



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

September 27, 2017

Right wing remains in flux as Sabres wait on players to claim spots

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 26, 2017

Justin Bailey and Nick Baptiste can count. They know the Sabres have 15 healthy forwards, including five right wingers. They know that Buffalo will dress 12 forwards and use four right wingers.

What they don't know is if they'll be part of those final numbers when the season starts.

As expected, there is competition at right wing as the Sabres move toward their final cuts. Kyle Okposo and Jason Pominville have spots. Seth Griffith, Bailey and Baptiste are trying to earn the other two.

"It's exciting," Baptiste said Tuesday. "It's where I want to be. I want to get in a situation where I'm battling to make the team.

"Clearly, I've done enough to get to this point, which is what I wanted to do. To get down to the last couple of guys to make the team, it's an honor – but I'm not satisfied until I make the team. That's my ultimate goal."

Part of the reason there's uncertainty is no one has stood out. Griffith has one goal, one assist and three shots in three exhibition games. Bailey has no points and two shots in three games while serving as a key penalty-killer. Baptiste has no points and one shot in two outings.

Buffalo has two preseason games left, including a trip to Pittsburgh on Wednesday. Time is getting short for the players to make their case.

"It's nice to still be around," Bailey said in HarborCenter. "Every day that you have practice or a preseason game, you want to show them that you're doing all you can to stay. That's what I'm doing. I'm just taking it day by day, not thinking too far into the future."

The last two practices have shown how unsettled the position remains. Griffith skated with center Sam Reinhart and left wing Benoit Pouliot on Monday, while Bailey was with Jacob Josefson and Nicolas Deslauriers. The right wingers swapped lines Tuesday.

Baptiste, meanwhile, remained alongside center Johan Larsson and left wing Matt Moulson.

"Hopefully, I can get into one of these preseason games, hopefully both, and show what I can do and show that I should make this team," Baptiste said.

The three competitors have similar traits. They're fast. They have a history of scoring in the American Hockey League. They haven't yet shown they can do it in the NHL.

Griffith has 34 goals and 121 points in his last 95 AHL games. Baptiste had 25 goals and 41 points in 59 games with Rochester last season. Bailey has 42 goals and 81 points in his 122 appearances with the Amerks.

Whoever lines up with Reinhart and Pouliot will be expected to produce.

"I'm a guy who's scored goals in the AHL, but it's not even so much that for me," Baptiste said. "It's just getting pucks to the net and being effective and using my speed, being electric and creating sparks for the team.

"We've got a ton of skill in our top six, so for me it's just providing that energy and be a guy that you can trust out there in every situation."

Indeed, coach Phil Housley has made it clear he wants the wingers to prove they can contribute in ways other than scoring.

Housley on Bailey: "He's been using his speed really well in the practices where it requires the rush or an attack. I think he's done a good job in the preseason games, so we're just going to continue to push him."

Housley on Baptiste: "Nick's doing a great job. He's jumping out there with our goalies before, shooting on the goaltenders. He's working on his game. That's all you can ask from him right now. He just hasn't seen any action lately, but he's been a really good teammate."

It remains to be seen where the players will be good teammates: Buffalo or Rochester? They have two preseason games to provide clues.

"Whether I play six minutes or 16 minutes," Baptiste said, "I've got to make sure every shift I'm playing to my strengths."

Sabres' Okposo hopes for tolerance as political debates extend into sports

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 26, 2017

Kyle Okposo is a news junkie. He knows the political and sports worlds have collided.

As the Sabres forward has watched the angry drama play out, he's wished people would listen to each other rather than yell.

"As a country we need to become more tolerant of people and of views," Okposo said Tuesday. "If you want to speak out on equality, I think that's a good thing and that's definitely your right. I also think it doesn't have to be as loud all the time, you know?"

The current debate is NFL players kneeling or avoiding the national anthem before games. Okposo is a Minnesota native who has represented the United States six times and spent a year in the U.S. National Team Development Program.

He wouldn't kneel for the anthem, but he says those who do have the right.

"Protecting the First Amendment is a huge thing," Okposo said in HarborCenter. "I'm a proud American, and I'm proud to be from the United States. Myself personally, I wouldn't kneel for an anthem, but I respect those that do.

"That's obviously been an issue for a while, and it's really got brought up through the election cycle and everything that happened last year. It really got magnified. Those guys have a right to do that. Those guys have a right to say what they feel.

