



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres' Rodrigues hopes increased speed gives him a leg up

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

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Evan Rodrigues takes pride in his self-evaluation. He's a speedy player, but he knew he needed to get even faster to earn a spot with the Sabres.

When he got back to Boston during the summer, he joined Jack Eichel and a few other former college teammates for off-ice workouts. Their trainer designed a program to build leg strength, and the group bought in.

"That was the one thing I really put all my focus in this summer," Rodrigues said Monday after recording two assists in Buffalo's 3-2 overtime loss to Carolina. "It's the new-age NHL. It's speed. That's what it is."

"Guys used to be able to skate up the wing 100 mph and put the puck in the net. Now they can do that, but they can make plays at the same time. You've got to be able to keep up."

Rodrigues was often a step ahead during the Sabres' preseason opener. The center position is crowded, and the performance was needed for him to have a shot at opening night in Buffalo.

"He's been terrific, not only in this game," coach Phil Housley said in KeyBank Center. "His work ethic has been really, really good. You could see tonight he's very poised with the puck. His lateral movement is really good. He had some quality chances. He made a heck of a play on that first goal."

As the puck-carrier on a two-on-one, Rodrigues faked out the defenseman and fed Seth Griffith to make it 1-1. His second assist came when he sprung defensemen Taylor Fedun and Jake McCabe on a rush that McCabe finished.

The two helpers equaled the number he recorded in 30 games with Buffalo last season.

"It'll be nice to look at him as we move through the training camp," Housley said. "I liked what he brought to the game."

Rodrigues, who was a restricted free agent, signed a two-year deal during the summer. While the second season pays \$650,000 no matter where he plays, the first year is a two-way deal. He'll make \$650,000 in Buffalo and \$225,000 in Rochester, according to CapFriendly.com.

Money is a factor in who stays and who goes down, but Rodrigues hopes his faster wheels are a bigger factor.

"A lot of it was just explosive power squats, dead lifts, a lot of lighter weight and quicker bursts," he said. "I think that's helped my first few steps a lot, and once I kind of get those few steps under my belt I feel like I can get going pretty good."

Rodrigues' competition for a center spot includes Johan Larsson and Jacob Josefson. His versatility can help. He's spent much of the last few years at left wing, and Housley said he may try Rodrigues there, too.

At the moment, he's not favored for a starting job in Buffalo, but that's nothing new.

"I've always been an underdog my whole life," said the 5-foot-10, 183-pounder. "Didn't really get drafted, was a smaller guy."

"I'm starting to catch up. My pace is there. My speed is there. My strength is there. I've always felt like I have a brain for the game, so I'm just trying to show that to the people in the stands and do what it takes."

More importantly, he's trying to show the new bosses.

"This is such a competitive league that even if you have the same coach or the same management you always have to prove yourself," Rodrigues said. "If you kind of relax and take it easy a little bit, there's a guy right behind you wanting to take your spot."

"I'm just coming into this trying to prove myself again, trying to show that I deserve to be on this team and doing whatever it takes."

Sabres Notebook: Stuffed buffalo watches dressing room; Pu impresses

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 18, 2017

The new addition to the Sabres' dressing room won't score any goals. He won't give fiery pep talks. Actually, he won't do much of anything.

But coach Phil Housley hopes the newcomer helps bring his team together.

High on the wall of the dressing room, above the door that leads to the video area, is a giant stuffed buffalo head. It's visible from everywhere inside the round room, and it overlooks everything.

"It's just a bit of a change," Housley said Monday in KeyBank Center. "I think it's a powerful message for our guys in that locker room. It represents what we want to be: coming together as a family, as a herd. We're just honoring it.

"I think it makes a statement, for sure, but it's what we represent as a team."

Housley declined to say who came up with the idea, but the stuffed bison is the latest in a line of locker-room oddities. Through the years, the Sabres have handed out a fake bird, white sport coat, metal sword and mink coat to their "player of the game."

Unlike those trinkets, this isn't moving from stall-to-stall.

"It's an internal thing," Housley said. "It's something that we can build around as a group. The buffalo represents everything we want to be: fast and powerful."

There's also a new inscription in the dressing room, though it's not as obvious as the bison head. As the Sabres leave the room for the ice, they'll read, "Witness the power, Buffalo Sabres."

Junior players are always hopeful of appearing in a preseason game. More often than not, they skate around during practice and watch the professionals play in the exhibitions.

Cliff Pu is an exception.

Hurricanes 3, Sabres 2 (OT)

Hurricanes 3, Sabres 2 (OT)

An impressive showing in the Sabres' Prospects Challenge earned him another chance to put on a Buffalo jersey. He played in the preseason opener Monday night when Carolina visited KeyBank Center.

"It's a huge honor to be able to get in an exhibition game," the 19-year-old said. "It's an exciting day for me."

Pu had a goal and three assists during the Sabres' rookie tournament while centering the top line. He faced the Hurricanes as the right winger for center Evan Rodrigues and left wing Seth Griffith.

He earned an assist on the opening goal, feeding Rodrigues for a two-on-one that Griffith finished.

"Over the last few weeks I've had a really good experience with the new staff, and it's been all positive so far," Pu said.

Housley said young players can use the Prospects Challenge in two ways. They can excel and use it as a springboard, or they can save their energy for training camp.

"Clifford chose the first option where he earned a game," Housley said. "He's a terrific player, really smart. He's got a little edge to his game. He goes to the net hard. Just with the speed of the game, he's just got to maintain his speed and his decisions up ice, but I really liked what I saw in Prospects Challenge."

Cody Golubeff is alone in more ways than one.

The defenseman is in Sabres training camp on a professional tryout, making him the only player who isn't assured of having a home this season. The other 50 guys have minor-league or junior options if they don't make the Sabres.

Golubeff also arrived in Buffalo without knowing a soul.

"I'm coming in blind," Golubeff said. "I don't know many guys, maybe one or two from way back when. Other than that I'm coming in for a business trip, and we'll see what happens."

"It's easier. I just stick to myself, go about your business and try and get better every day and prove yourself."

He got an early chance. The 27-year-old was in the lineup against Carolina, skating with Casey Nelson.

The University of Wisconsin product has bounced between the NHL and American Hockey League during the last seven seasons. He's totaled 129 NHL games, recording two goals, 23 points and a minus-4 rating. He played 33 games for Colorado last year, earning five assists.

The Sabres bolstered their defensive unit during the offseason, adding Marco Scandella, Nathan Beaulieu and Victor Antipin to a group that includes holdovers Rasmus Ristolainen, Zach Bogosian, Jake McCabe, Josh Gorges, Justin Falk, Taylor Fedun and Nelson. Brendan Guhle and Matt Tennyson are also hopeful of earning a spot.

"I had a few options, and I just surveyed where I thought was the best opportunity to play in the NHL," Golubeff said. "I made a decision with my agent and family, and it was here."

Mike Harrington: Back from the KHL, Moses looks for another shot

By Mike Harrington

The Buffalo News

September 18, 2017

Stevie Moses could still be a long way from home, making money and scoring goals in the KHL. But when he turned on the TV in June, he saw friends playing for hockey's top prize and he got the NHL bug again.

Moses' career has been mostly about being overseas collecting a paycheck. He's never played an NHL game and has, in fact, only played 24 games in the AHL. But as he sat and watched at home outside of Boston, there were several former Milwaukee Admirals teammates playing for the Nashville Predators in the Stanley Cup final.

Forwards Frederick Gaudreau, Pontus Aberg, Colton Sissons and Viktor Arvidsson all had big moments for the Preds in the series against the Pittsburgh Penguins. Backup goalie Juuse Saros came on to bail out Pekka Rinne when the starter was getting shelled by the Pens in Games Two and Six.

"When I was in Milwaukee, maybe I was a little naive," Moses said Monday in KeyBank Center, recalling his 16-game stint in the AHL two years ago. "I had a one-way deal and was expecting to be in the NHL and was unhappy. A couple years later, it seemed half the guys who were in Milwaukee with me were playing for the Cup. It was hard to watch. It definitely played a role in my decision to try to make a run."

