



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres' shorthanded unit has too much time to kill

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 22, 2017

TORONTO – A main goal of the preseason is to evaluate players. The guys Buffalo watched Friday were the penalty-killers.

They got way too much ice time – again.

The Sabres took nine penalties during a 3-0 loss to Toronto, giving them 18 in the last two games. While a few calls were part of the officials' crackdown on slashing, the rest were a result of flat-footed play.

"They were just skating, and we were getting caught behind them," center Ryan O'Reilly said in Ricoh Coliseum. "We know they're going to call it, and there was too much stick-checking, not enough skating."

Coach Phil Housley is tiring of the parade to the penalty box.

"It's one thing to take a penalty when there's a scoring chance," he said. "It's another thing to take an unnecessary penalty."

Buffalo took two slashing and hooking penalties apiece. It was also called for boarding, goaltender interference, cross-checking, tripping and too many men on the ice.

"It kind of relaxes as the season goes on," defenseman Matt Tennyson said of the high number, "but that's partly on us. We're taking penalties. We can't blame the refs for that.

"With the penalties we had to kill, I thought we did a pretty good job."

Indeed, the Sabres' highlight reel consisted of goaltender Linus Ullmark (32 saves on 33 shots) and the penalty-kill unit. Buffalo killed eight of the nine penalties, keeping the team in the game until Toronto scored two empty-net goals in the final 1:22.

"We don't want to be taking that many, but we did some good things on it," O'Reilly said. "That was one of the things we actually competed really well in. We won a lot of battles in that area.

"It would have been nice to take that momentum over to the five-on-five play, but with that many penalties you can tell it wore us out."

The penalty-kill duties fell heavily on O'Reilly and fellow forwards Benoit Pouliot, Zemgus Girgensons, Johan Larsson and Jacob Josefson, and defensemen Justin Falk, Taylor Fedun, Jake McCabe and Tennyson.

"It's tough for the preseason because everyone wants to get in the flow, start rolling lines and get the legs underneath and start feeling good about that," Falk said. "The reality is it seems like over half the game is special teams, which is tough to swallow for us right now.

"You try to prove you can contribute those areas. I think a lot of these calls, guys aren't even trying to take penalties. It's something they're going to really have to button down on. A slash a little too high or anything like that, they're calling it. It increases the discipline for everyone."

The Sabres' 8-for-9 showing on the penalty kill followed a 7-for-9 night Tuesday against Pittsburgh. They went 3 for 3 Monday against Carolina.

An 18 for 21 stat line is good anytime of the year. Although Buffalo doesn't want the second number to increase, it likely will Saturday when the Maple Leafs visit KeyBank Center to complete the home-and-home series.

Buffalo should be ready. The Sabres' penalty-killers are crediting their success to the new system being installed. While much of the talk has been about Housley's impact on the offense, it translates to the defensive zone, too. The Sabres refuse to sit back, which prompts mistakes by the opposing power play.

"It's just an aggressive style," Tennyson said. "If you have a chance to go you can go, try and put some pressure on them so they can't stay set up in the zone. We're all kind of buying into that system."

Sabres Notebook: Ullmark focused on growing in Rochester; Scandella returns

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 22, 2017

TORONTO – It would be easy for Linus Ullmark to be bummed.

The goaltender figured he'd paid his minor-league dues last season. It was a workhorse year that showed he could compete every night.

But before free agency even opened in July, word came that Buffalo was signing Chad Johnson to back up Robin Lehner. That meant Ullmark would start another season in Rochester.

"You always want to be the guy that plays in the NHL, but I'm just going to bide my time," Ullmark said. "It's like I always do it: Just go day-by-day and enjoy the moment. It's fun to be here."

Sulking simply isn't in the 24-year-old's nature, which was evident as he prepared to face the Toronto Maple Leafs on Friday night. Still, no matter how well he plays and looks during the preseason, Ullmark will head to the Amerks (provided Lehner and Johnson stay healthy).

"It feels like I can play there," Ullmark said of the NHL. "I'll just make an effort down there. I just have to be very professional every day, go 100 percent and no 50s or anything because then you have guys coming underneath that want to take your spot. I've got to do the same thing. I've got to earn my spot."

The situation is a reversal for Ullmark. The Swedish goalie was supposed to ease into North American hockey in 2015-16, but Lehner went down in the opener. Ullmark came up and spent the first three months of the season in Buffalo.

This seemed to be his time to return. He led the American Hockey League in games played, minutes and shots faced last season while being voted the Amerks' Most Valuable Player. He went 26-27-2 with a .909 save percentage on a team that was just 32-41-3.

The Amerks should be much better this season, and Ullmark is eager to lead them.

"I always try to think of it as personal development," he said. "If I can develop myself as a person, as a human being, I can grow as a goalie. That was one of the main topics I did during the season. There was a lot of things that happened – good things and bad things, like it always is – and I grew from it. That's just what I do."

"I'm 24. I've still got lots to learn, lots of hockey in me, so that's just how it is."

The netminder will again focus on the mental side of the sport. He wants to get better at reading plays and anticipating what the shooter is going to do.

"I try to get my head into the saves," Ullmark said. "That's one of my biggest strengths, too, and if I can develop that even further it's going to create more opportunities for me to be the guy that controls the play instead of just reacting to whatever happens."

Scandella taking his time

The only date Marco Scandella is concerned with is Oct. 5. He wants to be ready when the Sabres open the regular season.

As for the days between now and then? If he can get on the ice, great. If not, that's fine, too.

"It's good to be out with the boys, but some days is not going to be as good as others," Scandella said Friday. "I'm just coming off surgery, so I'm just getting back to playing at the NHL level, practicing hard. We're just taking our time with it so I don't get reinjured."

The defenseman returned to practice Friday in HarborCenter after sitting out the previous two days. He had offseason hip surgery, and he's easing back.

Scandella has taken three maintenance days so far. There will certainly be more before Montreal comes to town for the opener. Buffalo has three preseason games left, and it's possible Scandella misses them all.

"I definitely feel that getting a game helps – it can't hurt you to get a game – but right now the most important thing is getting back to being me, playing at the high level that I play at and not trying to rush things," he said.

Scandella and coach Phil Housley are both in their first season with Buffalo, so the missed days hinder the defenseman's knowledge of the system. He's been asking extra questions to make sure he gets it.

"I played the same system for about seven years, so just coming here and learning new things, it's never a bad question to ask about how he wants things done," said the former Minnesota Wild blue-liner. "I'm programmed now in a different system, and I just want to make sure I figure out and ask as many questions as I can.

"Missing days isn't ideal, but at this point it's better to be smart about it."

