Jack Eichel, who has morphed into an offensive star this winter. The Buffalo market also delivers huge television ratings.

The Rangers played two Stadium Series outdoor games in 2014 at Yankee Stadium.

New Era Field is hosting an outdoor game between Canada and the United States at the World Junior Championship on Dec. 29.

Kings running out of time, host struggling Sabres

The Associated Press

March 15, 2017

The Los Angeles Kings are running out of time in their effort to make the playoffs for the seventh time in the last eight years, and they can't afford to let more points slip away when they meet the Buffalo Sabres at Staples Center on Thursday night.

The Kings (33-29-7) are four points behind St. Louis for the second wild card out of the Western Conference after the Blues lost in Anaheim 2-1 on Wednesday.

Los Angeles missed a chance to move closer when it lost 3-1 to the visiting Blues on Monday and again Tuesday when it fell in an 11-round shootout against the visiting Arizona Coyotes, the second-to-last team in the West.

The Kings have 13 games to make up ground.

"We need to win every game," Los Angeles' Tyler Toffoli said. "We need to get rolling here and find a way to bear down and get two points in all these games coming up."

Toffoli was one of the few bright spots in recent games, totaling two goals and two assists in the last three.

"It's good to see him break out," Kings coach Darryl Sutter said. "Hopefully, that gets him going, gives him some confidence."

The Sabres (28-30-12) lost nine of their last 11 (2-8-1), most recently the first of three straight games in California -- a 4-1 defeat to the San Jose Sharks on Tuesday night.

Buffalo will also be without defenseman Justin Falk (calf) and forward Justin Bailey (foot), according to the Buffalo News. Tyler Fedun is expected to be called up from Rochester of the American Hockey League to fill in for Falk, and coach Dan Bylsma said he's leaning toward inserting Hudson Fasching in the lineup in place of Bailey.

Fasching missed three months with a groin injury and hasn't played in an NHL game since Oct. 30.

"It will be an opportunity for him, very similar to last year, when he played seven games, to show what he can do," Bylsma told the Buffalo News. "He's a big guy, physical along the wall. That's what we need to see him do."

Kings goaltender Jonathan Quick is expected to start after backing up Ben Bishop on Tuesday. Quick, who missed 59 games this season with a groin injury, is 4-1-0 in his career against Buffalo with two shutouts. His 1.41 goal-against average against the Sabres is his lowest against any NHL team.

Quick hasn't faced the Sabres since Dec. 9, 2014, however. He was injured when Buffalo beat the visiting Kings 6-3 in December and Jhonas Enroth played both games against Buffalo last season.

The Kings won't have the luxury of playing their back-up goalie this time around, but Sutter didn't seem overly concerned about his team's place in the standings following Tuesday's loss.

After all, the Kings clinched a playoff spot on the second-to-last game of the regular season five years ago, then went on to win their first Stanley Cup as the eighth seed out of the West.

"Every game's a new game," Sutter said. "I'm not going to let somebody in a basement somewhere decide where he thinks we're going to finish."

Sources: Citi Field close to hosting Winter Classic

By Arthur Staple

Newsday

March 15, 2017

The Winter Classic will likely make its New York debut on New Year's Day 2018, with an outdoor game at Citi Field between the Rangers and Buffalo Sabres close to being finalized, two sources confirmed to Newsday on Wednesday.

The signature outdoor event for the National Hockey League has been held all around the Eastern half of the U.S. but never in New York. There were, however, two "Stadium Series" games featuring the Rangers playing the Devils and Islanders at Yankee Stadium on Jan. 26 and 29, 2014. The most recent Winter Classic was in Busch Stadium in St. Louis between the Blues and Blackhawks on Jan. 2.

The Rangers have played in one prior Winter Classic, against the Flyers in Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia in 2012. The planned Sabres' selection for the next installment is a nod to Buffalo hosting the first Winter Classic in 2008 and this next one will be the 10th such game.

There were rumored talks of the Rangers playing the Winter Classic at West Point — possibly against the Panthers, whose owner Vinnie Viola was recently nominated to be Secretary of the Army before he withdrew — but those plans apparently did not materialize for the upcoming season.

The Islanders might have been a more natural fit for the Citi Field game, given the local flavor they would bring and the preliminary talks involving the Wilpons, the Mets owners, as possible investors in a new arena at Belmont Park that the Isles would call home.

But the more national draw of the Sabres, who played the Penguins in Ralph Wilson Stadium on Jan. 1, 2008 in the first Winter Classic, appears to have won out. The Sabres will likely be the "home" team in the game given the Rangers are contractually obligated to play all their home games at Madison Square Garden.

Rangers likely to play Sabres in Winter Classic at Citi Field

By Justin Tasch

New York Daily News

March 15, 2017

The Broadway Blueshirts could be taking their show to Flushing.

Plans are close to being finalized for the Rangers and Buffalo Sabres to play each other in the 2018 Winter Classic at Citi Field, according to a Newsday report.

