



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*March 7, 2017*

## **Rough beatings take toll as Sabres don't learn lessons**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 6, 2017

There are fun days at the rink. Then there was Monday.

It's a good thing the Sabres didn't skate or they might have tripped on their bottom lip. The players looked battered and sounded defeated. The beatings they're absorbing have taken a toll.

"I'm hoping that we've had enough pain and enough anguish to maybe turn a corner in learning how to play and win these hockey games," coach Dan Bylsma said.

Buffalo has won just once in the past seven games, coughing up three third-period leads along the way. They'll return to the ice Tuesday when Philadelphia visits KeyBank Center.

When you read between the lines, the Sabres' playoff chances range from slim to none. When you look at it in black and white, Buffalo is just a handful of points out with 16 games left.

That's what was gnawing at the players Monday in their painfully quiet arena.

"Especially with how close the playoff race is, it's frustrating," defenseman Jake McCabe said. "We could be right there. We could be knocking on the door. We're still not out of it, and that's what's frustrating.

"If we could string more together here – and we very well should have – then we're going to be right there. That's what the really frustrating part is."

The Sabres have coughed up point after point this season. First, it was shootouts. Lately, it's an inability to hold leads.

The *coup de grace* was Sunday in Pittsburgh, where the Sabres jumped to a 3-0 lead and lost, 4-3, after allowing two goals in the final four minutes.

"To let that slip away in the position we're in, it's disappointing," defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We have to find ways to get wins. We come out, we have a good start and – I don't want to say we stopped playing – we don't play enough. We don't do enough to get ourselves a win."

The letdowns have been plentiful during the Sabres' 1-4-2 slide, which includes a 1-3-2 record since their bye week. They lost third-period leads to Arizona and Nashville, then dropped a shootout to Tampa Bay.

"We've played six games since the break, we could easily be 6-0 if you look at the scenarios we've been in," left wing Evander Kane said. "Disappointing? That's one word to use."

Losing to the Penguins would be one thing. They're the defending Stanley Cup champs and nearly unbeatable at home. But when that disappointment follows the other recent collapses, it leads to long, dreary days.

"Am I satisfied with the progress? No, I'm not satisfied with the progress," Bylsma said. "The next step is learning how to win, learning how to win those games. It's not just playing shinny hockey and at the end of the game you check the scoreboard to see who won. You've got to learn how to win these types of hockey games.

"This is the time of year when every game is critical. Playing the Pittsburgh Penguins, they're fighting for points, too. Yes, they're in a spot and yes, they're where they're at, but they're fighting for their points that they want and they need. That's what the game had a feel of. Those are games and situations we have to learn how to win in and learn how to play in."

Learning, however, is meaningless if people don't remember what they learn. The Sabres went 8-3-2 during the final 13 games last season. They talked of learning how to win and wanted to use it as a springboard into this season.

Instead, they continue to lose winnable games.

"I guess we haven't learned right now because it's happened so many times already," defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "I like winning. I don't know if anyone likes losing in here. Why would you play if you don't hate losing? That's the worst thing, that you can lose to someone or someone was better than you.

"Last night, they won, so I guess they were a little better. I hate that feeling."

## **Sabres Notebook: Second thoughts; Carrier not skating**

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

March 6, 2017

For two-thirds of the game, the Sabres' bench is 60 feet away from their net. It is at least 110 feet away during the second period.

It may as well be a mile.

Buffalo continues to be abysmal during second periods. Pittsburgh outscored the Sabres, 2-0, during the middle period Sunday to add to the ugly numbers:

\*Buffalo has allowed 71 goals in the second period, tied for the second-highest total in the NHL.

\*Buffalo has scored 49 times in the second, the fourth-lowest number in the league.

That goal differential of minus-22 is nearly the entire reason Buffalo is minus-24 for the season heading into Tuesday's visit by Philadelphia. The Sabres say the longer distance from their bench to the defensive zone is the primary culprit.

During the first and third periods, the teams' benches are near their zone. When the sides swap nets for the second period, the bench is farther away. It makes it harder to change lines and defensemen.

"It's a huge difference," Sabres blue-liner Jake McCabe said Monday. "A lot of times if the puck even gets to maybe the red line or the far blue line, maybe one defenseman can sneak off. As for forwards, every once in a while you can sneak one or two off."