"To be honest with you, I think every little thing is getting so magnified now and people are starting to talk about every little bit and piece that we're kind of forgetting what brings us together as Americans: That's togetherness and being together and working to help out one another.

"You see the response from the natural disasters that have happened, people helping out each other. It doesn't matter if you're black, white or anything. You're in there to help people. We need to come together."

The anthem issue reignited after President Trump used a derogatory term regarding NFL players who kneel. He's commented on it extensively since the demonstrations increased Sunday morning.

"Some of the words coming out of the White House can be a little bit not as understanding as they should be," the 29-year-old Okposo said. "I think with that office comes the weight of the world, and the world is watching. Everybody is watching what you're doing and what you're saying, and that needs to be taken into account at all times.

"When you're the president of the United States, not everybody is going to agree with the decisions you make and the things that you say, but you have to be accountable for what you say. You have to know that the weight of those words that you say and the actions you do hold so much. People really take them to heart, and I think there's a little bit more divide right now than there should be.

"He can kind of work on bringing us back together. I think that'd be a good thing."

Owners Terry and Kim Pegula met with the Bills on Saturday night to discuss the anthem debate and the president's words. The owners have not met with the Sabres.

"It really hasn't been brought up, to tell you the truth," coach Phil Housley said. "We'll deal with that if it arises, but right now guys have been really good about what we're trying to accomplish here in training camp and get better every day."

There are seven Americans on the Sabres' 32-man roster. Housley, who was a U.S. Olympian, isn't sure how he'd react if someone kneeled or demonstrated.

"I don't know how to answer that because it hasn't happened, so I don't have an opinion right now," Housley said.

Okposo, who was the first black player for the University of Minnesota, said it's not a hot topic in the dressing room. He's actually surprised.

"I just like to follow and see what's going on," Okposo said. "It's kind of sad what's going on, to be honest with you, in Washington, just the way that this whole system is ran, in my opinion. It just needs to be better."

Sabres Notebook: Power play gets its shot; Fedun leaves after puck to ear

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

September 26, 2017

The Sabres had the best power play in the NHL last year, so it's not like Phil Housley has to start from scratch. There are tweaks the new coach would like to make, however.

"I just would like to see them have more of a shot mentality," Housley said Tuesday. "They're just passing up opportunities. I think we've got to simplify our game in that area."

The Sabres practiced the power play as they prepared to visit Pittsburgh on Wednesday. Housley challenged the two units to shoot, and he counted 20 shots in a four-minute span.

The first unit featured Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo, Sam Reinhart and Rasmus Ristolainen. Evander Kane, Jason Pominville, Nathan Beaulieu and Zach Bogosian anchored the second group, with Matt Moulson and Zengus Girgensons sharing time.

To emphasize accurate shots throughout practice, Housley instructed players to do pushups if they missed the net.

"It's just a mentality: When you're doing a drill, shoot to score," Housley said. "We've even included the post in that regard as part of the net because I want guys picking corners."

The Sabres hardly have an injury epidemic. Still, the list is getting longer.

Defenseman Taylor Fedun left practice after taking a puck to the ear. He didn't return.

"I'm sure he probably had to take a couple stitches," Housley said. "It's unfortunate, but that's hockey, right? He laid down to block a puck. He plays like he practices, so it was unfortunate."

The Sabres also skated without defenseman Jake McCabe (shoulder) and forwards Evan Rodrigues (upper body), Alex Nylander (lower body) and Sean Malone (undisclosed).

Rodrigues had a cast on his right hand and wrist while he watched the workout.

The Sabres' fourth preseason game will be the first for Rick Jeanneret. Buffalo's play-by-play announcer will call the game against the Penguins (7 p.m., MSG, Radio 550).

The Pegulas haven't spoken to the Sabres about Trump and the anthem

WGR550

By PAUL HAMILTON

SEPTEMBER 26, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Pegulas were involved in the player meeting with the Bills last week after Donald Trump's comments against NFL players.

The issue of protesting during the National Anthem was addressed and talked about so the players could work out their feelings in a safe setting and present a united front on Sunday.

There really hasn't been much talk about it in the NHL and head coach Phil Housley said the Pegulas have not brought it up with him, "No, not at all, it really hasn't been brought up and we'll deal with that if it arises."