Forward Alex Nylander, meanwhile, has yet to take the ice. He suffered a lower-body injury during the Sabres' Prospects Challenge. He's been watching practices in street clothes.

"He's doing well," Housley said. "He's making strides every day. It's something that we're going to be slow with, but he is making improvements. I don't know when he will be on the ice, but I would say it's going to be in the near future."

'Party in the Plaza'

The Sabres' season opener will again feature a "Party in the Plaza." It will run from 5 to 7 p.m. Oct. 5 outside KeyBank Center. The event is free to the public.

Sabres alumni will sign autographs and Sabretooth will provide giveaways. Food samplings will be provided by Tim Hortons, Yancey's Fancy and Wegmans Sushi, with additional food and beverages available for purchase.

There will be live music by Rochester's Joywave, inflatable games and a fan photo area. All outdoor events are weather permitting.

The Wraparound: Maple Leafs 3, Sabres 0

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 22, 2017

TORONTO – Evan Rodrigues avoided one hit. The next one landed and ended his night.

The Sabres left winger departed with an injury midway through the second period of Friday's 3-0 loss to Toronto.

"I don't know what the injury is at this point," Buffalo coach Phil Housley said in Ricoh Coliseum. "We'll know more tomorrow."

As Rodrigues crossed the Toronto blue line, he avoided a bump from forward Zach Hyman. Defenseman Andreas Borgman didn't miss. He put a shoulder high into Rodrigues' body, flattening the forward.

Rodrigues had an impressive debut Monday, recording two assists in a 3-2 overtime loss to Carolina.

Feel the power: The Maple Leafs had nine power plays. They connected once during the second period to take a 1-0 lead.

Defenseman Morgan Rielly was a one-man show to open the scoring. He spun with the puck in his own zone, sped through center ice and cut to the left faceoff circle. He fired far side to beat Linus Ullmark with 3:23 gone in the second.

Buffalo went 0 for 4 on the man-advantage.

Good night: Toronto's Leo Komarov scored into an empty net with 1:22 to play. William Nylander did the same with 10 seconds to go.

Ullmark does it all early: The Maple Leafs dominated the first period, taking 14 of the 19 shots, but Ullmark stopped everything to keep it scoreless after 20 minutes. Toronto took the opening eight shots and had a 10-2 advantage after 10:30.

Ullmark finished the game with 32 saves on 33 shots. The Sabres had 18 shots.

Better second: Although they gave up the only goal of the second period, the Sabres had an improved 20 minutes. They got outshot, 10-9, and almost tied the game with 1:30 to go. Ryan O'Reilly set up Seth Griffith in front, but Curtis McElhinney got his glove on the shot.

The lineup: O'Reilly centered for left wing Benoit Pouliot and right wing Griffith. Jacob Josefson skated in the middle of Johan Larsson and Nick Baptiste. Zemgus Girgensons was between Rodrigues and Stevie Moses. Kevin Porter centered for Nicolas Deslauriers and Cliff Pu.

On defense, Jake McCabe skated with Matt Tennyson. Victor Antipin and Cody Goloubef were partners. Justin Falk skated alongside Taylor Fedun.

Big names: The Leafs used some marquee players on home ice. The forward list included Auston Matthews, Patrick Marleau, Nazem Kadri and William Nylander. Rielly and Ron Hainsey led the back end.

A is for alternate: O'Reilly, Girgensons and McCabe served as the alternate captains for the Sabres, who do not have a captain. O'Reilly has worn an "A" in both of his games.

Counting the house: The Leafs announced a crowd of 8,178 in their minor-league arena.

Next: The Sabres and Leafs will meet again at 7 p.m. Saturday in KeyBank Center, though the lineups could be completely different. If the Sabres simply use Friday's practice group for Saturday's game, fans could see Jack Eichel, Evander Kane, Sam Reinhart, Kyle Okposo, Jason Pominville and Rasmus Ristolainen.

The game will be televised on MSG, though it will be the Leafs' Sportsnet feed. Sabres broadcasters can be heard on WGR-AM 550.

Tickets range from \$22 to \$45 at the box office. They were as low as \$7 on StubHub.com.

Inside the NHL: A year later, Eichel revels in World Cup memories

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

September 22, 2017

At least on the ice, this has been a normal training camp for Jack Eichel. While his agents continue to work with the Sabres on a long-term contract extension, Eichel goes about his business getting ready for the season with workouts, quiet morning practice sessions and meaningless exhibition games.

It's a far cry from last September, when Eichel was in the middle of a hockey craze that swept up fans across both borders.

Thursday was the one-year anniversary of Team North America's most memorable victory in the World Cup, the 4-3 overtime classic against Sweden in Toronto's Air Canada Centre that left the hockey world begging for more of the young guns who were the talk of the tourney.

Oddly enough, just as black and orange TNA gear was sprouting all over Toronto and Buffalo, it was over. The 23-and-under squad went 2-1 in the tournament, beating Finland and losing to Russia, and didn't advance to the semifinals because of its head-to-head loss to the Russians.

It meant no semifinal against Team Canada, and a potential matchup of Connor McDavid and Sidney Crosby was forever lost to history. It's expected that Nos. 87 and 97 will be teammates going forward because a future Team North America would likely be changed to a 22-and-under squad so players would be eligible for it only once.

"It was a great experience to be on a team with all those great players," Eichel told The Buffalo News after a recent practice in HarborCenter. "The excitement around the tournament made for a great time. In the end, a lot of us felt our tournament was cut a little bit short but it was a great way to start a hockey season and create a lot of excitement right from the beginning."

This corner was fortunate to view almost all of Team North America's activities up close, from its three-day camp in Montreal's Bell Centre, to its first exhibition game in Quebec City to all three of its action-packed games in Toronto. It was a remarkable process to watch.

That first day in camp, no one knew what to expect. Eichel has often said he looked at the wipe board in the dressing room and was stunned at the lineup he saw.

He was on a team with the likes of McDavid, Auston Matthews, Johnny Gaudreau, Nathan MacKinnon, Jonathan Drouin, Dylan Larkin, Brandon Saad and Mark Scheifele at forward. With a defense that featured Morgan Reilly, Seth Jones, Shayne Gostisbehere and Colton Parayko. And with Matt Murray and John Gibson in goal. Forget kids. Those are all-stars and even Stanley Cup champions on that list.

Looking back now, it seems ridiculous to think many pundits thought Team North America would be outclassed and not win a game.

Camp started Sept. 5. The Sweden game was Sept. 21. Edmonton coach Todd McLellan quickly assimilated a team out of guys who barely knew each other at the start, with the Canadians hanging out only with the Canadians and the Americans sticking with Americans when they got together for a reception on a Montreal hotel rooftop patio the day before they hit the ice.