Moses signed an AHL deal with the Rochester Americans in July and has been an interesting addition to Sabres camp. In Monday's preseason opener against Carolina, he got a chance on the wing with Sam Reinhart and Benoit Pouliot, two players who will certainly be in Buffalo's opening night lineup.

"I made a lot of decisions over the last couple years about making money," Moses admitted. "That's great and I'm happy for what I did. But I was watching the Cup playoffs and really hadn't made a serious effort to play in the NHL in my career ... I want to give myself a real chance and see where it ends up."

"I've really liked his attitude these last three days," said coach Phil Housley. "He's been playing with a chip on his shoulder. He's got to continue to do that if he's going to get more ice time and more games but I'm very happy with what he's brought the last couple of days. He's quick in the zone, he understands the system pretty well and it will be interesting to see how he plays."

Moses never got much of a chance with Nashville, getting released after scoring just two goals in Milwaukee. At 5-foot-9, he reminds you of a slightly taller version of former Sabre Nathan Gerbe. He's speedy and shifty. Even though Moses had no shots on goal in Monday's game against Carolina, you saw some of that speed in the first period and he got one good chance in tight before his shot was deflected by Hurricanes defenseman Noah Hanifan.

The size, of course, is what has kept NHL teams away and left him undrafted after a four-year career at the University of New Hampshire. It was no detriment overseas.

Moses earned a good deal of notoriety in 2014-15 by scoring a then-KHL record of 36 goals for Jokerit, the Finnish entry in the Russian league operated by Hall of Famer Jari Kurri. Moses played on a line with Linus Omark, the Swedish winger who had a cup of coffee with the Sabres during the tank era, and the big season landed him a one-year, \$1 million contract with Nashville. But when things went awry in Milwaukee, Moses was able to get a deal with St. Petersburg SKA that paid even more than the Nashville contract.

"It was a great year. I had a lot of fun on and off the ice," Moses said of his explosion with Jokerit. "It's been brought up a lot. It earned me a lot of respect in Europe and gave me a chance to play on the best team outside the NHL with SKA, to play with Ilya Kovalchuk and Pavel Datsyuk. That was a good experience. A lot of that is credit to that season in Jokerit. It's been something that's helped me out a lot but you can't live off that forever."

Moses said he learned plenty in his daily interaction with Datsyuk and Kovalchuk although his success on the ice was limited by injuries. He played just 24 games and scored only three goals for SKA last year. There were far more challenges off the ice too.

"It's very different. Playing in Jokerit is a lot like a North American team," he said. "We ran everything in English. We had a lot of Swedes, a lot of North Americans and of course Finnish players. Everyone speaks English and the culture is very similar. Then you go on a 1-hour train ride to Russia and it's a totally different ballgame."

The SKA coach spoke no English and Moses was often in the dark about what was being said on the ice or in the dressing room. It's the kind of situation new Buffalo defenseman Victor Antipin is going through as he joins the Sabres, although Antipin is quickly learning enough English. Moses has gone to dinner with Antipin during camp to continue to help that process along.

"I know how he feels coming here now so it's nice to be able to hang out with him," Moses said. "I understand how difficult it can be to walk around the room and not know what people are talking about or doing drills and not knowing what the coach is saying. It's definitely a challenge."

Moses is one of those players who could certainly help boost the Amerks this season. Seth Griffith, who bounced between Toronto and Florida last year, scored the first goal Monday and also fits that list. The Amerks, remember, are a priority of new General Manager Jason Botterill and the free-agent signings came with the idea of having success in the AHL much like Wilkes-Barre/Scranton did when Botterill was with Pittsburgh.

At this point, Moses doesn't even have an NHL contract but he's been noticeable in camp. You might hear a lot about him in Rochester and after that, who knows?

"I certainly don't plan on trying to change right now," he said. "It's hard to do at 28 years old so we'll see. My expectations are to play as well as I can, show what I can do and let the chips fall where they may."

The Wraparound: Hurricanes 3, Sabres 2 (OT)

By John Vogl

The Buffalo News

September 18, 2017

Sabres defensemen are going to have the green light this season. It will create interesting and entertaining plays.

That was evident right from the start.

Late in the second period of Buffalo's preseason opener against Carolina, the teams were skating four-on-four. The Sabres bolted from their zone – with defensemen Taylor Fedun and Jake McCabe leading the charge.

After taking Fedun's pass just over the blue line, McCabe sped to the left circle and unleashed a laser into the top corner. It certainly won't be the last goal by a blue-liner this year.

It wasn't enough to deliver a victory. Carolina's Derek Ryan scored on a breakaway 2:19 into overtime, giving the Hurricanes a 3-2 victory.

Hurricanes 3, Sabres 2 (OT)

Hurricanes 3, Sabres 2 (OT)

Carolina goaltender Alex Nedeljkovic made a great stop 1:07 into the extra session, flashing the leather after Rasmus Ristolainen sent Zemgus Girgensons into the Hurricanes' zone.

Odd-man rush: After Carolina opened the scoring, the Sabres used a two-on-one break to tie it. Cliff Pu's pass to Evan Rodrigues created the odd-man rush, and Rodrigues got the defenseman's attention before feeding Seth Griffith. The left winger waited for goaltender Jeremy Smith to go down and shot high into the net with 8:10 left in the first period.

Light night: Sabres starting goaltender Robin Lehner faced just 16 shots during the opening two periods, stopping 14. Linus Ullmark played the third period and stopped all 10 shots he faced.

Slow-charging power: Familiarity and timing are building blocks to a great power play. Those don't exist in a preseason opener, and it was obvious.

The referees repeatedly sent the Hurricanes to the penalty during the first two periods, but the Sabres struggled to make anything happen. They failed to get a shot during a double-minor for high-sticking early in the second, then allowed a short-handed late in the period.

Coaching duties: Phil Housley will lead a three-coach bench this season. Associate coach Davis Payne will handle the forwards during games. Assistant coach Chris Hajt will direct the defense. Assistant coach Tom Ward will watch from the press box with video coach Mat Myers, who joined Housley's staff after working with him in Nashville.

Give them an A: Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Rasmus Ristolainen served as the alternate captains. The Sabres do not yet have a captain after not re-signing Brian Gionta.

Scrimmage star: The Sabres held an intrasquad scrimmage for the players who didn't dress against Carolina. Defenseman Matt Tennyson scored twice to lead Blue to a 3-2 victory over Gold. Josh Gorges also scored for the winners. Evander Kane and Jason Pominville scored for Gold, which got a few stellar stops from goalie Chad Johnson.

Counting the house: The Sabres announced 16,310 tickets sold. There were about 10,000 fewer people actually in attendance.

Next: The Sabres head to one of the other houses that Terry built. Buffalo and Pittsburgh will meet at 7 p.m. Tuesday in Pegu la Ice Arena on the Penn State campus. It will be broadcast on WGR-AM 550.

The Sabres have not announced their lineup. The Penguins' roster will feature forwards Carl Hagelin and Bryan Rust, defensemen Olli Maatta and Chad Ruhwedel, and goalie Antti Niemi.

Biron, Duff staying home to work Sabres road games

By Alan Pergament

The Buffalo News

September 18, 2017

Marty Biron and Brian Duff won't be taking their new act on the road with the Buffalo Sabres this season.

Biron, who replaces Brad May on this season's pregame, intermission and postgame shows, and Duff will be working the team's road games from the TV studio at New Era Field.

Mark Preisler, executive vice president of media and content for Pegula Sports and Entertainment, said it isn't a cost-cutting measure.

"We think it will provide better coverage," said Preisler.

He explained staying at home will enable the post-game show to be a full 30 minutes. When the team is on the road, the post-game shows often have to be cut so the TV performers can catch the team plane.

Of course, play-by-play man Rick Jeanneret, game analyst Rob Ray and Dan Dunleavy will be at the road games. Dunleavy provides interviews and insights when he isn't doing play-by-play.

The Sabres first three preseason games are WGR radio only, with Dunleavy and Ray calling them.

The Sept. 23 game with Toronto will be carried on MSG via a simulcast with Sportsnet. The Sept. 27 games at Pittsburgh and the Sept. 29 game against the New York Islanders produced by PSE will be carried on MSG with Jeanneret and Ray calling them.