Kyle Okposo was born in Minnesota. He said the players haven't been discussing it, "It hasn't really been brought up the last couple of days which kind of surprises me, but I've been following it, I'm kind of a news junkie, so I just like to follow and see what's going on and it's kind of sad what's going on to be honest with you in Washington. Just the way this whole system is run in my opinion, it just needs to be better."

Okposo knows exactly how protests have been handled around the NFL. He said, "I'm a proud American and myself personally, I wouldn't kneel for an anthem, but I respect those that do and I think that some of the words coming out of the White House can be not as understanding as they should be."

"With that office comes the weight of the world and the world is watching what you're doing and what you're saying and I think that needs to be taken into account at all times," Okposo said. "You have to be accountable for what you say. You have to know that the weight of those words that you say and the actions that you do hold so much and I think there's a little bit more divide going on than there should be."

Okposo believe in freedom of speech and he's very passionate about protecting it, "There's a lot of things going on in the country and a lot of issues and I think as a country, we need to become more tolerant of people and of views because I think protecting the First Amendment is a huge thing."

Equality was the original issue in the NFL before Trump got involved. The Sabres winger is OK with that, but he says there's a bigger issue at stake, "Those guys have a right to do that, people have a right to say what they feel and every little thing is getting so magnified and people are starting to talk about every little bit and piece, that we're kind of forgetting what brings us together as Americans and that's togetherness and that's being together, working to help out one another. You saw the response from the natural disasters that have happened, people helping out each other and it doesn't matter if you're black, white, you're in there to help people."

"If you want to speak out about equality, I think that's a good thing and that's definitely your right, but I also think it doesn't have to be as loud all the time."

"It's something that if you see something, you've got to say something and I think that can make our country better."

Sabres goalie Linus Ullmark using head to make saves

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

9/26/17

BUFFALO – The drill, Sabres netminder Linus Ullmark explained, is “very easy.” Someone – on Tuesday it was goalie coach Andrew Allen – shoots pucks at him “top shelf.”

“I just try to get my head up there and actually try to get the puck to where I want it to go,” Ullmark said following practice inside HarborCenter.

Yes, the 6-foot-4, 221-pound Swede really tries to redirect the puck with his head.

“Either it’s up or either it’s down to the corner,” the loquacious Ullmark said after the Sabres prepared for tonight’s preseason road tilt against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

So instead of, say, using his glove to snare the puck, in some instances Ullmark, 24, would rather headbutt it over the glass.

“It’s just a reactionary thing for him,” Sabres coach Phil Housley said.

Ullmark, who has played 21 NHL games, said when he noticed New York Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist used his head to stop shots, he wondered why he didn’t simply catch the puck.

But then Ullmark learned shots – often tips or screens – come at NHL goalies so quickly they don’t have time to react with their arms or hands.

“So what do you got to do?” he asked. “You got to use your head, because it’s the closest thing. It’s lot easier to move your head than it is your whole upper torso.”

The philosophy isn’t letting the puck hit his head.

“I’m making sure my head hits the puck instead,” he said.

Ullmark said using his head to stop shots mostly works playing angles.

“You don’t create any holes,” he said. “You have your arms against your body and just cover all the net, then you use your head to pick up the rebounds.”

In Friday’s 3-0 preseason loss in Toronto, Ullmark dazzled against the Maple Leafs, stopping 32 shots, including one with his mask. While he didn’t headbutt the puck into the crowd, it appeared he wanted it to hit him in the head.

Of course, so many sports these days are focused on staying away from the head and preventing concussions. Does Ullmark worry about a head injury?

“No, I have great protection,” he said. “I switched masks a couple years ago. As long as it isn’t one-timed on my chin, I’m all good.”

Ullmark is also good with heading back to the Rochester Americans soon to begin his third North American season. After an AHL All-Star campaign in which he morphed into the Amerks’ backbone and MVP, it appeared he might graduate to the big league this season. The Sabres even gave the Vegas Golden Knights a sixth-round pick to lay off their top goalie prospect in the NHL Expansion Draft.

The Sabres, however, signed former backup Chad Johnson to a one-year contract to play behind Robin Lehner, meaning Ullmark is ticketed for the AHL again.

“I’m 24, I got lots to learn, lots of hockey in me,” Ullmark said.

Ullmark has played for two bad Amerks teams, missing the playoffs both seasons. A year ago, he faced an astounding 1,678 shots in 55 games, both league highs.

But Sabres general manager Jason Botterill quickly rebuilt the Amerks and some of the organization's depth during the summer. The AHL club could contend for its first playoff berth since 2014.