The guys who get stuck on the ice have to face two or three waves of rested opposition.

"Sometimes you've just got to grind it out," McCabe said. "Forwards have got to recognize when we've been out there for extended periods of times, and we've got to recognize ourselves when we've been out there for an extended period of time and keep the game that much more simple."

The Sabres have failed to recognize the troubles.

"We join a rush, now we have to change on the way back," coach Dan Bylsma said. "It's all the way down at that end of the rink, but it puts us in a tough position as a result."

The longer changes affect every team. Entering Monday's schedule, there had been 1,819 goals scored during second periods compared to 1,491 in the first and 1,583 in the third (excluding 224 empty-net goals).

The long change just affects the Sabres more, especially when their passing is inefficient. Second periods have become a disaster.

"I would say where we lost track was the second period, not the third," defenseman Josh Gorges said of Sunday's 4-3 loss to Pittsburgh, which featured a 3-0 lead for Buffalo after one period. "We give the teams we're playing against opportunity, and sometimes it just gives them life. It gives them a chance to breathe, and we can't allow teams to breathe. When you get that position, you've got to step on their throats."

"They got one, and they started feeling good."

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Buffalo defenseman Dmitry Kulikov is expected to miss his second straight game with a concussion. Left wing William Carrier will sit out for the 17th time with a bone bruise in his knee. He isn't skating.

"The pain has to dissipate, and he's got to have some healing on the bone," Bylsma said. "We'll pretend for a second that you're a golfer, and you take a divot. Every time you move, you continue to take a swing at the same divot over and over and over and over again. That's what happened for him, and now it has to heal.

"We'd like him to be able to move around and do something, but every time you do it's on the same spot."

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The Flyers are 2-0-1 in their last three games with goaltender Steve Mason putting up a .969 save percentage and 0.96 goals-against average. Philadelphia is two points ahead of Buffalo with two fewer games played.

Because it's a nationally televised game on NBCSN, faceoff will be at 7:30 p.m.

"You take a look at the team as a whole, and we're starting to play better hockey," Mason told Philadelphia reporters. "We've gotten better results in the last three games, but we're still in a tough position with lots of work to be done."

## **Sabres alumni help Junior Purple Eagles get started**

By Corey Desiderio

The Buffalo News

March 5, 2017

There's been a little bit more blue and gold around Niagara University's Dwyer Arena in recent weeks.

That's because the Niagara Junior Purple Eagles were chosen as one of the local youth hockey organizations to partner with the Buffalo Sabres, the NHL and its players association to launch the leaguewide "Learn to Play" initiative.

The eight-week program, aimed at boys and girls 4 to 8 years old who are first-time participants, was developed to offer more families a chance to join the hockey community and experience the potential benefits of being involved in the sport.

For a \$100 participation fee to offset ice and coaching expenses, the kids have received free head-to-toe equipment (a minimum \$400 value) and an hour of certified instruction per week led by Sabres alumni Patrick Kaleta and Darryl Shannon.

"To be honest, we didn't know what to expect at first," said Marc Catanzaro, the instructional/coaching director for the Niagara Junior Purple Eagles. "However, the more we met with the Sabres' representatives, the more excited we got.

"With the offer of free equipment, Sabres alumni coaches and also representatives from the Buffalo Beauts and Niagara University's club team, it has more than exceeded our expectations."

Catanzaro was first contacted by the Sabres last season to see if the NJPE would be interested in being involved in the program. After answering with a resounding yes, the real planning started over the summer when the NHL season was complete.

Kaleta was officially hired by the Sabres on Nov. 17 as the Youth Hockey Ambassador to implement and manage the Learn to Play program, and the Junior Purple Eagles opened their registration Nov. 30.

The initial response was overwhelming. The original Thursday evening session, with about 30 spots available, filled up within two days. It filled up so quickly that Catanzaro added a Saturday session for another 30 kids.

Once registration was complete, the participants got the chance to go on a shopping spree.

They went to Pure Hockey just before Christmas to be fitted for their equipment and left the same day with a hockey bag full of customized gear.

From the jersey to the pants, to even everything you can't see like the shoulder pads and shin guards, every piece has a Sabres logo on it.