Gamenight: Hurricanes upend Sabres 3-2 in OT

WGR550

PAT MALACARO

SEPTEMBER 18, 2017

It feels like forever, but hockey is ready to return! After just three days of practice the Buffalo Sabres begin their preseason schedule against the Carolina Hurricanes. It is going to be a busy week for the blue and gold, after a summer of change swept through KeyBank Center. Gone are GM Tim Murray and head coach Dan Bylsma, replaced by ex-Sabres Jason Botterill as the general manager and Phil Housley behind the bench.

Not all of the opening night roster will skate tonight against Carolina. To find out who will take to the ice in Downtown Buffalo, click here for Paul Hamilton's pregame primer.

First Period

18:10 - Robin Lehner is in goal to start the preseason. It is safe to say that this is truly a "make or break" year for the goaltender that was acquired for a 2015 first round pick. Hopefully he can stay healthy for the full season to give the coaching staff and front office a proper evaluation.

15:00 - Five minutes in, and the Sabres are very active not only in the offensive zone, but in the defensive end as well. You can hear the chatter from the ice up here, and all five players on the ice are pressing the play in order to keep the puck from reaching Lehner's crease.

11:25 - HURRICANES GOAL. Carolina was on a delayed penalty advantage as Buffalo was about to head to the penalty box. Instead, Derek Ryan buries a chance from the slot. It was a very nice one-timer as a defender was closing in. The puck slides along the ice and in the net, and the Sabres trail. 1-0 CAR.

10:36 - Jeff Skinner setup the game's first goal, and now he has taken the first minor penalty of the game. He was called for slashing, and now it is 5-on-4 for the blue and gold.

8:10 - SABRES GOAL. Tic-tac-toe as Seth Griffith buries a cross-ice pass from Evan Rodrigues to tie the game at one. Buffalo had good speed through the neutral zone and kept it all the way through the goal. 1-1 tie.

4:05 - Buffalo is able to kill off Stevie Moses' interference minor with relative ease, save for one frenetic sequence in their own end early in the man advantage. Lehner was sprawled out on his back as a shot from the point whizzed past the opposite goal post and into the corner harmlessly.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: 11:50 - Seth Griffith (1) (Evan Rodrigues, Cliff Pu)

CAR: 8:25 - Derek Ryan (1) (Jeff Skinner, Hadyn Fleury)

Penalty Summary

BUF: 13:39 - Stevie Moses (2 min., interference). 19:30 - Kyle Criscuolo (2 min., slashing)

CAR: 9:24 - Jeff Skinner (2 min., slashing). 16:50 - Lucas Wallmark (2 min., slashing)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 11, CAR - 5

Second Period

17:59 - Carolina came out firing on all cylinders to start the period, but a Brock McGinn double minor for high sticking will put the team down a man for the next four minutes. Let's see if the Sabres' special teams can come through to take the lead in the middle frame.

14:10 - A pretty boring power play for the Sabres, and disappointing. The team failed to get a shot on goal, and did not really have any scoring chances during the man advantage. If nothing else, four minutes simply melted off of the clock this period.

7:25 - Better work by the Sabres on their most recent power play. They cycled the puck better and made Carolina defend, not just stand in a box formation and keep the puck to the outside. Cody Goloubef tried creating some offense from the point. Paul talked to the forward here on a tryout during the last intermission. He said he is focused on staying within his game, which will help him be successful and potentially lead to an opportunity in this organization, or another.

5:07 - HURRICANES GOAL. Another bad start to the power play for Buffalo, but this time it results in a Carolina goal. Derek Ryan cruised down the wing with Josh Jooris going to the net on a 2-on-1 chance. Jooris simply slides the puck into a wide open net to give the Canes their second lead of the night. 2-1 CAR.

3:51 - SABRES GOAL. It does not take long for the blue and gold to answer back. Jake McCabe unleashed a perfect wrist shot from just above the left face-off dot and into the top corner of the net for the equalizer. Credit goes to Taylor Fedun for the nice pass after carrying the puck through the neutral zone to start the rush. 2-2 tie.

End of Period

Goal Summary

BUF: 16:06 - Jake McCabe (1) (Taylor Fedun, Evan Rodrigues)

CAR: 14:53 - Josh Jooris (1) SHG (Derek Ryan)

Penalty Summary

BUF: 15:59 - Seth Griffith (2 min., holding)

CAR: 1:45 - Brock McGinn (4 min., high sticking). 10:30 - Derek Ryan (2 min., holding). 14:11 - Jeff Skinner (2 min., slashing)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 10 (21), CAR - 11 (16)

Third Period

17:24 - Linus Ullmark makes his 2017 preseason debut for the Sabres, spelling Lehner between the pipes after two periods. Lehner made 14 saves on 16 shots, and was tested more in the second period than the first.

13:24 - All of the blue and gold faithful were chanting "PUUUUUUU!" As Cliff Pu broke down the left wing boards and had Justin Bailey crashing to the front of the net for a one-time pass. It was just a bit off line and did not connect, but was close enough to be a scoring chance for the Sabres. If they had connected, it would be 3-2 Buffalo right now. That is one draft pick that looks like a steal for the old regime right now.

9:29 - It seems like the offense on both sides has regressed as the game has moved along. I am a little surprised at the lack of offense from Buffalo, especially during all of their power play chances last period. Would not expect the pass to be crisp with the mix and match lines tonight, but at least some shots from all angles to try and generate offense. We did not get that, unfortunately.

5:17 - Shots on goal are 8-5 in favor of Buffalo this period, but neither team has anything to show for the effort. We are officially in #NoOvertime territory.

End of Regulation

Goal Summary

BUF: none

CAR: none

Penalty Summary

BUF: none

CAR: 15:37 - Team (2 min., face-off violation)

Shots on Goal

BUF - 12 (33), CAR - 10 (26)

Overtime

3:53 - Zemgus Girgensons created some space in the 3-on-3 period, but Alex Nedeljkovic stays with the shot and keeps the game going at 2-2. Nice outlet pass and shot, but better save.

2:41 - HURRICANES GOAL. It looked like Derek Ryan knocked out the feet of Casey Nelson, then had a breakaway goal to end the game. It was Ryan's second goal of the game after a good breakout pass by Trevor van Riemsdyk. 3-2 CAR.

End of Game

Carolina 3, Buffalo 2 FINAL/OT

Goal Summary

BUF: none

CAR: 2:19 - Derek Ryan (2) (Trevor van Riemsdyk)

Penalty Summary

BUF: none

CAR: none

Shots on Goal

BUF - 2 (35), CAR - 2 (28)

Sabres open the preseason against Carolina

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

SEPTEMBER 18, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - It's not a regular season game, but tonight's preseason game against Carolina will be Phil Housley's first as a NHL head coach. He of course will have butterflies, "I'd be lying to you if I say when the game comes that I'm not going to be nervous, being a head coach for the first time behind the bench. It's quite exciting for me, but at the same time, we've worked on a lot of things these last three days trying to implement our systems and I just want to see the execution."

Housley said his system isn't too complicated so he's going to tell the players, "My message is just go out and work hard, don't hesitate in anything you do, if you make a decision to go, go and we'll deal with the mistakes as they come."

"I want us to play with a lot of speed and attitude tonight." Housley said, "The one thing I'm going to be looking at is making proper decisions as we come through the neutral zone so we can set up our forecheck and not turning the puck over and make sure we're playing north instead of coming back and playing south."

Robin Lehner will be in goal tonight backed up by Linus Ullmark. Housley hasn't decided how long he'll play, "If he's doing well we might play him the whole game, we might play him two periods, we'll evaluate when that time comes."

Tonight's lines:

Girgensons - O'Reilly - Okposo

Pouliot - Reinhart - Moses

Smith - Criscuolo - Bailey

Rodrigues - Pu - Griffith

Guhle - Ristolainen

McCabe - Fedun

Goloubef - Nelson

As we walked into the Sabres room, there was a big Buffalo head hanging on the wall. The team would not allow photos to be taken of it, but the head has significance to the head coach, "I think it's a powerful message for our guys, it represents what we want to be fast and powerful, coming together as a family, as a herd and we're just honoring it."