In the end, it became one of the most unique team-building exercises in hockey history, a 24/7 groupthink completely on fast-forward out of necessity.

"It was a blast to be around those guys every day," Eichel said. "We were all pretty similar because of the ages and that's not what you normally have on a team with a lot of different ages. I don't think any of us had any kids. The majority were very young, just having fun playing hockey without too much to worry about.

"It doesn't take much to come together as a team when you're in that situation. Similar guys, similar interests. It just takes a couple beers at dinner to get to know each other and that was the case. The coaches did a really good job of giving us opportunities to come together."

(Lest anyone start going tsk-*tsk*-*tsk* at that quote, remember the drinking age in Canada is 19).

Eichel bounced around through the tournament, practicing on the power play with McDavid, scoring a goal against Finland where he beat Buffalo teammate Rasmus Ristolainen to the puck, seeing his ice time cut against Russia and settling in to a nice slot against Sweden. Eichel centered Gaudreau and Larkin early in the tournament and was with the likes of Saad, Florida's Vincent Trocheck and New York's J.T. Miller in the finale.

(Here's Eichel's goal against Finland)

Team North America ripped out to a 2-0 lead against Sweden in the first 95 seconds on goals by Matthews and Trocheck, the latter assisted by Eichel. Gaudreau missed a penalty shot in that span as well. And remember, Sweden's lineup featured the Sedin brothers, Erik Karlsson, and Henrik Lundqvist in goal. The building was in a complete uproar.

"That was a pretty crazy game right from the start," Eichel said. "That's the way we wanted to play. We made it really exciting and fans wanted to watch us."

MacKinnon won the game in overtime with a sick-mitts deke of Lundqvist and the place went bonkers. So did the players. At the time, everyone thought they had advanced to the semifinals.

"We became fans," McLellan said that night. "I was standing on the bench going 'No, no, no' and 'go, go go.' It was just going back and forth. The energy in the building and the passion of the fans and the players, I've seen a lot of excited players and that bench was very excited. It was a lot of fun."

In hindsight, the coaching staff simply goofed on tiebreakers and should have pushed much harder to win the game in regulation.

"We thought we were in there with a win but obviously we needed some help and didn't get it," Eichel admitted. "But more than that, we were just excited. It was great hockey, a great game and we were excited to win. It didn't matter about what it meant going forward. We won a big game and we were savoring the moment. The atmosphere in the rink made it a lot of fun, something I'll always remember."

The next day, Russia beat Finland and Team North America was toast. On Sept. 23 in Toronto, the players and coaches toasted each other as they gathered for one final goodbye dinner. Just 18 days after that first practice in Montreal, it was over. But in less than three weeks, Eichel became part of a team that will resonate in hockey history.

Eichel has signed sticks from the tournament as well as his helmet and gloves. He's getting his jersey framed for posterity. He had always been friends with the likes of Matthews, Larkin and especially Gaudreau. What resonates is becoming friends with a guy like Schiefele, whom he didn't know at all before the tournament, and keeping in touch with the Winnipeg star in the wake of their shared experience.

"I was able to talk to him throughout the year last season and not even about hockey," Eichel said. "More about how things were going for him, things he likes doing. He's a real big hockey nerd and I give him credit. He eats, sleeps, breathes hockey and is a good guy to talk to.

"Then I go on the NHL Media Tour to New York a couple weeks ago and there's a bunch of us from Team North America together at the U.S. Open. We're tight now. It was a great opportunity to be with some of the best players in our league and guys who you will hopefully be playing against for many years."

Faceoff follies

The crackdown on slashing and faceoff violations has become the NHL's No. 1 story in the preseason. Cleaning up the slashes to the hands is long overdue in the wake of the injuries last season to Calgary's Gaudreau and Ottawa defenseman Marc Methot.

There is, however, crabbing far and wide about the strictly enforced faceoff standards, which mandate players must stay behind the lines for the drop of the puck and not infringe upon them or face a two-minute penalty. It's better for the linesmen, who will not get caught in a scrum of the two players, and it will promote skill over brawn in the circle. No early moves, down to the knee for leverage and brawling in there.

Now, the fact is these are not new rules. They're rules the league is choosing to enforce. We'll see if it continues and players adjust or if the league drops back on the enforcement. The sense is the latter may happen, given the universal hue and cry about things.

"The slashing is one thing, but this faceoff rule is an absolute joke," said Boston's Brad Marchand. "That's how you ruin the game of hockey by putting that in there. They're going to have to do something about that because we can't play all year like that. Basically you have to be a statue. You can't move. It takes away from the center iceman.

"That's just a joke. I don't know how you expect guys to step back. Guys are excited to get in there and help out their centerman. I know they're trying to add a little more offense to the game [with power plays] and make it more exciting, but you don't want to ruin the game. It's frustrating for everyone."

Even Jody Clarke, daughter of Flyers legend and Hall of Famer Bobby Clarke, weighed in on the matter on Twitter. Her thought: "Not sure my dad would have ever won a faceoff under the new rules. I've been told he was the league's 'best cheater' in the circle."

Preds name Josi, Ellis

With Mike Fisher retired, the defending Western Conference champion Predators have installed defenseman Roman Josi as captain and created an associate captain position for fellow blueliner Ryan Ellis, who is going to be out until around the new year after knee surgery.

Nashville's three new alternate captains — center Ryan Johansen, forward Filip Forsberg and defenseman Mattias Ekholm — haven't held that title in the NHL. Ellis, meanwhile, served in several leadership positions in his career, including captain of Team Canada during the 2011 World Junior Championships in Buffalo.

"It's not just a general in charge," said coach Peter Laviolette. "It's a general, a colonel, a major, a captain, a lieutenant, an officer. We're just trying to put a little bit more structure and have ownership inside of the room with that leadership.

"I just feel based on Ryan and him being part of the group last year as an alternate, three first-year captains, there's going to be a little bit chain of command now inside the room."

'Eddie O' update

Blackhawks play-by-play man Pat Foley gave an update on Hawks and NBC analyst Ed Olczyk during the team's first telecast last week. Olczyk, a beloved figure among hockey media, has been sidelined while dealing with colon cancer.

Foley said Olczyk recently had five hours of surgery and his treatment will require six months of chemotherapy. "This guy is in a battle," Foley said.

Added Hawks star Patrick Kane about the United Center faithful: "I'm sure all 22,000 of us will welcome him back with open arms when he's ready to come back."

Around the boards

* It seems inconceivable to think disgruntled star Matt Duchene starts the season with Colorado. Duchene showed up to camp and grumbled that he was there to honor his contract and serve the fans but the entire league knows he wants out, which leaves the Avalanche struggling for leverage in a deal. While many teams have inquired, there's lots of chatter that Columbus may ultimately be Duchene's destination.