The players took part in their opening session Jan. 5 and have been reveling in the fact that they're on the ice wearing the same logo Kaleta and Shannon wore during their playing days in Buffalo.

"Just having the former NHL players on the ice makes it an experience they look forward to," Catanzaro said. "Many may not even recognize them without their equipment, but when their parents tell them their eyes light up and they have sudden bursts of energy.

"It's the idea that they are sharing the ice with a professional player. How many kids can say that?"

When it comes to the on-ice training, the Junior Purple Eagles since 2011 have followed the American Development Model, USA Hockey's nationwide player-development guidelines for youth hockey associations.

What Catanzaro, lead coach Rob Kopf, who Catanzaro said has been instrumental to the success and efficiency of the program, and other NJPE coaches do is have players 8 years old and younger participate in practices that are based on stations rather than having one team at one end of the ice and another team at the opposite end. There are often multiple skill stations set up across the rink, and the kids rotate through the stations to allow for exposure to all the coaches and players on the ice.

It's essentially a blueprint for training boys and girls beginning with their first steps on the ice. It places an emphasis on long-term athletic and skill development principles while also making sure the kids are engaged and having fun at the same time.

The key term for Catanzaro is "athlete," and not just "hockey player." He's an advocate for not specializing kids in one sport at an early age.

"In my opinion, with some players, it's similar to when a kid gets a new toy," Catanzaro said. "They will play with it every day, and then they get bored. They want a change. We pride ourselves on differentiated instruction."

While the partnership with the Sabres has been a new venture, beginner programs aren't totally foreign to NJPE. Catanzaro is also heavily involved with Niagara's own instructional "Learn to Skate" program.

That's a longer 24-week session designed to accommodate beginner youth hockey players of all ages. While the cost is higher, players are invited to try the first four weeks for free. And a mere \$25 fee will secure equipment for the whole season. It's believed to be the only equipment loan program in the area.

In addition to that, NJPE also continues to host a "Try Hockey for Free Day."

All of these programs are part of the overarching initiative to give more people more opportunities to get involved in a sport that often costs too much for kids to ever have a chance to try it.

Even though Catanzaro has been involved with NJPE for the past 9 years, it doesn't matter to him whether the kids who benefit from these instructional programs continue on with the Purple Eagles, join another local travel program or decide hockey isn't for them.

These programs reach out to everybody. It's something that Catanzaro has always supported.

"What makes the sport so tough for kids is the cost," he said. "They just can't afford it."

"The equipment rental program as well as the NHLPA's free equipment offer definitely takes some of the financial burden off the parents. It also makes it affordable to anyone wishing to get involved in a sport that was considered too expensive in the past. This is a great opportunity for the many inner-city kids that may not otherwise have the option."

## **Highest paid' Bills and Sabres not earning their money**

By Jay Skurski

The Buffalo News

March 6, 2017

Inflation makes comparing contract values over different eras sort of silly.

Back in 1987, for example, Jim Kelly made \$1.1 million – which was the most in the NFL at the time. Wide receiver Marcus Easley is scheduled to make \$1.1 million in base salary for the Buffalo Bills in 2017.

But whenever a player earns the distinction of becoming “the highest-paid player in team history,” there is added significance, even if it’s somewhat symbolic. In the case of both the Bills and Sabres, those players are currently on the roster – and neither is coming close to the lofty title.

Marcell Dareus’ six-year contract extension, signed before the 2015 season and the biggest in Bills history, carries a potential value of \$100 million. Since he signed it, Dareus has almost as many games missed because of suspensions (five) as he does sacks (5.5).

The Sabres’ Ryan O’Reilly signed a seven-year, \$52.5 million contract before the 2015-16. He currently ranks tied for 59<sup>th</sup> in NHL scoring, with 44 points. Last year, he finished tied for 41<sup>st</sup>.

Both O’Reilly and Dareus are good players. But has anyone ever watched them and thought, “Wow, no wonder he’s the top-paid player in franchise history?” At those salaries, “good” simply isn’t good enough. They need to be great.

## **Reeling Sabres still learning to win**

By Bill Hoppe  
Olean Times Herald  
March 6, 2017

BUFFALO – In what has become *another* disappointing season destined to end without a playoff appearance, the Sabres have endured 39 defeats. A few have been blowouts, but the club has usually been highly competitive, losing 20 one-goal affairs.