Housley wouldn't say if it was his idea.

The players that aren't playing tonight had a scrimmage at HarborCenter. Matt Tennyson, who played 45 games with the Hurricanes last year had two goals and an assist including the overtime winner. His defense partner Josh Gorges has a goal and an assist.

Jason Pominville opened the scoring with a nice shot to the far side beating Adam Wilcox.

Evander Kane had the other goal as Jack Eichel gave him an empty net with a slick pass. Kevin Porter, Marco Scandella, Matt Moulson, Johan Larsson and Wilcox all had assists.

Chad Johnson let in all three blue goals while Jason Kasdorf allowed none. Jonas Johansson was in goal for the Kane goal.

Join Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray for all tonight's action beginning at 7:00.

Sabres' Phil Housley excited, nervous for coaching debut

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

9/18/17

BUFFALO – Come about 7 p.m., just before the Sabres' preseason opener against the Carolina Hurricanes, rookie coach Phil Housley will start feeling some butterflies.

"I'd be lying to you if I say when the game comes I'm (not) going to be nervous," Housley said this morning inside KeyBank Center. "Being a head coach for the first time behind the bench, it's quite exciting for me."

Housley, a Hall of Fame defenseman, spent 21 years as an NHL player before a four-year run as an assistant with the Nashville Predators. He's an NHL lifer. Still, he's never had a night like tonight, his first running his own bench.

The first glimpse of the revamped Sabres, a team Housley has quickly put his imprint on, should be exciting. Housley has implemented a slick five-man attack. Just four days into training camp, the speed on the ice has been noticeable.

Housley wants the Sabres to relax and play aggressively out of the gate.

"I just want to see the execution, and more importantly, I know there's a lot of things coming at these guys, a lot of information," he said. "My message is just go out and work hard, don't hesitate in anything you do. If you make a decision to go, go, and we'll deal with the mistakes as they come.

"But I want us to play with a lot of speed and attitude tonight. We've been working on our pace."

He added: "When you get a lot of information like, I understand, as a player, you tend to freeze a little bit. We don't want them to freeze; we want them to be themselves."

As you would expect from an exhibition opener, tonight's lineup is a mix of veterans, prospects and some AHL players.

Goalie Robin Lehner will start in goal and be backed up by Linus Ullmark. Lehner could play the whole game, Housley said.

Here are the forward lines and defense pairs from left to right:

– Zemgus Girgensons, Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo

– Benoit Pouliot, Sam Reinhart and Stevie Moses

– Seth Griffith, Evan Rodrigues and Cliff Pu

– C.J. Smith, Kyle Criscuolo and Justin Bailey

– Brendan Guhle and Rasmus Ristolainen

– Jake McCabe and Taylor Fedun

– Cody Goloubef and Casey Nelson

Okposo, who was hospitalized in intensive care late last season, will play his first game since March 27. Meanwhile, Pu, a junior scoring star with the Ontario Hockey League's London Knights, will make his NHL exhibition debut.

Housley said Pu earned his opportunity by standing out in the Prospects Challenge rookie camp tournament before the main camp started.

"He's a terrific player, really smart, he's got a little edge to his game, he goes to the net hard," he said.

Want an under-the-radar name to watch closely tonight? Moses, who scored a KHL-record 36 goals with Jokerit Helsinki in 2014-15, returned to North America this season on an AHL contract.

“Stevie’s a tremendous skater, he’s got tremendous speed, and he fits well in our system,” Housley said. “I really like his attitude these last few days. He’s been playing with a chip on his shoulder. He’s got to continue to do that if he’s going to get more ice time and get more games.”

Housley knows Moses from his short stint in the Nashville organization in 2015.

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There’s one noticeable change in the home dressing room this season, a huge Buffalo head mounted on the wall.

The furry head is massive.

“It’s just a bit of a change,” Housley said. “I think it’s a powerful message for the guys in our locker room. It represents what we want to be, coming together as a family, as a herd. We’re just honoring it. I think it makes a statement, for sure.”

So, was the head his idea?

“I can’t tell you that,” a grinning Housley said.

Who’s idea was it?

“I can’t tell you that,” he said, still smiling.

Housley called it an “internal thing.”

“It’s something we can build around as a group,” he said. “The Buffalo represents everything we want to be, fast and powerful.”

Speed could help Sabres' Evan Rodrigues secure roster spot

Olean Times Herald

By: Bill Hoppe

9/19/17

BUFFALO – A 28-game run in which Evan Rodrigues emerged as the Sabres' biggest late-season surprise hardly made the young center feel comfortable in the NHL.

"If you kind of relax and take it easy a little bit, there's a guy right behind you wanting to take your spot," Rodrigues said after recording two assists in Monday's 3-2 preseason overtime loss to the Carolina Hurricanes.

So Rodrigues, who already possessed notable speed, spent the summer trying to get faster.

"That was the one thing I really put all my focus on," Rodrigues said.

His fleet feet were noticeable throughout Monday's exhibition opener, a game Derek Ryan won 2:19 into overtime inside KeyBank Center.

Rodrigues set up the Sabres' first goal, feeding Seth Griffith a nifty two-on-pass 11:50 into the game. The third-year pro also registered the second assist on Jake McCabe's second-period score.

In what Rodrigues called "the new-age NHL," speed is an asset every player needs.

"Guys used to be able to skate up and down the wing, put the puck in the net," he said. "Now they can do that but make plays at the same time. You got to be able to keep up."

Rodrigues said he hired a new trainer and mostly laid off weight training to focus on becoming more explosive.

Given Rodrigues finished last season strongly as the Sabres' third- or fourth-line center, he probably had an inside track for a roster spot out of training camp. Still, because of his history, he doesn't feel he has anything locked up.

"I feel like I've always been an underdog my whole life," Rodrigues said.

Rodrigues, undrafted and undersized at 5-foot-10, only emerged as an NHL prospect during a 61-point senior season at Boston University in 2014-15.

These days, however, Rodrigues believes he's "starting to catch up."

"My pace is there, my speed's there," he said. "I've always felt like I had a brain for the game, so I'm just trying to show that to the people in the stands."

Rodrigues is also trying to show a new coach, Phil Housley, who said the youngster has looked "terrific" early in camp. Housley, of course, wants to showcase an aggressive attack.

"You could see tonight he's very poised with the puck, his lateral movement's really good," said Housley, who also plans to use Rodrigues at wing, his regular spot most of his career. "He had a couple quality chances, made a heck of a play on the first goal."

xxx

There's one noticeable change in the home dressing room this season, a huge Buffalo head mounted on the wall.

The furry head is massive.

"It's just a bit of a change," Housley said. "I think it's a powerful message for the guys in our locker room. It represents what we want to be, coming together as a family, as a herd. We're just honoring it. I think it makes a statement, for sure."

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Housley called it an “internal thing.”

“It’s something we can build around as a group,” he said. “The Buffalo represents everything we want to be, fast and powerful.”

Notes: Sabres winger Kyle Okposo, who missed the final two weeks of last season after suffering a scary concussion, played his first game since March 27. “I actually felt pretty good,” Okposo said. “I felt like the pace of camp has helped me over the first three days, just kind of getting me ready for this.” ... Sabres forward prospect Cliff Pu, a junior scoring star with the Ontario Hockey League’s London Knights, made his NHL exhibition debut, recording the second assist on Griffith’s goal. ... Sabres goalie Robin Lehner played the first 40 minutes before Linus Ullmark relieved him. ... The Sabres announced a crowd of 16,310. ... The Sabres play the Pittsburgh Penguins tonight at Pegula Ice Arena on the Penn State campus.

5 Observations: Hurricanes top Sabres 3-2 in OT

WKBW

Matt Bove

Sep 18, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WKBW) - It's officially hockey season. On Monday night Sabres fans got what they've been clamoring for - Phil Housley behind the bench as Buffalo's head coach. To the dismay of a half-filled KeyBank Center, his debut was spoiled by the Carolina Hurricanes, falling 3-2 in overtime.