* Big loss in the Atlantic Division as Boston defenseman Torey Krug suffered a nondisplaced fracture of his jaw Tuesday against Detroit and will be reevaluated in three weeks. That means he's certainly going to be out at least the first couple weeks of the season. The Sabres' first meeting with the Bruins is Oct. 21 in TD Garden.

* The disintegration of hockey coverage in the United States took on an even more ominous tone in recent weeks as the Florida Panthers, once covered daily home and away by three major South Florida daily newspapers, are going to struggle to get much coverage at all in any of them.

The Palm Beach Post no longer covers the team and the South Florida Sun-Sentinel laid off longtime beat writer Harvey Fialkov over the summer. The Miami Herald dealt a death blow to Panthers coverage last week with the announcement that writer George Richards, one of the league's top writers and great characters on the NHL beat, would no longer be covering the Panthers on a daily basis.

That's a disgrace. Richards has spent years providing dedicated coverage in a market dominated by NFL and college football, the Miami Heat, high schools and the Miami Marlins. Without him, hockey fans in South Florida would have nothing. Herald management should be ashamed of itself.

Sabres set Party in the Plaza for prior to team's season opener Oct. 5

The Buffalo News

By Keith McShea

September 22, 2017

The Party in the Plaza has been set for the Buffalo Sabres' season opener.

The Sabres announced plans for a Party in the Plaza on Oct. 5 that will run from 5 to 7 p.m. in Alumni Plaza directly outside KeyBank Center, which leads up to the team's season opener against the Montreal Canadiens at 7 p.m.

The event is free to the public.

Sabres alumni and Sabretooth will be on hand to sign autographs and hand out giveaways during the Party in the Plaza.

Food samplings will be provided by Tim Hortons, Yancey's Fancy and Wegmans Sushi. Additional food and beverages will be available for purchase.

The event will include a live performance by Joywave, a band from Rochester, as well as the KeyBank "puck shoot," NHL Network inflatable games, a virtual reality experience from Productive Edge, giveaways for fans, as well as a fan photo area.

All outdoor events are weather permitting.

Leafs top the Sabres 3-0

WGR 550

September 22, 2017

The Sabres are in Toronto for the 1st of a home and home with the Leafs. The game is being played at Ricoh Coliseum, the home of the AHL's Toronto Marlies. On Saturday the Sabres host the Leafs at Key Bank Center.

The first half of the first period was all Leafs. Shots were 10-2 in favor of Toronto at the 2 minute mark. Linus Ullmark looked strong turning away all shots to keep the game scoreless.

Buffalo got their first real opportunity at the 8-minute mark with a powerplay. Despite some good pressure, the Sabres couldn't capitalize. Auston Matthews got a breakaway coming out of the box, but missed the net on the blocker side.

Much of the period was uneventful for the Sabres, however Linus Ullmark certainly looked sharp.

Early in the 2nd, Morgan Rielly broke the scoring with a powerplay goal. Rielly was one of many of Toronto's stars to play in this game.

Mid-way through the period, Evan Rodrigues was the victim of a big hit. After trainers looked at his hand/wrist, Rodrigues went to the locker room to be evaluated.

The Sabres best chance to tie the game in the 2nd, was a great pass by Ryan O'Reilly in front to Seth Griffith, but Curtis McElhinney shut the door.

The third again was a lot of pressure by the Leafs. The Sabres had just 4 shots on goal down 1 for most of the period. Finally in the final minutes, the Leafs got two empty net goals to end the game.

1st Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: none

TOR: none

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 5, TOR - 14

2nd Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: none

TOR: Morgan Rielly (PP) (Unassisted)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 6, TOR - 11

3rd Period

Goal Summary:

BUF: none

TOR: Leo Komarov (EN) (Ron Hainsey, Connor Brown) - Willie Nylander (EN) (Unassisted)

Shots on Goal:

BUF - 4 (18), TOR - 13 (36)

Sabres' Jacob Josefson shootout star

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

September 23, 2017

TORONTO – Try figuring this out. In 276 NHL games, Buffalo Sabres center Jacob Josefson has scored only 18 goals. In three of his seven seasons, the Swede has recorded just a single goal.

Offensively, Josefson, 26, ranks among the league's least productive forwards.

But Josefson, having scored 11 goals in 21 attempts, is a shootout stud. His 52.4 shooting percentage ranks fourth among active players, according to sportingcharts.com, trailing only Brandon Pirri, T.J. Oshie and Jakob Silfverberg.

The Sabres, of course, need Josefson's scoring prowess badly. They performed atrociously in shootouts last season, going 2-6 and scoring only six goals.

What makes Josefson, who signed a one-year, \$700,000 contract July 1, so lethal in shootouts?

"I have no idea," he said prior to Friday's 3-0 preseason loss to the Toronto Maple Leafs inside Ricoh Coliseum. "I guess (I have) good confidence there. The coach has been able to put me out in those situations. Once you score a couple you get confident in that situation. It's been fun. I like being out there for the shootout."

Josefson said he simply tries to read the goalie and go the opposite way, nothing too fancy. Still, he possesses slick moves.

"He's very deceptive in his move and unpredictable," Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

Housley will likely make Josefson his third- or fourth-line center, a role similar to the one the 2009 first-round pick had with the New Jersey Devils. On Friday, Josefson pivoted Johan Larsson and Nick Baptiste.

"He's just a really smart hockey player," Housley said of Josefson. "He's always in the right spot, in the right position, either offensively or defensively, and I can see why he's a high-possession player. Hopefully, we can translate that into more goals and points. But I'm really intrigued what he's brought in the first game."

Josefson said he's a "reliable two-way guy."

"I'm a good skater with a pretty good passing game," he said.

Josefson believes focusing on the details elevates his game.

"It makes a big difference when you do all the small things right," he said. "This game is so fast, everyone is so good. I try to pay attention to all the small things."

Josefson battled an injury-plagued 2016-17 season, playing only 38 times.

"I kind of got ripped apart by some injuries and stuff like that," he said. "I felt when I was playing, especially after Christmas, (it was some) of my best hockey. Unfortunately, at the end of February, I had a fracture in my back."

While Josefson said he liked New Jersey, he knew he needed a fresh start. The Sabres' new staff intrigued him.

"It felt like a good fit," he said. "I think they have something interesting going on here, fun to be a part of."

He added: "There's so much talent on this team. It's inspiring to be on."

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Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues left the game after Leafs defenseman Andreas Borgman crunched him into the boards with around eight minutes left in the second period.

Housley had no update and said the Sabres will know more today.

Despite getting outshot 9-0 in the opening nine minutes and 14-5 in the first period, the Sabres hung around, mostly due to goalie Linus Ullmark, who made 32 saves.