The Sabres have taken leads deep into games before melting down, losing seven contests in which they were up entering the third period.

Want a telltale sign of a team learning how to win? Try an inability to hold a late lead.

After Sunday's debacle in Pittsburgh, the Sabres have blown three third-period leads in the last five games and lost.

The collapse against the Penguins was especially frustrating.

The Sabres led 3-0 just 18:07 into the tilt, yet frittered it away late to the defending Stanley Cup champions, falling 4-3.

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said the loss "should be painful."

"I'm hoping that maybe we've had enough pain and enough anguish to maybe turn a corner in learning how to play and win these hockey games," he said Monday following a team meeting.

On Monday, the loss still stung the Sabres, who host the Philadelphia Flyers tonight at KeyBank Center.

"It's really tough," Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen said. "We have a lot of young guys who need to learn. I guess we haven't learned right now because it's happened so many times already."

He added: "It (stinks) when you lose that way."

So what's the next step for the Sabres? They've demonstrated they can play top teams closely, consistently taking them to the brink.

"The next step is learning how to win those games," Bylsma said. "It's not just shinny hockey, at the end of game you check to see who won. You got to learn how to win these types of hockey games, and this is the time of year where every game is critical.

"Playing the Pittsburgh Penguins, they're fighting for points, too. Yes, they're in a (playoff) spot ... but they're fighting ... and that's what the game had a feel of. Those are games and situations we need to learn how to win and play in."

Right now, the Sabres are five points out of the final wild card spot, although four teams are ahead of them, including the Flyers.

Imagine if the Sabres had closed out those three recent games.

"We could be right there," Sabres defenseman Jake McCabe said. "We could be knocking on the door with our positioning, where we're at."

"We're still not out of it. If we can string some more together here – and we very well should have – then we'd be right there, and that's what the really frustrating part is."

After inching close to a spot two weeks ago, the Sabres have gone 1-4-2 and 1-3-2 since their bye week ended.

Instead of going on a run – they earned only two of a possible six points against Arizona and Colorado, the NHL's worst teams – they quickly fell apart.

"We could easily be 6-0, if you look at the scenarios we've been in," Sabres winger Evander Kane said. "Disappointing."

So what happens to the Sabres after they start games strongly?

"I don't want to say we stop playing," Sabres defenseman Josh Gorges said. "We don't play enough, we don't do enough to get ourselves a win."

He added: "We have to have that mindset of continually playing the way we did throughout, no matter we're up one, we're up two, we're down two. It shouldn't change the way we approach the game."

Instead of sitting back, many Sabres want to play more aggressively. Kane, who has 23 goals in his last 42 games, has said it several times recently. So has center Jack Eichel, who was visibly frustrated talking about it following Sunday's game.

Kane said the Sabres "get away from what makes us successful." He and others want to keep attacking with the lead

"We stopped trying to score goals," Kane said. "The way you score goals is you stay aggressive, your mindset stays aggressive – in a way offensive – and that leads to less time in your D-zone."

The Sabres spent a lot of time in their own zone Sunday. Bylsma said the Penguins generated more scoring chances than any opponent this season.

## **Sputtering Sabres aim to get back on track vs. Flyers**

The Associated Press

March 6, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. -- The Buffalo Sabres and Philadelphia Flyers both face an uphill battle when it comes to making the postseason. That's why Tuesday's contest may be considered an elimination game of sorts.

The two teams will square off in Buffalo in a nationally televised game.

Buffalo (27-27-12) is coming off perhaps its most demoralizing defeat of the season. On Sunday, the Sabres jumped out to a three-goal lead over the defending Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins before ultimately falling 4-3 after surrendering two late goals. Giving up late leads has been a major problem for the Sabres ever since returning from their bye week in late February; Buffalo has only one win in its past seven games (1-4-2).

"It's hard to say one exact reason as to why," defenseman Josh Gorges said, according to the team's website. "I believe sometimes when you get a lead, you start to play a little safe. And that's not how our team is successful. I'm not saying we should go out there and take chances; we don't need to score another goal to win. We just need to not let them score."