Ullmark believes the Amerks possess enough talent to go on a postseason run.

"I haven't had a chance to play for the (Calder) Cup," he said. "You always play for the Cup. Going down there again, I can only say positive things about it, because I feel like ... we have a really good opportunity to actually be competing for the Cup."

He added: "Five months of the summer is a long time, way too long. I want to have two, tops. That means I want something."

So what can Ullmark get out of another AHL season? How can he get better?

"Oh, that's very easy, just got to stop one more puck every night, keep that puck from going into the net," he said. "That's easily the biggest thing I felt during the season. I felt almost every night was one too many. Even though I played maybe like a ridiculously good game, maybe we lost 2-1. That was just one goal too much."

Phil Housley in no hurry to name new Sabres captain

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

9/26/17

BUFFALO – Instead of using a temporary captain this preseason, Sabres coach Phil Housley has named three alternate captains each game.

A slew of players, including perhaps the top three candidates for the vacant captaincy – Jack Eichel, Kyle Okposo and Ryan O’Reilly – have worn an ‘A.’

Housley is in no rush to name a captain.

“We’re just going to wait,” he said this afternoon following practice inside HarborCenter. “This has only been a couple weeks for me really getting on the ice with these guys, getting to know them and seeing how they react and fit into the team. That’ll happen maybe after the preseason. I don’t have a definite answer for that.”

That, of course, begs the question, will the Sabres even have a captain this season? Housley said he doesn’t know.

“We’re just evaluating right now,” he said.

The Sabres didn’t re-sign former captain Brian Gionta.

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Housley on if he’s dealt with anything relating to the recent protests by NFL players during the national anthem: “No, not at all, it really hasn’t been brought up, to tell you the truth. We’ll deal with that if that arises, but right now, guys have been really good about what we’re trying to accomplish here at training camp.”

Would Housley have a problem if a player wanted to protest during the anthem?

“I don’t know how to answer that because it hasn’t happened,” he said. “So I don’t have an opinion right now.”

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Sabres defenseman Taylor Fedun left today’s practice after taking a puck in the ear and needed stitches, Housley said.

Meanwhile, defenseman Jake McCabe (upper body, week-to-week) and center Evan Rodrigues (hand, day-to-day) missed the session.

Housley said McCabe was recently nursing a sore shoulder.

Kane impressing with pace, work ethic at Sabres camp

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

September 26th, 2017

Phil Housley said at the outset of training camp that he was excited to coach Evander Kane. Now nearly two weeks in, he's liked what he's seen.

"I think he's been a terrific pro," Housley said after practice on Monday. "He comes to work and he's had a terrific attitude, working hard in practices and he's trying to get himself ready. I respect his work ethic."

It's no accident, then, that Kane has worn an "A" in each of the two exhibition games he's played in, putting his name on a list of Sabres who have worn letters this preseason that also includes Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Jack Eichel, among others.

He's only 25, but Kane is entering eighth season in the NHL and his third with the Sabres. Housley is the sixth coach he's played for. He's a veteran by all of those standards, and he's made an honest effort under the new coaching staff to set an example on the ice.

It's been easy, he said, in part of because of Housley's transparency.

"I think Phil's done a really good job of keeping things open, keeping the dialogue open with everybody, keeping things short and sweet and to the point," Kane said. "I think that makes it real easy, when everybody understands what's going on and what the goal is."

It also helps that was Housley's asking from the Sabres falls directly in line with Kane's greatest strengths, which are aggressiveness and speed. He's been one of the players pushing the pace in practice, and his aggressiveness led to two drawn penalties against Toronto on Saturday.

"Seeing him this year, he's playing with pace both ways on the ice and that's huge," Sam Reinhart, who played on a line with Kane in that game, said. "Everything we're kind of looking toward is pace defensively that's going to lead to and create our offense. It's starting with him and going through the whole team."

That includes setting an example for younger players like Justin Bailey and Nicholas Baptiste, two players who possess similar combinations of speed and size.

"I think he's come in with a different mentality this year," Bailey said. "He's obviously working hard in practice but he's more vocal day in and day out. I think it's great to see. Everyone's pulling together and I think our team has come together pretty quickly so it's great to see guys like him step up."

Fresh starts have been a theme of this training camp, with Housley stressing the idea of coming in with a clean slate to his players. Following an offseason in which his name came up mostly in trade speculation, it seems Kane is making the most of his.