“He was the only reason we were in it,” Sabres center Ryan O’Reilly said.

Morgan Rielly scored a second-period power-play goal before the Leafs, whose lineup featured more NHL talent than Buffalo’s, added two empty-netters.

The Sabres have taken a whopping nine penalties in each of the last two games.

“I don’t think we were ready to play,” Housley said.

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How’s this for a scheduling quirk? After this weekend’s home-and-home preseason set with the Leafs – Toronto plays tonight in Buffalo – the fierce rivals don’t meet again until March 5.

“It’s crazy,” Housley said Friday morning inside KeyBank Center in Buffalo. “When I looked at the schedule, here’s one of the rivals in our division, we’re not going to see them until March. Hopefully, they’re going to be real meaningful games at that time and there will be something on the line.”

The teams then meet four times in a 29-day stretch.

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Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella, out the last Wednesday and Thursday resting his hip, practiced Friday. Scandella underwent offseason surgery.

Housley has said he’s not concerned about the newcomer, who won’t play this weekend.

“One day at a time,” Scandella repeated a few times after skating Friday inside HarborCenter.

Scandella would like to play next week, although he doesn’t want to rush back.

“I don’t want to be that guy coming in and then being out right away,” he said.

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Housley said Sabres winger Alexander Nylander, out since suffering a lower-body injury in rookie camp, could skate in the “near future.”

“He’s doing well, he’s making strides every day,” Housley said. “It’s something that we’re going to be slow with.”

Notes: Sabres forward prospect Cliff Pu, the only junior player left in training camp, played his second exhibition game. Meanwhile, winger Seth Griffith, an AHL star fighting to make the big club, played his third contest. ... The game was played at Ricoh because the Air Canada Center is being used for the Invictus Games.

Sabres won't see Leafs for months after weekend set

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

September 22, 2017

BUFFALO – How's this for a scheduling quirk? After this weekend's home-and-home preseason set with the Maple Leafs – the Sabres play tonight in Toronto – the fierce rivals don't meet again until March 5.

“It's crazy,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said this morning inside KeyBank Center. “When I looked at the schedule, here's one of the rivals in our division, we're not going to see them until March. Hopefully, they're going to be real meaningful games at that time and there will be something on the line.”

The teams then meet four times in a 29-day stretch.

Tonight's game, which will be played at Ricoh Coliseum, is all about evaluation for Housley. The lineup for the Sabres' third preseason tilt features a mix of veterans, AHL players and youngsters. The Leafs plan to play second-year star Auston Matthews.

Here are tonight's likely forward lines and defense pairs from left to right:

- Benoit Pouliot, Ryan O'Reilly and Seth Griffith
- Johan Larsson, Jacob Josefson and Nick Baptiste
- Evan Rodrigues, Zengus Girgensons and Stevie Moses
- Nick Deslauriers, Kevin Porter and Cliff Pu
- Jake McCabe and Matt Tennyson
- Victor Antipin and Cody Goloubef
- Justin Falk and Taylor Fedun

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark, who played the third period and overtime in Monday's 3-2 loss to Carolina, will start. Housley said Ullmark will be evaluated after 40 minutes, meaning backup Adam Wilcox could play the final period.

So far, one week into camp, Griffith, an AHL stud looking to stick in the NHL, has made a positive impression, recording a goal and two points in two appearances. Scoring will get you a look on the No. 1 line.

Still, Housley wants to see more from the 5-foot-9 Griffith, who played for three teams last season, including the Leafs.

“I just want to see his speed and (him) tenacious on the puck,” Housley said. “He made a nice play on that tying goal in Penn State (on Tuesday). He's got good vision, and he's got to use it more.

“When the battle requires a competitive nature, he's got to get in there. Everybody battles in their own way. ... Smaller guys got to find a way to compete for pucks and win battles.”

In other news, Sabres defenseman Marco Scandella, out the last two days resting his hip, practiced this morning. Scandella underwent offseason surgery.

Housley has said he's not concerned about the newcomer, who won't play this weekend.

“One day at a time,” Scandella repeated a few times after skating this morning inside HarborCenter.

Scandella would like to play next week, although he doesn't want to rush back.

“I don't want to be that guy coming in and then being out right away,” he said.

In other injury news, Housley said Sabres winger Alexander Nylander, out since suffering a lower-body injury in rookie camp, could skate in the “near future.”

“He’s doing well, he’s making strides every day,” Housley said. “It’s something that we’re going to be slow with.”

Sabres need more offense, better defense to return to playoffs

NHL.com

By Joe Yerdon

September 22, 2017

If the Buffalo Sabres are going to get back to the Stanley Cup Playoffs for the first time since 2011, they're going to need to score more at even strength and improve on defense, including the penalty kill.

They had the best power play in the NHL last season (24.3 percent), scoring 57 of their 199 goals (tied for 24th) with the man-advantage. They were 25th in the League on the penalty kill (77.6 percent) and allowed the most shots per game (34.3). That kind of inconsistency plagued Buffalo and led to changes at coach and general manager in the offseason.

Coach Phil Housley and GM Jason Botterill, who were hired to replace Dan Bylsma and Tim Murray after each was fired April 20, have a lot to build on with the roster. Center Jack Eichel had 57 points to lead the Sabres in scoring last season despite missing the first 21 games because of an ankle injury. Forwards Ryan O'Reilly (55 points) and Kyle Okposo (45) each missed time because of multiple injuries but rounded out the top four on the Sabres in scoring with forward Sam Reinhart (47).

Housley said everyone gets a fresh start, which could be what the Sabres need after a disappointing season.

Here is a look at the five keys for the Sabres, the inside scoop on their roster questions and projected lines for the 2017-18 season:

5 KEYS

1. Playing aggressively

Under Bylsma, the Sabres played a passive style of hockey at each end of the ice. Housley said he wants to change that right away, and that should play to the strengths of the roster.

"We want to be an aggressive team," he said. "I think everybody we've talked about playing aggressive offensively, but we need to play aggressive defensively. I think defense gives you a chance to win every night and they'll understand that we want to be fast and aggressive."

2. Staying healthy

Last season, the Sabres were stung by injuries to Eichel, O'Reilly, Okposo, forward Evander Kane and defenseman Zach Bogosian. Injuries always are an unpredictable factor for every team, but if the Sabres can keep their top players on the ice all season and play up-tempo hockey, improvement will come quickly.

3. Improved defense

With Housley's plan to increase aggressive play, the pressure will be on the defense not only to stop opponents, but to continue generating chances for themselves. The additions of Marco Scandella, Nathan Beaulieu and Victor Antipin will help with puck possession and make things a little easier for goalies Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson.