"But we're good when we're on the forecheck, we make teams turn pucks over and we get sustained offensive-zone time. When we play back and we get on the wrong side of pucks, we give the team we're playing against opportunities and sometimes it just gives them life, it gives them momentum, it gives them a chance to breathe. We can't allow teams to breathe."

One positive for the Sabres has been the play of second-year standout Jack Eichel. Eichel is in the midst of a career-best 10-game point streak with three goals and 10 assists.

Buffalo will be without defenseman Dmitry Kulikov, who is out with an upper-body injury. Robin Lehner (.922 save percentage, 2.59 goals against average) has been terrific for Buffalo in recent weeks but has struggled greatly in shootouts; Lehner has yet to stop a shooter in eight attempts this season.

The Flyers (30-26-8) are coming off a 2-1 overtime loss to the Washington Capitals on Saturday. Philadelphia won its previous two games before that, a 2-1 shootout win over Florida and a 4-0 win over Colorado.

The Flyers will leave Buffalo and head to Toronto and Boston to finish their road trip.

"Every game on this road trip is a critical game, so we have to make sure that we take care of our business," said Flyers coach Dave Hakstol, according to the team's website. "It's a next challenge up, really. There's a lot of challenges ahead, but the next challenge up is the game in Buffalo."

Jakub Voracek leads the Flyers in scoring with 52 points (17 goals, 35 assists). Goaltender Steve Mason has been hot in recent games and is expected to get his fourth start in a row.

## **Sabres' coach is quite happy with Eichel's latest streak**

By Paul Hamilton

WGR 550

March 6, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) -- I have to admit, I was quite surprised reading some fans and media comments about Jack Eichel in his last 16 games. The 20-year old center has 21 points in his last 16 games, but he was being ripped because he only had four goals in that stretch.

Three of those four goals have come in his last five games, but I'm not following this logic. If you have a player that is picking up 1.31 points per game over a quarter of the season, how can that be a bad thing in any way shape or form?

To me, if you're generating offense for the team, it makes no difference at all who scores the goals. Dan Bylsma said, "Over the course of the last stretch, he's producing over a point a game and he's near a point a game for the games he's played this year."

"We're imploring Jack to develop his shot as a weapon and to use it and I think he's done a better job of doing that." Bylsma added, "It's something he can continue to do better and I think for him, the progression is to decide if he's going to be a 35 or 40 goal scorer or a guy who gets 30 goals and 50 assists and he can be either one of those players and he has been for us the last stretch."

In 45 games Eichel has 15 goals and 26 assists for 41 points. Since January 24, Eichel and Jamie Benn lead the league with 23 points. Evander Kane has 22.

When the season started, Eichel was hurt for the first 21 games. It seemed like every time the great young players of the game were mentioned, it was always Connor McDavid, Auston Matthews and Patrik Laine.

It had to bother Eichel that since he wasn't playing, he was being forgotten about. Since coming back he compares nicely with all the great young players of the league. I took their totals this season and projected them over 82 games

I'll also include the three top forwards taken in the 2014 draft.

1-McDavid Edm.	28 goals	66 assists	94 points
2-Laine Winn.	45 goals	37 assists	82 points
3-Eichel Buff.	29 goals	47 assists	76 points
4-Matthews Tor.	40 goals	31 assists	71 points
5-Marner Tor.	21 goals	49 assists	70 points
6-Draisaitl Edm.	29 goals	40 assists	69 points
7-Reinhart Buff.	19 goals	33 assists	52 points
8-Bennett Calg.	14 goals	14 assists	28 points

It's interesting that Eichel would have one more goal than McDavid, but 19 fewer assists.

Buffalo has only won one of its last seven games. They thought they could challenge for a playoff spot, but every time it gets close, they freeze up. Both Tim Murray and Bylsma have spoken about it lately. It's surprised me that both have explained it away as part of the process after both expected to challenge for a playoff spot this season. Bylsma said, "Am I satisfied with the progress? No, I'm not satisfied with the progress."

"I'd like it to be quicker to get down the road a little faster, but you can't accelerate the process, you can't get there quicker than you want to get there and we just have to keep going, keep building with the way we play. I think at times we've had that and that's something that we have to keep plugging away to do."

From the injury front, Dmitry Kulikov will miss his second straight game with a concussion.