New York City has never hosted a Winter Classic. The Rangers have played in one of the previous nine, the 2012 game against the Flyers at the Phillies' ballpark, which they won, 3-2.

The Rangers have played in two outdoor Stadium Series games, defeating both the Devils and Islanders twice in four days in January 2014 at Yankee Stadium.

Buffalo played host to the first Winter Classic at Ralph Wilson Stadium in 2008, when the Penguins defeated the Sabres 2-1 in a shootout.

The Sabres likely would be the home team because the Garden's tax exemption with the city is dependent on the Rangers and Knicks playing all their home games there. The Rangers were the road team for both games at Yankee Stadium in 2014.

Two Sabres prospects staying in school

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 15, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - A couple of young Sabres are apparently staying in school. Nick Hatten of the St. Cloud Times said he was told by coach Bob Motzko that defenseman Will Borgen and forward Judd Peterson are staying for a another season.

Borgen is 20-years old and was a 4th round pick in 2015. He had two goals and 10 assists for 12 points in 33 games during his sophomore season.

Borgen was suspended for both games of St. Cloud's best of three playoff series against North Dakota for shoving an official. The Huskies lost both games.

Peterson was a 7th round pick in 2012 and netted 11 goals and six assists for 17 points during his junior season. He had 16 goals as a sophomore. Peterson is 23 years-old.

Here We Go Again

By Mike Schopp

WGR 550

March 15, 2017

Here we are yet again, counting down to the end of a Buffalo sports season that never even brought on any real hope of success. If you feel like you've read me writing that over and over for years, you pretty much have, and so while the content has hardly changed please enjoy the exciting presentation of our new web design!

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE CAPITAL LETTERS IN THIS NEW FONT?

Terry Pegula bought the Sabres six years ago and inherited Lindy Ruff, whose hiring in 1997 you could read about online after your modem made that shrieking dial-up sound. By 2011 television graphics would show Ruff's tenure to be longer than almost coach in pro sports – curious mostly for the fact that the Sabres had no championships and only one Finals appearance in those many years. (Gregg Popovich, by comparison...)

Ruff got the Sabres to the 2011 playoffs, then lasted 99 more games here before Pegula dumped him. The team with unheard-of coaching stability – especially for a non-winner – made a change for the first time since Wayne Gretzky played in the league.

Ron Rolston, from inside, took over in February 2013 and lasted 51 games. Then The Past's Ted Nolan returned for two seasons of overall last place.

The Sabres really didn't search for a coach until firing Nolan and hiring Mike Babcock I mean Dan Bylsma.

It seemed like a good idea at the time.

Bylsma represented more than the team's first legitimate coaching search and hire in two decades. He coached Pittsburgh to a Stanley Cup in 2009. He personified the thing Pegula has invested so heavily in here: credibility.

It isn't working.

The Sabres entered play Tuesday night in San Jose more than just in a seventh-place position in the division standings. They were 29th in the league in 5-on-5 Corsi percentage, a distinction worthy of the label "bad team".

They've had injuries, and they also still have serious road work to do on the roster, especially on defense. But with Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Evander Kane up front, 29th in Corsi over almost a full season is inexcusable.

I don't think the Sabres should stress over making a coaching change. Most coaches in the league are interchangeable, and they shouldn't be afraid to try someone new next season. It'd be yet another \$15M for the Pegulas to pay someone not to work there anymore – the Leino List – but if, you know, your "reason for existence is to win the Stanley Cup", you make the change.

Players have been reported as frustrated and unhappy for more than a year. The results are subpar. Coaching changes are made all the time. Pegula isn't above firing a coach in the second year of a five-year pact; ask Rex Ryan. The Sabres are a franchise that for years was known for their coaching stability, but not anymore.

So be it. With an exception or two (cough, Babcock) your coach can be replaced at little cost. Eichel is young but by far more valuable than the head coach here, and if he's ready for a new leader then so am I. Perhaps down the road I won't give him the benefit on the doubt on whether a move like this is needed. But this time I am.

What have you got to lose?

REPORT: Sabres likely to play in 2018 Winter Classic

WGR 550

March 15, 2017

According to a report from Arthur Staple at Newsday out of New York, the National Hockey League is likely to announce that the Buffalo Sabres will play the New York Rangers at Citi Field in Queens in the 2018 Winter Classic.

That same weekend, New Era Field in Orchard Park, New York will be prepared for the United States and Canada to play outdoors in the IIHF World Junior Championships. Despite having the rink already set up, and it being the 10th anniversary of the inaugural Winter Classic here in Buffalo, signs point to the Sabres being on the road for the game.

This would be the Sabres' first time playing outdoors since the inaugural Winter Classic in 2008. The Sabres lost that game 2-1 in a shootout to Sidney Crosby and the Pittsburgh Penguins.