4. Eichel leads the way

Eichel scored 24 goals in 61 games, matching his production in 81 games as a rookie in 2015-16, and had 33 assists, one more than his first season. But the 20-year-old needs to take more of a leadership role this season. The Sabres have quality scorers throughout the lineup, but they'll go only as far as Eichel can take them.

5. Wing production

The Sabres are deep at center with Eichel, O'Reilly and now Reinhart going back to his original position, but they're going to need production from the wings to succeed. Okposo and Kane lead the way, but former captain Jason Pominville, Zemgus Girgensons, Matt Moulson and Benoit Pouliot need to score more.

ROSTER RUNDOWN

Biggest lock

Lehner is the No. 1 goalie and proved it last season when he made the most starts of his NHL career (58) and had a 2.68 goals-against average and .920 save percentage. In two seasons with the Sabres, Lehner has a .921 save percentage. Johnson returns to Buffalo as Lehner's backup after playing well in that role in 2015-16 (22-16-4, 2.36 GAA, .920 save percentage), but Lehner is the starter.

Biggest battle

There are spots to be had on the wings on the top three lines, especially now with Reinhart playing center. Young players like Hudson Fasching, Nicholas Baptiste, Justin Bailey, and C.J. Smith, each 22 years old, as well as Seth Griffith and Steve Moses, have shown at other levels they can score. Speed and skill are valued by Housley, and each of these players has them.

Most intriguing addition

It was stressed in the offseason that fixing the defense was the priority, and the biggest name the Sabres brought in was Scandella, who was acquired along with Pominville in a trade from the Minnesota Wild on June 30. After seven seasons with the Wild, Scandella brings veteran know-how and will be expected to help support top defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen. "[Housley] wants north-south hockey, he wants the [defense] to be involved, so I feel like I have pretty good skating ability, so I think I'm going to mold really well into the system," Scandella said.

Biggest potential surprise

For a player who was a first-round pick (No. 17) of the Montreal Canadiens in the 2011 NHL Draft, Beaulieu appears to have the cleanest slate of anyone on the roster. Acquired in a trade from the Canadiens on June 17 for a third-round pick in the 2017 NHL Draft, Beaulieu figures to instantly plug into the top six on defense, and with Housley's aggressive puck-moving style, the potential he's always had in Montreal may have the proper outlet in Buffalo.

PROJECTED LINES

Evander Kane -- Jack Eichel -- Jason Pominville

Zemgus Girgensons -- Ryan O'Reilly -- Kyle Okposo

Benoit Pouliot -- Sam Reinhart -- Hudson Fasching

Matt Moulson -- Johan Larsson -- Jacob Josefson

Marco Scandella -- Rasmus Ristolainen

Jake McCabe -- Zach Bogosian

Nathan Beaulieu -- Victor Antipin

Robin Lehner

Chad Johnson

Housley wants Sabres to be aggressive, creative

NHL.com

By Joe Yerdon

September 22, 2017

BUFFALO -- When Phil Housley was named coach of the Buffalo Sabres on June 15, he finally got the chance to have a team play the way he did as a Hall of Fame defenseman, with speed, skill and offensive creativity.

Housley took over the team he starred for as a player after spending the past four seasons as an assistant with the Nashville Predators. With Buffalo, Housley has a team with young players such as forwards Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, and defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, as well as veteran forwards Ryan O'Reilly, Evander Kane, and Kyle Okposo.

With that group to build around, Housley will look to boost an offense that scored 139 even-strength goals and 199 total last season by playing with more speed and by getting the defense more involved in the attack.

"We want to be an aggressive team," Housley said. "I think everybody we've talked about playing aggressive offensively but we need to play aggressive defensively. I think defense gives you a chance to win every night and they'll understand that we want to be fast and aggressive. The days are gone when a guy wants to make a breakout pass and the [defense] just watched the rush go up and play; they have to get up in the play not only to maybe join the rush and add to the attack, but to be in the offensive zone, being able to keep pucks in, or else you're going to start playing defense."

Being aggressive to Housley means playing fast, intelligent and cleanly, with and on the puck. The message he's gotten through to his players has many of them eager to start the season.

"In speaking with him, he just wants us to play fast more than anything, and the positional things and the way we're playing, it'll come. But he wants us just playing, going, moving, and that's good," Eichel said. "The way that Phil wants to play is right up my alley; I'm excited for it. [Defense] down the walls, [defense] in the rush, that's me. That all sounds good."

The insistence on pushing the pace and creating offense means everyone will need to be more aware of where they're at when play turns back toward the defensive end. That part of the game isn't lost in the discussion.

"When the puck gets turned over, our mindset and our back pressure is going to be aggressive and we're going to try and take time and space away so teams can't make plays, and that requires playing without the puck and we've got to be accountable that we're just going to not think offense," Housley said. "And I'm not saying we're going to play reckless hockey because you're going to have to take what's given, but when we're playing defense we want to be aggressive in that area too and that's one of the things we talk about with aggressive style."

Asking more of the defense could be a tall task. The Sabres allowed 34.3 shots per game last season, the most in the NHL (34.3), but new general manager Jason Botterill overhauled the defense during the offseason.

The Sabres added Marco Scandella from the Minnesota Wild and acquired Nathan Beaulieu from the Montreal Canadiens in trades. They also signed Victor Antipin from the Kontinental Hockey League to join incumbents Ristolainen, Jake McCabe, Zach Bogosian, and Josh Gorges with the goal of making the Sabres a deeper and potent team from the back end.

"I think all of us on the back end can skate pretty well and we need to use that to our advantage," McCabe said. "If it's your strength, you have to use it and a lot of us on the back end can skate, so I think that's something you have. You'd be stupid not to use [that] so I think that going forward we're all really excited for it, including the forwards."

Housley is the fourth highest-scoring defenseman in NHL history, and it's clear that history has inspired the players to want to do more.

"We're here to learn from him and pick his brain, he was a [heck] of a player in his day," Bogosian said. "He gets the game. He's played for a while, he's coached for a while, he's been around forever. He gets the new style of game as well. Sometimes when you've been around that long, I think sometimes people forget that the game's changed so much. But he seems to be part of that new group with the skating and getting up in the play on the offensive side of things. Guys are looking forward to playing that style."

Slow start, penalty trouble plagues Sabres in loss to Leafs

Sabres.com

By Jourdon LaBarber

September 22, 2017

TORONTO - Facing a Toronto Maple Leafs team that was not only coming off of two bad preseason losses, but also dressing many of its stars for their home crowd, the Buffalo Sabres expected their opponent to come out with guns blazing at Ricoh Coliseum on Friday night.