Five observations from Monday's game:

The Housley Effect

Defensemen are allowed to join the rush. Who would've thought? Since joining the Sabres, Housley has said several times he wants his defensemen to be active at both ends of the ice.

Although it's a small sample size, we saw that against the Hurricanes. It seemed like whenever I looked up there was a defender jumping into the play. This was most evident in the second period when both Taylor Fedun and Jake McCabe jumped into the play, rushing down the ice. McCabe converted on a nice pass from Fedun, firing a wrist shot top corner to tie the game at two.

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Jake McCabe goes cheddar and we have a tie game. Refreshing to see a defenseman jump into the play. Fedun & Rodrigues get the assists @WKBW

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At times the Sabres defensemen got caught and things got a little shaky but more often than not, a forward was there to cover the blue line. After the game, Housley reiterated that he wants his defensemen to attack, as long as they are smart about jumping into the rush.

Reinhart looks comfortable down the middle

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Guhle jumps into the rush & creates a great scoring chance. Hockey can be fun.

9:06 PM - Sep 18, 2017

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How many times have we heard it before? The Sabres are exploring moving Sam Reinhart to center. On Monday evening he got his chance during the first preseason game of the year and looked calm, cool and collected.

Sabres fall 3-2 in OT to Carolina in preseason opener

By Nick Filipowski

News 4 Sports

September 18, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. (WIVB) – It's been nearly three decades since Hall of Fame defenseman Phil Housley wore the Blue and Gold in Buffalo. His coaching debut was spoiled by Carolina in a 3-2 overtime loss in the Sabres preseason opener on Monday.

"A little bit of nervousness, you know. But as the game went on just felt comfortable," Housley said. "I'm just really happy to be apart of the Buffalo Sabres again. I think it's a great city it's a great organization to be a part of and I'm really looking forward, as we move through training camp, to continue to build our game."

Seth Griffith and Jake McCabe netted the goals for Buffalo, before Derek Ryan beat Linus Ullmark for the game winner in the extra session.

"Going forward, just working on these systems that coach Housley wants us to do," McCabe said after the game. "Just kind of sharpen up. Our execution was sloppy on our end here and there but definitely some good things to build off going forward at camp."

Trailing 1-0 in the first Evan Rodrigues threaded a perfect pass to Griffith who buried his first with the club.

"Cliff (Pu) made a great play on the wall and I came in and tried to sell the shot, I slid it to him and he put it in," Rodrigues said after the game.

#Sabres tie it at 1. Rodrigues → □ Griffith @news4buffalo pic.twitter.com/arPJL02BSW

— Shannon Shepherd (@shannshep4) September 18, 2017

//platform.twitter.com/widgets.js

The forward is also looking to crack the Sabres opening night roster. In 30 games last season the former Boston University star scored four goals with the big club.

"This is such a competitive league, even if you have same coach and management you have something to prove," he added. "I'm just coming into this trying to prove myself to them and do whatever it takes."

Again down a goal in the second and short handed, McCabe jumped into the rush and ripped a shot top shelf to tie things at two.

"When you have a 4-on-4 there are opportunities for us defenseman to jump in the play and our forwards can read off of us," he said. "A lot of us are really good skaters on the back-end and we want to help our offense."

OH BABY!! McCabe's top shelf rip is a beauty! Tied at 2 with seconds left in the 2nd. pic.twitter.com/4MQYX1dt4r

— Shannon Shepherd (@shannshep4) September 19, 2017

//platform.twitter.com/widgets.js

The Sabres return to action on Tuesday when they play the Pittsburgh Penguins. The game is being played at Pegula Ice Arena on the campus of Penn State University. Puck drop is set for 7 p.m.

Sabres Lose to Hurricanes, 3-2 in OT

WGRZ

September 18, 2017

BUFFALO, NY- Carolina beat the Sabres 3-2 in overtime in the preseason opener for the Sabres. The Sabres battled back twice to tie it but the Hurricanes got the game winner from Derek Ryan at 2:19 of the overtime. It was the second goal and third point of the night for Ryan.

The game marked the debut behind the bench of new Sabres head coach Phil Housley. Housley said after the game "Well, it was a little bit of nervousness but as the game went on I felt more comfortable but I'm just really happy to be a part of the Buffalo Sabres. It was unfortunate we lost. I thought the guys should have got rewarded better but you know we'll work and we'll continue to work at our game."

Ryan opened the scoring at 8:25 of the first period. The Sabres tied it less than four minutes later when Seth Griffith scored from Evan Rodrigues. Cliff Pu also got an assist on the play. Rodrigues assisted on both Sabres goals.

Carolina took the lead in the second period when Josh Jooris scored shorthanded at the 14:53 mark. Buffalo defenseman Jake McCabe answered less than two minutes later with Rodrigues and Taylor Fedun helping out.

On the game winner Ryan took advantage of a turnover and beat goaltender Linus Ullmark for the win. Robin Lehner played the first two periods for the Sabres.

The game marked the return of forward Kyle Okposo to the Buffalo lineup. He was limited to 65 games last season because of injuries. He missed the final part of last season because of a concussion and his reaction to medication he took for it.

The Sabres will skate in Buffalo Tuesday and then head to Penn State to take on Pittsburgh Tuesday night.

Quietly competent Phil Housley ready to turn Buffalo Sabres around

ESPN

By: Josh Cooper

9/18/17

Phil Housley is pretty sure that his old Buffalo house is in good hands.

In 2011, while an assistant coach for Team USA in the World Junior Championship in Buffalo, Housley and his family took a quick trip to the suburb of East Amherst to see the house he and his wife, Karin, had built when he played for the Sabres in the 1980s.

"It's the same house," Housley told ESPN.com. "It was a great little neighborhood and had four little cul de sacs, so it had a dead end and it was very peaceful."

When he last lived in Buffalo, Housley was a young star defenseman on a good but not great team that played in a hockey-mad city craving a big-time contender. He played his first 608 career games and scored his first 558 points for the Sabres.

In his second stint in the Queen City, he's a 53-year-old empty-nester living in a two-bedroom condo downtown. And he's now the Sabres' newest head coach and wants to finally give Buffalo a taste of success after missing the playoffs six straight years -- to stop the Sabres from becoming the equivalent to a hockey dead end.

"These people are very enthusiastic and they're just waiting for one of the [pro] teams to take the next step," said Housley, a Hockey Hall of Famer who is the fourth-leading career scorer among NHL defensemen. "So they're hungry for a winner, and that is really important to me that we put a good product on the ice that the fans will want to come and see."

Phil Housley was a key driver of the Predators' success. Christopher Hanewinkel-USA TODAY Sports

As an assistant coach with the Nashville Predators from 2013-14 through the team's Stanley Cup finals run last season, Housley's ability to get through to his young defense proved his greatest strength. When Housley arrived with the Predators, blueliners Mattias Ekholm and Ryan Ellis needed someone with a deft touch to help them take the next step. Rookie Seth Jones needed a guiding hand to help him figure out how to handle the NHL.

Ellis, a 2009 first-round pick, had six points in 32 games the previous season while averaging 16:23 of ice time per game. Ekholm had mostly played in Sweden and then the AHL after a disastrous debut in 2011-12. Jones was considered a future cornerstone blueliner but was still raw.

Fast forward to last season, when Ekholm averaged 23:28 of ice time per game while posting positive 5-on-5 possession numbers and Ellis averaged 23:57 per game while blasting 16 goals. Jones had become an All-Star with the Columbus Blue Jackets after a January 2016 trade, and he attributes a lot of his early progress to working with Housley.

"Phil I definitely think taught us a lot," Jones said. "I think in games he doesn't say too much behind the bench, but I think when he does say something, it means he sees something, and you want to listen to him because a lot of those guys in Nashville -- we wanted to be offensive defensemen -- and he was one of the best at being an offensive defenseman."

Housley's ability to connect with players was on display immediately after the Sabres hired him on June 15. He started calling guys at 9 a.m. that day and basically didn't let up until he reached a good chunk of his players by late in the day.