Will Carrier still can't put too much weight on his knee and is no better. He has missed 16 games.

Bylsma did confirm that despite Johan Larsson rehabbing, he will not surprise us and return this season.

The team held long meetings and film sessions on Monday, but did not skate.

Buffalo has played six games since the bye week and has one win. Evander Kane summed it up very well, "We could easily be 6-0 if you look at the scenarios we've been in. Disappointing? That's one word to use."

If you analyze that statement it is so very true. They played the worst two teams in the NHL and lost 5-3 on an empty netter and 3-2 after holding a 2-0 lead midway through the third period.

They lost an overtime decision to Nashville after blowing two, two goal leads, lost in a shootout to Tampa Bay and coughed up a 3-0 lead in Pittsburgh losing 4-3.

The next opportunity comes Tuesday at home against the Flyers. Earlier this year, the game in Philadelphia was another where the Sabres blew a 3-0 lead only to lose 4-3 in a shootout.

## **Sabres still seeking to solve struggles with leads**

By Jourdon LaBarber

Buffalo Sabres

March 6, 2017

There are certain aspects of the Buffalo Sabres' loss in Pittsburgh on Sunday evening that would seem to set it apart from their other losses since the bye week. Yes, they squandered a third-period lead as they had done against Arizona and Nashville, but they also had a season-high 49 shots and several chances to extend their lead.

Talking to the Sabres themselves, however, you get the sense that those three losses are one in the same. The players who have spoken since the game ended in Pittsburgh - Jack Eichel, Anders Nilsson, Evander Kane, Josh Gorges and Rasmus Ristolainen - have all said the same thing. They believe they took their foot off the pedal.

The question of why it happened, the same way it happened against the Coyotes and Predators before, is one they're still trying to answer.

"It's hard to say one exact reason as to why," Gorges said. "I believe sometimes when you get a lead, you start to play a little safe. And that's not how our team is successful. I'm not saying we should go out there and take chances; we don't need to score another goal to win. We just need to not let them score.

"But we're good when we're on the forecheck, we make teams turn pucks over and we get sustained offensive-zone time. When we play back and we get on the wrong side of pucks, we give the team we were playing against opportunities and sometimes it just gives them life, it gives them momentum, it gives them a chance to breathe. We can't allow teams to breathe."

In turn, the Sabres find themselves with less and less of their own breathing room in the standings. Had they even won two of those games they squandered leads in, they could be sitting one or two points back from a playoff berth.

Instead, Buffalo sits five points behind the New York Islanders, who have two games in hand. It can be looked at in a positive light - the fact that their opposition has also struggled as of late means they're still within earshot - but the Sabres see it more as a missed opportunity.

"I don't know, I think we've played [six] games since the break," Kane said. "We could easily be 6-0 if you look at the scenarios we've been in. Disappointing, that's one word to use."

"Why would you play if you don't hate losing?" Ristolainen said. "It's the worst thing, that you could lose to someone and someone is better than you. Like last night, they won so I guess they were better and I hate that feeling, for sure."

Sabres coach Dan Bylsma said he expects the loss to sting, given the circumstances. But the Sabres have a quick turnaround before they'll have to respond. Their opponent at KeyBank Center on Tuesday, the Philadelphia Flyers, sits two points ahead of them with two games in hand.

"It should be painful," Bylsma added. "One we've got to learn and get better from as a result. We've been able to respond the next game in a number of those games. We have to do the same thing."

### **Injury report**

It's now been over a month since William Carrier was diagnosed with a bone bruise in his knee, an injury that's since kept him off the ice. Bylsma said the injury is not one that surgery could fix; rather, the Sabres are forced to play the waiting game as Carrier continues to rest and recover.

Bylsma used a metaphor to explain Carrier's current state.

"We'll pretend for a second that you're a golfer, and you take a divot, and every time you move you continue to take a swing at the same divot over and over and over again," he said. "That's what happened for him, and now it has to heal. We'd like him to move around and do so but every time you do, you're on the same spot."

Bylsma also said that Dmitry Kulikov, who is day-to-day with an upper-body injury, will miss his second game in a row on Tuesday and confirmed that Johan Larsson, out since Jan. 3 after undergoing surgery on a dislocated wrist, will not return this season.