Even with that foresight, the Sabres couldn't keep up. A lopsided first-period in favor of Toronto gave way to penalty trouble for Buffalo over the final 40 minutes, and a pair of late empty-net goals sealed a 3-0 win for the Maple Leafs.

"You're looking at a team, and I know it's early in preseason, but they lost two games, scored four goals and they gave up 11 against," Sabres coach Phil Housley said. "You know they were going to come out with some hair on their back, and we weren't ready for that."

Toronto's strength is its speed, and the young Maple Leafs put that on full display while outshooting the Sabres 14-5 in the first period. It took until eight minutes into the contest for Buffalo to record its first shot.

The Sabres finally got a strong shift from the line of Ryan O'Reilly, Benoit Pouliot and Seth Griffith in the final minute of the first, but an onslaught of penalties from that point on prevented them from establishing any sort of consistency.

In total, Toronto had nine power plays. They only scored on one - Morgan Rielly went end-to-end with the puck and beat Linus Ullmark from the left side in the second period - but that was all they needed. Toronto goalies Curtis McElhinney and Garret Sparks combined for an 18-save shutout.

"You could tell off the bat that we didn't have our legs," O'Reilly said. "That's tough, being on the other side of the puck. They were causing turnovers and forcing us to have to stick check, have to get back so it led to the penalties. Once it kind of got going with that, it was tough for us to gain any momentum back."

It was because of Ullmark that the Sabres were in the game at all. He made 32 saves and was the steady presence the Sabres needed on a night that saw the Maple Leafs spend ample time in their zone.

"I felt good," Ullmark said. "First real game of the season, it felt great to be out there. It was a lot of fun, especially against Toronto of all teams. Sadly we couldn't make the most of it and go back home for a win."

Whereas Toronto iced a star-studded lineup, the Buffalo lineup consisted of mostly players competing for roles on the NHL roster. For context, of the Sabres' six leading scorers from last season, only one (O'Reilly) played. The Leafs dressed three of their five leading scorers in Auston Matthews, Nazem Kadri and William Nylander, as well their top defenseman in Rielly.

While the team performance was disappointing, Housley said the opportunity to see his players under duress against a strong Maple Leafs team made for a good evaluation.

"I think it does put a damper on it, but we had a good evaluation tonight," he said. "That was a pretty strong lineup. They're strong down the middle, they had a lot of their top scorers out there and some of their D, so it was a good evaluation in that respect."

"Our guys are going to have to learn that it's only going to get harder from here on in."

Rodrigues exits with injury

Evan Rodrigues left the game in the latter half of the second period after taking a hard check from Andreas Borgman along the boards. Housley did not have an update on his status after the game.

The hit could interrupt what's been a strong camp for Rodrigues, who stood out in the preseason opener on Monday and had impressed Housley with his work ethic. He's looking to solidify his spot on the NHL roster after scoring six points (4+2) in 30 games as a rookie last season.

Ullmark uses his head

While he made several saves worthy of the highlight reel, two of Ullmark's most memorable saves came within a one-minute stretch in the third period. Ullmark deflected a shot out over the glass with his mask, then used his head to make another stop shortly after.

Ullmark said earlier in the week that making saves with his mask was something he'd been actively working on.

"I just kind of felt like there was no real reason to get my hands in there because it can bounce off it, so I just tried to get my head to it and head-butt it over the glass," he said.

Look for the rematch

The Sabres and Maple Leafs will meet again at KeyBank Center on Saturday night. Tickets are available by [clicking here](#), or you can catch the game live on MSG-B and WGR 550. The puck drops at 7 p.m.

Party In The Plaza set for home opener on Oct. 5

Sabres.com

By Sabres PR

September 22, 2017

The Buffalo Sabres today announced plans for a Party in the Plaza presented by KeyBank, which will take place prior to the team's home opener against the Montreal Canadiens on Thursday, Oct. 5. The event will be held in Alumni Plaza from 5 to 7 p.m.

The Party will be highlighted by a special live performance throughout the event by Rochester natives Joywave, whose single, "It's A Trip!," is currently No. 25 on the Billboard US Alternative Radio chart. The Party will also feature the KeyBank "puck shoot" and NHL Network inflatable games and giveaways for fans, as well as a fan photo area. Productive Edge will also be onsite to provide fans with an immersive 360-degree virtual reality experience that will put their hockey skills to the test.

Sabres alumni and Sabretooth will be on hand to sign autographs and hand out giveaways during the event, which is free to the public. Food samplings will be provided by Tim Hortons, Yancey's Fancy and Wegmans Sushi. Additionally, food and beverages will be available for purchase during the Party. All outdoor events are weather permitting.

Following the Party, all fans who attend the home opener will receive a Sabres T-shirt courtesy of KeyBank.

Ullmark starts in net as Sabres open home-and-home with Leafs

Sabres.com

By Jourdon LaBarber

September 22, 2017

With a full year as a starter in the AHL under his belt, it was fair to assume entering the offseason that Linus Ullmark had put himself in a position to assume the backup role in the NHL full-time. Ullmark led all AHL goalies with 3,082:36 of total ice time and was named an All-Star.

Then July 1 came, and the Sabres brought Chad Johnson back on a one-year deal. The move was made not because the team felt Ullmark wasn't ready to play in the NHL, Jason Botterill said at the time, but rather because they saw more benefit in him playing every game as opposed to sitting as backup to Robin Lehner.

Ullmark seemed unbothered by it all when speaking after practice on Thursday. His attitude was the same as it was when he spoke after the final last game of last season: He's just happy to be here.

"You always want to be the guy that plays in the NHL," Ullmark said. "But I'm just going to buy my time, take my time and enjoy every day as it goes, try to develop my game and me as a person. That's what I'm looking forward to."

Ullmark will get the start in net tonight for the Sabres against the Toronto Maple Leafs. His only appearance in the preseason thus far came in relief of Lehner on Monday night, when he was a perfect 10-for-10 in the third period prior to allowing a breakaway goal in overtime.

After being thrust into sharing the starting duties with Johnson for much of his rookie season in 2015-16, Ullmark only played in one NHL game last season. He started the season finale against Tampa Bay and made 37 saves.

He was a workhorse for the Amerks, though, often starting three games in three nights. The team struggled in spite of his personal success, and the ups and downs led to personal growth. When he grows as a person, he said, he grows as a goalie.

"I grew from it," he said. "I'm 24, I've still got lots to learn, lots of hockey in me."

The Sabres gave up a sixth-round pick along with William Carrier to Vegas in the expansion draft this past summer, in part to protect Ullmark from being selected. The move could be seen as a testament to how the organization values Ullmark as a prospect.

At the same time, Botterill has maintained his stance that competition breeds development. Thus the Sabres also signed Adam Wilcox to a two-way contract on July 1, bringing a goaltender who started 47 AHL games a season ago into the mix.