One of those players he chatted with was, of course, Jack Eichel, the team's 20-year-old star center who started last season sidelined with an ankle injury and finished it amid rumors that he wouldn't re-sign with Buffalo during the offseason if the Sabres didn't fire coach Dan Bylsma. Eichel shot down the rumors, but the Sabres then fired Bylsma and general manager Tim Murray. Eichel currently remains unsigned past this season, although he has publicly said he doesn't want to play elsewhere.

Phil Housley is returning to the city where he started his Hall of Fame career. Getty Images

The goal, according to Housley, is to make Eichel feel comfortable while being a superstar in a hockey fishbowl such as Buffalo. Housley knows what it's like from experience as a high-drafted (sixth overall) teenager who made the Sabres in 1982-83.

"I think there's so much demand on him, we're going to try to protect him in that way so he can just focus on playing the game, coming to the rink and enjoying coming to the rink," Housley said. "Everybody has a clean slate, including him, to just make a good impression and do the right things and enjoy himself, and I think that will relay into success for him."

"I've spoken with him a few times on the phone, and I just met him," Eichel told ESPN.com during media access in New York on Sept. 6. "He seems like a really down-to-earth guy. He can have a conversation with you that doesn't involve hockey. As players, you appreciate that. When he got the job he called me and we had a good conversation. He told me the way he wants to play this year, what his expectations are."

Housley said he mostly tries to ignore the talk around Eichel's contract. All he wants is for Eichel to be happy and producing. Last season Eichel, the No. 2 pick in the 2015 draft, had 57 points in 61 games, which led the Sabres.

"That's why he pays his agent and that's why [general manager] Jason [Botterill] speaks to his agent," Housley said. "I just want him to come to the rink and forget about that, take that off his plate. Even though everybody knows negotiations are going on, but let's focus on our team and let's focus on getting better every day."

The education of Jack Eichel

In a Q&A, the Sabres' center got candid about his relationship with his new coach, how workouts with Brad Marchand will help him in the defensive zone, when he last cried and the pride he feels for his "alma maters," BU and the Online School of Missouri.

Tuukka Rask: Bruins are 'flying under the radar'

The Bruins are looking to get younger, but Tuukka Rask remains one of their rocks. The veteran goalie dishes on how teammate Zdeno Chara is an "inspiration," whether the NHL is goalie-friendly and why everyone is talking about fellow Finn Patrik Laine.

Let's talk about Slap Shot, Vegas and Jaromir Jagr

After a summer of relaxing and recovering, the annual NHL-NHLPA media day brought in the best players from around the league to be grilled about the day's hottest topics. And "Slap Shot," of course.

Although Eichel commands the spotlight in Buffalo, Housley needs to figure out how to get more from a group that finished 26th last season with 78 points -- and has settled into a period of malaise after essentially tanking to snag Eichel in the draft.

Housley said he wants to create a system that allows his team to use its speed as one unit where players can attack, knowing their teammates will cover for them. The hope is that this should accentuate the talents of other top Sabres Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane, Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen.

The team still has somewhat of a talent deficit compared to other organizations, but gains are certainly possible with a buy-in.

"We want to play a fast game," Housley said. "I know a lot of coaches talk about it and I get that, but we want to be fast and not only offensively but also closing defensively."

Housley will try to do all this while dealing with his own learning curve. He has never been an NHL head coach and his highest-profile position as coach came at the helm of the gold medal-winning United States World Junior team in 2013.

Those who have seen him in action believe he should be able to make the transition, but he still needs to show progress with the Sabres to prove he was the right choice.

"Can you go from being ... an excellent assistant coach to being the head coach now? That'll be the question," said former Predators assistant coach and radio analyst Brent Peters on. "We'll just have to wait and see."

2017-18 NHL Team Preview: Buffalo Sabres

Sportsnet

Rory Boylen

September 18, 2017

It's time the Buffalo Sabres got out of the Atlantic Division basement and make a big jump up in the Eastern Conference standings.

The Sabres have finished at the bottom of the division in three of the four years since it's been re-arranged as the Atlantic, which has given them time and opportunity to put together a young roster with promise. Some reasonably believed 2016-17 was going to be Buffalo's big break out, but a bottom-third offence helped sink them again — the consolation prize being Casey Mittelstadt with the eighth overall pick.

Mittelstadt adds another scoring forward for the future, although he won't be on the 2017-18 team. This year's Buffalo Sabres come back a year older, a year better developed and supposedly, a year closer to getting back in the playoffs.

We'll see if it comes true and take a closer look at the team in our season preview.

The 411 on the Sabres

Head coach: Phil Housley

GM: Jason Botterill

2016-17 record: 33-37-12

2016-17 result: Eighth in Atlantic Division

Key departures: Brian Gionta, Cody Franson, Dmitry Kulikov, William Carrier

Key acquisitions: Marco Scandella, Nathan Beaulieu, Jason Pominville

2017-18 cap: \$68.078 million (cap space \$6.921 million)

UP-AND-COMING PLAYER TO WATCH

Throughout our 31 team previews, we've mostly used this space to talk about potential rookies that could crack the roster. In Buffalo's case, that candidate would be the eighth overall pick of the 2016 NHL Draft, Alexander Nylander.

Nylander struggled, though, with 28 points in 65 AHL games last season and earned one assist in four late-season NHL call-up games. He was injured in the rookie tournament and hasn't been healthy for training camp yet with week-to-week status, so he's highly likely to go back to the AHL, where the team hopes to see some improvement.

Other than Nylander, we're going to get more obvious. Jack Eichel, who will turn 21 in October, would like to see a breakthrough season in which he's fully healthy. He was limited to 61 games last season and still scored one more point (57) than he did in his 81-game rookie season. Due for his first first post-entry-level contract, Eichel needs to be the offensive leader and is a candidate to top 30 goals and 80 points, with the potential to go even higher.

Eichel may not be at the same level as Connor McDavid, but if he becomes a top five scorer in the league it would give the Sabres a similar boost in their playoff hopes, and it would give Eichel a contract north of \$10 million.

WHAT A SUCCESSFUL 2017-18 WOULD LOOK LIKE

It's about time this team took a leap, isn't it?

In some ways, the Sabres are the Winnipeg Jets of the East: a team of patience that has built through the draft in recent years, but one that hasn't made any meaningful progress in the standings. At least the Jets have a playoff appearance to show for it, though.

New Buffalo coach Phil Housley has shown signs in training camp that he wants to open up the attack and use all five players to push the pace aggressively, which would seem to suit their collection of defencemen and offensive forwards, beefed up with summer pick-ups Marco Scandella, Nathan Beaulieu and Jason Pominville. The Sabres were 24th in goals per game last season (2.43) and should see an uptick there.

Success will be defined by the playoffs for the Sabres this season, but missing out may not necessarily constitute a disappointment. As long as they are in the playoff race until late in the season there will finally be a sign of life here. But the Eastern Conference will be a tough top eight to crack.

BIGGEST REMAINING QUESTION

As mentioned, the Sabres need an improvement in their goals this season and it seems the coach coach will optimize the situation. Eichel will score, Ryan O'Reilly will be in the 50-to-55-point range and Sam Reinhart should get up into that range this season, too. Aside from them, there are two veteran forwards in particular that need to step up.

Kyle Okposo came to the team as a free agent last season, earning \$6 million against the cap. Moving away from John Tavares, Okposo had his worst season since 2011-12 and didn't crack the 20-goal mark. For the kind of money he's making, Okposo shouldn't be reliant on his centre and needs to get over 20 goals and 60 points again.

And then there's Evander Kane. After hitting 30 goals in 2011-12, Kane has been very inconsistent over the years, finally approaching that number again with 28 goals last season. He did that with a 10.8 shooting percentage, which is around three percentage points higher than he shot in the past three seasons. Kane will be an unrestricted free agent after this season, so he's playing for a contract at least. But he was supposed to be an elite scoring talent when the Thrashers drafted him fourth overall in 2009 and hasn't come close to that potential at age 26.

Both players have to bring it this year and if they do, the Sabres should make up all the offence they need to be competitive.