The Rangers have played in three outdoor games since 2008, including the 2012 Winter Classic in Philadelphia against the Flyers. The Rangers ended up winning that game 3-2. They have also played in two more outdoor games at Yankee Stadium in 2014 when they played the New York Islanders and New Jersey Devils.

Citi Field has never hosted an outdoor game since it was constructed in 2009.

Report: Sabres to play in 2018 Winter Classic at Citi Field against New York Rangers

By Matt Bove

WKBW

March 15, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - The Buffalo Sabres are heading back outside, at least according to Newsday Sports, which is reporting the blue and gold will take on the New York Rangers on New Year's Day 2018 at Citi Field in Queens.

The event has yet to be finalized by the NHL, but Newsday is reporting the league will make it official soon.

Per @NewsdaySports the NHL will announce the 2018 Winter Classic will be played at Citi Field in Queens. Rangers vs Sabres, New Year's Day.

The 2018 Winter Classic will mark the 10-year anniversary of the event that began in Buffalo in 2008 when the Sabres hosted the Pittsburgh Penguins at what was then Ralph Wilson Stadium.

It will also mark the first outdoor game for the Sabres since 2008, and the the first Winter Classic played in New York City. Yankee Stadium has hosted two 'Stadium Series' games featuring the Rangers, New Jersey Devils, and New York Islanders, but never the New Year's day showcase.

Coincidentally, Western New York Buffalo will host the first ever outdoor IIHF outdoor hockey game at NewEra Field between Team U.S.A and Team Canada the day before on New Year's Eve.

Sabres set out to prove themselves over final stretch

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 15, 2017

LOS ANGELES - In the last two games alone, the Buffalo Sabres have showed both the type of play that has allowed them to compete with any team in the League at times this season (in the last two periods against Columbus on Saturday) and also the type of play that has prevented them from establishing any sort of consistency (in San Jose on Tuesday).

With 12 games remaining on their schedule, the aim for the Sabres going forward after a practice in El Segundo, Calif. on Wednesday is proving to themselves that they can play the way they did against Columbus day in and day out.

"We've got to find consistency in the way we play, find an identity that we can build off and that we have as a foundation, as a team and as an organization," Sabres captain Brian Gionta said. "That's what the goal would be coming down the stretch here."

The problem that plagued the Sabres in their loss to San Jose was simple: the Sharks dominated the possession game, which was a product of Buffalo's puck management. The struggles managing the puck, Gionta said, stemmed from a lack of support up the ice.

"Everyone says make more plays, make more plays, but it's about support," Gionta said. "If the support isn't there, the play's not there to be made. You need to support each other on the forecheck in order to get it back, support each other in the D-zone to get it out. It's little things like that."

"We get glimpses of it each game, the consistency of it isn't there," alternate captain Ryan O'Reilly added. "We're working hard and you see guys, they want to make the right plays, but it's just there's certain times where you just get caught thinking."

"Everyone's trying to do the right thing, we're working, everyone's trying to get to the right areas but we're just a split second behind. You see how it shows, the way we get hemmed in or the way we're not crisp."

If you're looking for an example of puck support, look no further than Buffalo's opponent on Tuesday. The Sharks are an established contender in the League, and Gionta said they played the style of game that the Sabres are looking to achieve.

"They're a veteran team that moves well up and down the ice," Gionta said. "If you look at their game, it's not much different than what everyone else is doing. You're coming over and supporting with two, three guys, you've got options of where to go with the puck."

"They made our D go back the other night. Everyone says make plays, but a lot of it is just getting it by their D and being supportive on the forecheck."

The difficulty of becoming a perennial contender like the Sharks, or like Buffalo's next two opponents in Los Angeles and Anaheim, might be the single biggest lesson to take away from this season.

"I think for ourselves, you don't just wake up one year and decide you're going to win a Stanley Cup, decide you're going to be a competing team," O'Reilly said. "It's tough to make a jump in the standings each year and make a push. For us, it's not over yet. We've got a lot to prove to ourselves, that we can play and beat these teams."

"No matter who we play each night, we've got to show that we're better and we should be in the playoffs, that it should be our run this year. That's something we have to prove constantly."

Wednesday's practice

Justin Bailey and Justin Falk were both absent from practice due to injuries. Bailey was hurt blocking a shot in San Jose on Tuesday and is questionable for the game in Los Angeles, while Falk will be out for the remainder of the road trip with a calf injury. The Sabres will recall a defenseman to replace Falk in the lineup.

If Bailey is unable to play, expect Hudson Fasching to step into the lineup in his place. Fasching skated on a line with Marcus Foligno and Evan Rodrigues in practice.

Here's how the full lineup looked on Wednesday:

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

29 Jake McCabe - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
4 Josh Gorges - 6 Cody Franson
44 Nicolas Deslauriers (substituting for Falk) - 47 Zach Bogosian

40 Robin Lehner
31 Anders Nilsson