"It's very important to be able to lead by example," Kane said. "There's definitely other ways to lead but I think first and foremost, you have to lead by example. For me, that's just what I'm trying to do."

Power-play practice

Sabres Now (9/26/17)

02:18 • September 26th, 2017

The Sabres practiced with their full power-play units on Tuesday, and it seems for now like the group that drove their No. 1 ranked power play last year is going to stay together. That unit comprises of Eichel, Reinhart, Okposo, O'Reilly and Rasmus Ristolainen.

While the Sabres led the NHL with a 24.5 percent conversion rate on the power play last season, Reinhart said he still sees room for growth.

"Looking at stats, it doesn't always do it justice," Reinhart said. "We feel there's a lot we can improve on. One of those things is timing, knowing situations a little bit better. You can go 50 percent through two weeks and then the timing the next week, when it's really important, may not be there. So you've got to be really consistent."

Buffalo's second unit consisted of Kane, Jason Pominville, Zach Bogosian and Nathan Beaulieu, with Matt Moulson and Zemgus Girgensons alternating as the fifth man down low.

Fedun leaves with injury

Phil Housley After Practice

05:59 • September 26th, 2017

Taylor Fedun was forced to leave practice early after taking a puck off of his ear while he attempted to block a shot.

"I'm sure he probably had to take a couple stitches," Housley said. "It's unfortunate, but that's hockey. He laid down to block a puck and he plays like he practices, so it was unfortunate."

The Sabres are already practicing without Jake McCabe, who is week-to-week with an upper-body injury. Without McCabe and Fedun, the Sabres have eight healthy defensemen at camp.

Lines at practice

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
67 Benoit Pouliot - 23 Sam Reinhart - 25 Seth Griffith
26 Matt Moulson - 22 Johan Larsson - 13 Nicholas Baptiste
44 Nicolas Deslauriers - 10 Jacob Josefson - 95 Justin Bailey

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 47 Zach Bogosian
4 Josh Gorges - 93 Victor Antipin
41 Justin Falk - 5 Matt Tennyson
38 Cody Goloubef - 27 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson
35 Linus Ullmark

Sharpen Up: September 26, 2017

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

September 26th, 2017

The preseason is quickly winding down. There are only two games remaining, starting tomorrow night against the Pittsburgh Penguins at PPG Paints Arena. The game can be seen on MSG starting with the pregame show at 6:30 p.m. RJ and Rayzor will have the call.

But first, there's another day of practice at HarborCenter this morning.

Here's what you need to know.

Monday's practice

Sabres Now (9/25/17)

01:41 • September 25th, 2017

Who was on the ice?

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
28 Zengus Girgensons - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
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4 Josh Gorges - 93 Victor Antipin
41 Justin Falk - 5 Matt Tennyson
38 Cody Goloubef - 27 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson
35 Linus Ullmark

With camp for the Rochester Americans in full swing, we're closer to what Buffalo's opening night roster might look like. Of course, there are still position battles at some positions on the third and fourth lines and on defense. So those are some of the things we'll be watching as Oct. 5 approaches.

Phil Housley (9/25/17)

04:45 • September 25th, 2017

For more on those position battles check out yesterday's Ice Level Practice Report.

Speaking of Oct. 5, here's a way for you to win a seat to the game:

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Injury updates

Jake McCabe, Evan Rodrigues, Alexander Nylander and Sean Malone did not practice. McCabe is week-to-week with an upper-body injury, but could be ready for the season opener against Montreal next Thursday, according to head coach Phil Housley.

There is no timetable set for the return of Rodrigues, who sustained a hand injury in Friday's preseason game in Toronto. Housley said both Nylander and Malone are making progress in their returns. Malone has been skating on his own.

Prospects back in action

Brandon Hagel and Rasmus Asplund had stand-out weekends. Kris Baker of SabresProspects.com has more on those future Sabres and other coming up through the pipeline in our weekly Sabres Prospects Report.

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Rasmus Asplund strikes for goal #2 on the year (9/21) #Sabres

10:12 AM - Sep 23, 2017

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Speaking of top amateur players...

Tickets for the World Junior Championship outdoor game on Dec. 29 between Team USA and Canada at New Era Field are on sale now!

On tap today

Practice kicks off at 11 a.m. at HarborCenter today. We'll have full written and video coverage for you right here at Sabres.com.