Sabres shake off rust, see areas to build on in OT loss to Canes

Sabres.com

by Jourdon LaBarber

September 18th, 2017

For the majority of the players on the ice at KeyBank Center on Monday night, the preseason opener between the Buffalo Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes was their first real game action since early April. For at least one period, you could tell.

Rust was evident on both sides in the early going of an eventual 3-2 overtime win for the Hurricanes. Phil Housley put it this way: the Sabres had a hard time executing on breakout passes, and when they did make a pass they had a hard time catching it.

As the game went on, however, the rust began to wear off. By the time the third period came around, the Sabres were sustaining pressure and showing at least a taste of what Sabres hockey might look like with a Housley system.

"I thought as the game went on we got better and better," Housley said. "I liked the way the fellas played."

Housley Postgame (9/18/17)

07:09 • September 18th, 2017

Seth Griffith and Jake McCabe scored goals for Buffalo. Robin Lehner made 14 saves on 16 shots in two periods of work prior to being relieved by Linus Ullmark, whose only goal against came from Derek Ryan on a breakaway in overtime.

Ryan led the way for Carolina with two goals and an assist, while Josh Jooris also found the back of the net.

McCabe's goal, which evened the score at 2-2 late in the second period, was perhaps the best example of the difference in the Sabres style under Housley. The coach told his defensemen to play loose and join the rush when possible, and McCabe jumped on an opportunity with the Sabres shorthanded.

McCabe caught a pass on the rush from another defenseman in Taylor Fedun and went far side with a shot from the left circle.

"It's one of those things where you want to have a 5-man attack," McCabe said. "When we get the green light to jump in and you feel it's the right time to jump in, you for sure should. They're barking at us on the bench to make sure we're in the offensive zone [and] defensive zone."

"I thought our D's timing up the ice was really good," Housley said. "They got involved with the play, they got involved with the rush, you could see the weak side was open on a break out and the guys joined the rush. Jake McCabe's goal was a perfect example of that."

As fun as that style may be, it also puts responsibility on the defensemen to make the correct reads as to when to jump into the play and on forwards to recognize when they need to drop back and assume a defensive role. McCabe said it's a matter of forming the right habits, and the Sabres seemed to get better at it as the game went on.

"Going forward, we'll get more comfortable with it," he said. "I think you saw at times in the offensive zone we did a really good job with it. Other times there were times where we could've done it and we didn't do it, maybe we were hesitant. It's all a comfort thing."

The Sabres established pressure consistently in the third period, with Rasmus Ristolainen in particular showing a tendency to get involved near and below the goal line. Buffalo's top line of Zemgus Girgensons, Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo was also consistent throughout the night on the forecheck.

Ultimately, the chances they did earn to break the tie in that third period fell short, including a look at an open net for C.J. Smith. Ristolainen hit Girgensons with an end-to-end pass in overtime only to see Girgensons' shot stopped by Carolina goalie Alex Nedeljkovic, and a neutral-zone turnover led to Ryan's winner shortly after.

Not the result they wanted, of course, but they'll have plenty of time to build on the loss with six preseason games still left to play.

"It was unfortunate we lost," Housley said. "I thought the guys should've got rewarded better. But you know, we'll work. We'll continue to work on our game."

Rodrigues makes strong impression

Evan Rodrigues Postgame (9/18/17)

02:09 • September 18th, 2017

Despite having shown over 30 games for the Sabres that he could be a reliable center, Evan Rodrigues said at the end of last season that he didn't believe he had cemented himself as an NHL player. He certainly played like he had something to prove on Monday.

Rodrigues made a good pass on a 2-on-1 rush to set up Griffith's goal in the first period, and then went on to be one of Buffalo's most consistent forwards throughout the night. He finished the game with two assists, three shot attempts and a penalty drawn.

"I think he's been terrific," Housley said. "Not only in this game, I think his work ethic has been really, really good and you could see tonight his great poise with the puck. His lateral movements are really good and he had a couple of quality chances, made a heck of a play on that first goal. It'll be nice to look at him as we move through training camp."

Rodrigues has played with a chip on his shoulder since signing with the Sabres as an undrafted free agent out of Boston University prior to the 2015-16 season. He went into the summer with that same approach, identifying his speed as an area in need of improvement and working with a group of players - including Jack Eichel - to hone in and improve on it.

In the early going, the fruits of his labor are paying off.

"I feel like I've always been an underdog my whole life," Rodrigues said. "(I) didn't really get drafted, I'm a smaller guy. I'm starting to catch up. My pace is there, my speed's there, my speed's there. I've always felt like I had a brain for the game, so I'm just trying to show that to the people in the stands."

Penguins up next

The Sabres will continue their preseason slate on Tuesday night against the Pittsburgh Penguins at Pegula Ice Arena, home of the Penn State Nittany Lions.

Puck drop is scheduled for 7 p.m. Listen to the game live on WGR 550, then check here on Sabres.com for postgame reaction and highlights.

Asplund, Davidsson among European prospects starting up

Sabres.com

by Kris Baker

September 18th, 2017

Rasmus Asplund (2016, second round) got his Swedish Hockey League season off to a hot start Saturday, scoring a goal and an assist as Färjestad BK earned a 3-2 shootout victory over Linköping HC.

At 8:21 of the opening frame, Asplund took the puck down the right wing and sent a perfect tape-to-tape pass to the slot to set up Michael Lindqvist for the game's opening goal.

Just over two minutes later, Asplund emerged from a group of bodies on the left side and found space in the left circle to quickly release a shot for his first goal of the season to put his team ahead 2-0.

Asplund rounded out the effort with two shots on goal, a plus-2 rating, and an impressive 10 wins in 12 tries at the faceoff circle for an 83.3 per cent success rate. The savvy two-way pivot earned a healthy 19:10 of ice time in the victory.

If the first game is any indication, Asplund, who finished last season ranked third in the Swedish Hockey League for junior-aged scorers with six goals and 19 points in 39 appearances, is already on a nice track towards achieving the 30-point benchmark he stated as a goal for himself in July when in Buffalo for development camp.

Elsewhere in Saturday SHL action, Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) opened the season as the third-line left-winger, contributing one shot on goal and a plus-1 rating as Frölunda HC got past Mora IK 3-2 in overtime.

The leading producer for a struggling MODO club in 2015-16 with 14 goals and 29 points, Olofsson had to work his way into a firm role when transferring to Frölunda last season. He didn't provide the same goal-scoring knack as the year before, potting just nine goals in 51 games, but he did hit his stride in the final month of the season to grind out 27 total points, which was good for fourth on the team.

Following the acquisition of veteran winger Rene Bourque, Djurgården IF has sent Marcus Davidsson (2017, second round) to the J20 squad to begin the season.

A dominant figure at the junior level last year with six goals and 10 points in nine games, Davidsson again proved over the weekend that he is a force better suited playing in the top men's league as opposed to his peer group.

On Saturday, Davidsson opened the season with one goal on three shots while owning the faceoff circle with 13 wins in 14 draws as Djurgården J20 dropped a 4-1 road decision to MODO.

The 18-year-old kept it going Sunday, notching his second goal in as many games and winning 10 of his 14 faceoffs as Djurgården J20 posted a 2-0 shutout victory over Timrå IK.

After spending his rookie SHL season as a fourth-line left-winger, Davidsson has been skating at his natural center position through the early stages of the preseason.

Davidsson, who does his best work in the corners, in the trenches from the hash marks down, and on the penalty kill, scored five goals and nine points in 45 top league games last season.

It remains to be seen how long his J20 assignment will last, but for now he's making the most of his minutes as he targets a role on Sweden's national junior team that will take part in the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship later this winter in Buffalo.

Finland

In Finland, Oskari Laaksonen (2017, third round) scored his first goal of the season Saturday as Ilves U20 fell to Jukurit 2-1 in overtime. Laaksonen logged his usual load of minutes, skating for 23:40 in the victory.

Laaksonen returned to work Sunday, again piling up the all-situations ice time with 29:45 of work as Ilves U20 earned a 5-4 overtime victory over Sport.

Laaksonen, who spent the summer training with higher-end Finnish prospects like Henri Jokiharju (CHI) and Juuso Valimäki (CGY) in preparation for what he hopes is a breakout season, has collected four points (1+3) through eight games while logging an average of 24:45 of work per game.