It's good, then, that Ullmark doesn't plan on taking his position for granted.

"It feels like I can play [in the NHL], but also it's going to be up to the coaches that I am making an effort down there," he said. "I just can't go half-assed or sloppy. It's got to be very professional every day, go 100 percent, no [50-percent efforts] or anything like that because then you have guys coming from underneath trying to take your spot. I've got to do the same thing. I've got to earn my spot."

"I go day-by-day and enjoy the moment. It's fun to be here."

Updates on Scandella and Nylander

He won't play tonight, but Marco Scandella took a step in the right direction by returning to practice with the non-game group. The Sabres have been playing it safe with Scandella, who's coming off of hip surgery as the end of last season, and gave him rest days on Wednesday and Thursday.

"I feel good today," Scandella said. "It was good to be out with the boys. Some days aren't going to be as good as others. I'm just coming off surgery, so just getting back to playing at the NHL level, practicing hard. We're just taking our time with it so I don't get reinjured."

Alex Nylander has yet to skate at training camp after sustaining a lower-body injury in the first game of the Prospects Challenge on Sept. 8, but Phil Housley offered a promising update on him following practice this morning.

"He's doing well," Housley said. "He's making strides every day. It's something that we're going to be slow with but he is making improvements. I don't know when he's going to be on the ice, but I would say that it's going to be in the near future."

Projected lineup

There's been a good deal of competition for starting jobs in camp, and we'll see a lot of the candidates for forward positions in the lineup tonight. One position of interest is fourth-line center, assuming the Sabres stick with Sam Reinhart on the third line behind Ryan O'Reilly and Jack Eichel.

Any conversation about that job would likely include the names Johan Larsson, Jacob Josefson and Evan Rodrigues, and we'll see all three of them tonight. Larsson and Rodrigues are expected to get looks on the left wing after beginning camp at center, while Josefson will play down the middle.

"I think competition is high, which I think it should be," Josefson said. "When competition is high you become a better player as well. You have to compete for every practice and every game and show yourself that you belong."

Zemgus Girgensons will also play at center for the first time this preseason after beginning camp on the left wing alongside Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo. Here's what the full lineup is expected to look like, based on Thursday's practice:

67 Benoit Pouliot - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 25 Seth Griffith
22 Johan Larsson - 10 Jacob Josefson - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
71 Evan Rodrigues - 28 Zemgus Girgensons - 52 Stevie Moses
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 12 Kevin Porter - 59 Cliff Pu

19 Jake McCabe - 5 Matt Tennyson
93 Victor Antipin - 38 Cody Goloubef
41 Justin Falk - 27 Taylor Fedun

35 Linus Ullmark
32 Adam Wilcox

Tonight's game

The matchup with the Maple Leafs will mark the first leg of a home-and-home set, with the two teams set to meet again at KeyBank Center on Saturday night. Tonight's game will be played at Ricoh Coliseum, home of the AHL's Toronto Marlies.

You can listen to the game live on WGR 550, with puck drop set for 7:30 p.m.

Sharpen Up: September 22, 2017

Sabres.com

By Chris Ryndak

September 22, 2017

The preseason continues tonight when the Sabres head up to Toronto for a game against the Maple Leafs at Ricoh Coliseum. The puck drops at 7:30 p.m. Dan Dunleavy and Rob Ray have the radio call on WGR 550.

We'll have the full lineup for you shortly.

Here's what you need to know.

Phil Housley mixed up his practice groups and combinations at yesterday's practice to help build some chemistry up and down the lineup. Here's how the team practiced yesterday:

Group A

67 Benoit Pouliot - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 25 Seth Griffith
22 Johan Larsson - 10 Jacob Josefson - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
71 Evan Rodrigues - 28 Zengus Girgensons - 52 Stevie Moses
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 12 Kevin Porter - 59 Cliff Pu

19 Jake McCabe - 5 Matt Tennyson
47 Zach Bogosian/93 Victor Antipin - 38 Cody Goloubef
41 Justin Falk - 27 Taylor Fedun

35 Linus Ullmark
32 Adam Wilcox
33 Jason Kasdorf

Group B

26 Matt Moulson - 15 Jack Eichel - 21 Kyle Okposo
9 Evander Kane - 23 Sam Reinhart - 29 Jason Pominville
49 C.J. Smith - 46 Eric Cornel - 24 Hudson Fasching
64 Vaclav Karabacek - 51 Kyle Criscuolo - 95 Justin Bailey

82 Nathan Beaulieu - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
45 Brendan Guhle - 53 Devante Stephens
4 Josh Gorges - 8 Casey Nelson
54 Brycen Martin

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson
34 Jonas Johansson

More on that in yesterday's Sabres Now with Brian Duff.

Meanwhile, Jourdon LaBarber chatted with Cliff Pu, the only remaining junior-eligible player left in training camp. Why has he earned an extended look?

"I think he's had a great camp and it started with development camp," Sabres coach Housley said. "We like his grit, we want to see him in another game hopefully soon in the next two ... It's intriguing, trying to see where he can fit in. I think he's had an excellent camp up to this point and he's getting rewarded for it."

Check out the full Ice Level Practice Report [here](#).

Another live stream this morning

Once again, we'll be live streaming the practice session at HarborCenter featuring players who won't suit up tonight. Watch it with Brian Duff and Martin Biron, who will be providing commentary starting at around 9:45.

[Click here to watch the live stream!](#)

Prospect action

Last night, 42 of the top American prospects eligible for the 2018 NHL Draft were in Buffalo to play in the sixth annual CCM/USA Hockey All-American Prospects Game at KeyBank Center.

Brady Tkachuk stole the show, recording a goal and an assist, including the game-winner with just over five minutes to play, in Team Leetch's 6-5 win over Team Chelios.

Here are the highlights:

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Watch the highlights from Team Leetch's 6-5 victory in the 2017 #AAPG. us

Game recap, photos & more: <http://bit.ly/2h1hEkh>

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World Junior Championship outdoor game tickets go on sale Monday

Don't miss the chance to be part of a once-in-a-lifetime event when Team USA takes on Canada at New Era Field on Dec. 29 in the first-ever outdoor game of the IIHF World Junior Championship.

Tickets for the event go on sale to the general public Monday morning at 10 a.m. But if you're a USA Hockey member, a Buffalo Bills or Buffalo Sabres season ticket holder, or a My One Buffalo member, you can take advantage of a special presale opportunity today.

On tap today

Stay tuned for full pregame and postgame coverage. We'll have a written Morning Skate Report as well as Dan Dunleavy's video Game Preview. Then stick with us through the game and after for highlights, a recap and locker room reaction.