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, second round) remains under contract with Finnish club HPK, but instead of dominating against junior-aged shooters has been placed on a full-season loan to LeKi of the second professional league, Mestis, where the 6-foot-4 goaltender can play at a high level as he readies himself for the test of getting Finland back into medal contention at the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship.

Luukkonen has won two of his three exhibition starts, including one shutout, with LeKi, who begins Mestis regular season play Sept. 29 versus Pelitat.

Guhle, Risto will skate together as Sabres look to push tempo in opener

Sabres.com

by Jourdon LaBarber

September 18th, 2017

Phil Housley is aware his players might be experiencing a bit of information overload. We're only four days into training camp, so it's understandable if the Sabres are still grasping the complexities of a new system.

With that in mind, Housley had a simple message for his players as they approach their preseason opener against Carolina on Monday night. Play fast, and play confident.

"I know there's a lot of things coming at these guys, a lot of information, so my message is just go out and work hard," Housley said. "Don't hesitate in anything you do. If you make a decision to go, go. We'll deal with mistakes as they come, but I want us to play with speed and attitude tonight."

Preview: CAR vs BUF (9/18/17)

02:55 • September 18th, 2017

It's to their benefit, then, that the Sabres will have two of their best skaters pushing the tempo from the back end. Brendan Guhle and Rasmus Ristolainen have been skating as a pair in practice, and they'll serve as Buffalo's top defensive unit against the Hurricanes.

Guhle, 20, will need to impress in the preseason to have a shot at making the Sabres roster out of camp. It's hard to imagine a better opportunity out of the gate than playing alongside Ristolainen, who has led the Sabres in ice time for the last two seasons.

"Who knows what it means, but I'm definitely excited about playing with a player of his caliber," Guhle said.

Both players seem to be ideal fits in Housley's system with their ability to join the rush and create offense. Ristolainen should have the opportunity to do that more often now than in years past, and we've already seen instances of it in 5-on-5 drills in practice:

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A little 5-on-5. That's Girgensons-O'Reilly-Okposo-Guhle-Risto in blue. Ends with Okposo goal. #Sabres

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Guhle, meanwhile, stood out as much as anyone at the Prospects Challenge earlier this month. He scored six points in the final two games, and showed diversity in doing so. He scored one goal on a give-and-go at the net front and another with a slap shot from the point.

Playing with Ristolainen, he said, could provide more of those opportunities.

"I think the biggest thing for me that he's going to be able to help with is just his strength in the D-zone and in the corners and stuff," he said. "I think he'll be able to help me pop some guys off pucks, be able to get out of the zone quick and play in the O-zone."

Puck drop between the Sabres and Hurricanes is scheduled for 7 p.m. You can catch the game live on WGR 500, and check back here afterward for highlights and reaction.

Moses looking to make most of second chance at NHL

HOUSLEY: Pregame Interview

04:26 • September 18th, 2017

Two years ago, Stevie Moses thought he had earned his ticket to the NHL. He was coming off a season in which he led the KHL with 36 goals, and had been rewarded with a one-way deal with the Nashville Predators.

Looking back, Moses admits the thought was naïve. He was unhappy after beginning the season in AHL Milwaukee, where he played only 16 games before returning to the KHL to play with SKA St. Petersburg.

Then, last June, he watched the Predators compete for the Stanley Cup.

"I was expecting to be in the NHL and was unhappy," Moses said. "Two, three years later half the guys who were playing in Milwaukee are playing in the Final. It was hard to watch, obviously, and definitely played a role in my decision to try and make a run."

After winning a championship with SKA St. Petersburg last season, Moses decided to give the NHL one more shot. He signed an AHL contract with the Amerks, in hopes of eventually impressing enough to earn a shot with the Sabres.

He's gotten a good opportunity out of the gate. Moses has been skating on a line with Benoit Pouliot and Sam Reinhart, which is where he'll play on Monday night.

"Stevie's a tremendous skater and he's got terrific speed and he fits well into our system," Housley said. "I've really liked his attitude the past three days. He's been playing with a chip on his shoulder, and he's got to continue to do that if he's going to get more ice time and more games."

Moses is known for his skating and shooting ability, and that's what he'll look to bring against the Hurricanes and going forward. His only expectations this time around are to give his best, and let the chips fall where they may.

"I want to give myself a real chance and see where it ends up," he said.

Projected lineup

Robin Lehner will get the start in net for the Sabres, although whether or not he'll play all three periods will be determined as the game goes on. Linus Ullmark will back him up.

The rest of the lineup is as follows:

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo

67 Benoit Pouliot - 23 Sam Reinhart - 52 Stevie Moses

49 C.J. Smith - 51 Kyle Criscuolo - 95 Justin Bailey

25 Seth Griffith - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 59 Cliff Pu

45 Brendan Guhle - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen

19 Jake McCabe - 27 Taylor Fedun

8 Casey Nelson - 38 Cody Goloubef

40 Robin Lehner

35 Linus Ullmark

Sharpen Up: September 18, 2017

Sabres.com

by Chris Ryndak

September 18th, 2017

It starts tonight!

Buffalo and Carolina will go at it tonight in preseason action from KeyBank Center. Check out the action live (tickets are on sale now!) or tune in to WGR 550 at 7 p.m. when Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray begin broadcasting.

Who is playing tonight? We'll have that news for you shortly when the morning skate kicks off at around 10:30.

Scrimmage starting at 9:45

The players who aren't set to play tonight will face off in an intra-squad scrimmage starting at 9:45 this morning. Brian Duff and Martin Biron will provide commentary over it in a special live stream here at Sabres.com

Here are the projected lineups (subject to change)

BLUE

26 Matt Moulson - 22 Johan Larsson - 24 Hudson Fasching
83 Vasily Glotov - 10 Jacob Josefson - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
62 Brandon Hagel

41 Justin Falk - 93 Victor Antipin
4 Josh Gorges - 5 Matt Tennyson
58 Austin Osmanski

32 Adam Wilcox
34 Jonas Johansson

GOLD

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 12 Kevin Porter - 64 Vaclav Karabacek
46 Eric Cornel

6 Marco Scandella - 47 Zach Bogosian
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 54 Brycen Martin
79 Vojtech Budik

31 Chad Johnson
33 Jason Kasdorf

Weekend coverage

The team has been working hard all weekend at practice sessions at HarborCenter.

Brian Duff took a look at the goaltenders on Saturday thank to a great chat with goaltending coach Andrew Allen:

Sabres Now (9/16/17)

02:49 • September 16th, 2017

Some new faces have gotten some attention as well.

Jourdon LaBarber talked about Victor Antipin's assimilation into American and NHL life.

"He's a student of the game," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "He really absorbs a lot, likes to watch a lot of video trying to understand our concepts. He's like a sponge."

Prior to camp, Antipin spent time with assistant coach Chris Hajt learning the subtleties of Housley's system and the North American game in general. Hajt said the sessions were arranged to prevent information overload once on-ice activity began.

"We identified it as something important for him, coming from Russia and making sure he understands what's going on so he can just concentrate on playing," Hajt said. "We didn't want him to see it for the first time on the first day of camp. It'd be very overwhelming. So we kind of got ahead of it and made sure to explain to him how we're going to play and his role within that system."

More on that here.

Saturday also featured a chat with Benoit Pouliot, who signed with Buffalo as a free agent in July. He, of course, sees some similarities between the Sabres and his previous team, the Edmonton Oilers.

Meanwhile, Zengus Girgensons has been practicing on a line with Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo. How he and Johan Larsson are approaching what should be comeback years was the subject of Sunday's Sabres Now:

Sabres Now (9/17/17)

02:19 • September 17th, 2017

If you've missed any of our coverage so far, be sure to check out our News Feed and our Video Channels.

On tap today

Jourdon and Dan will be live at the scene for the morning skate today to provide you with all of the lineup news you need. Then stick around after the game for full postgame coverage including recaps, highlights and locker room reaction.

And we'll be right back at it tomorrow with a game against Pittsburgh at Penn State.