



Buffalo Sabres

Daily Press Clips

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Sabres searching for a consistent mental game

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

October 27, 2017

Among the things the Buffalo Sabres are searching for early this season, along with goals and better defense, is little bit of resiliency.

On more than one occasion, Sabres coach Phil Housley has talked about the mental toughness of his team. Some days, they have it. Some days, they don't. And the ability to find consistency in resiliency can be the difference between a 5-4 overtime win in Boston and a 5-1 drubbing in Columbus.

The resiliency and mental toughness the Sabres are searching for comes down to a simple sounding statement – stick to the game plan.

But Buffalo has struggled to do that. The Sabres have made mistakes and given up goals only to see their play get tighter and too defensive. They've made mistakes and tried to press too much offensively, trying to create something outside of the game plan only to give up odd-man rushes and easy goals against.

Housley talked about his team's mental toughness on Wednesday, after the Blue Jackets scored three goals in a three-minute span at the end of the second period to earn the win.

"There's a lot of things that involve mental toughness – rebounding from a game or facing adversity," Housley said Friday after the Sabres practiced for Saturday's 1 p.m. game against the San Jose Sharks in KeyBank Center. "I think what I meant by that the last time we spoke was the discipline in our game. Here we are at the five-minute mark (of the second period) only down one and we got away from that discipline. ... The mental toughness part was more the discipline part for me. Certainly our group is pretty resilient. We've responded in the right way."

The Sabres have been able to respond twice in big ways. They came back from a 4-1 third-period deficit in Vegas to gain a point despite the overtime loss. They came back from a 4-1 deficit in Boston, earning a 5-4 OT win.

But sometimes it's easy to turn up your game when you've already dug yourself a big hole.

"You have nothing to lose ... you have to play aggressive in both ends of the rink but you can't be afraid to lose," Sabres forward Evander Kane said. "Sometimes we're thinking a little bit too much at the start of the game and we get down by a couple of goals and ... we kinda just say, we've got nothing to lose, let's go get it. Let's give it all we've got. For us, we've got to realize, if we score the first goal, we've got to try to get the next one. There's no penalty for scoring too many goals or getting a lead too big."

So while the Sabres have may have shown flashes resiliency in two games, they're still searching for consistency in the first 40 minutes, particularly those little moments of mental toughness and discipline that can prevent the need for dramatic comebacks.

"It could be confidence, too, a little bit," said Sabres forward Jason Pominville.

"I think when you start winning, you start feeling better about your game. We did it in Vegas where we came back in a game. We did it in Boston. I mean when we're down, we know we can do it. But once you start winning games you build that confidence, that trust, that knowing how to win in key situations. Not deviating from the system is something that we've got to do a little bit better job at because we're not that far off."

Winning is contagious and learning how to win is what begets more winning. It's something that Pominville lived first-hand in Minnesota last year.

"It's not easy. Confidence is such a big part of the game and when you don't have it you're searching for it and it's usually tough to find," Pominville said. "Sometimes, as crazy as it sounds, all you need is a little bounce to go your way. Last year in Minnesota we went on a stretch where we won 13 in a row and there's probably some games in there we shouldn't have won, but we found ways to win."

Call it confidence, resiliency, or mental toughness, but the head-game is something that forward Justin Bailey spent time working on over the summer. It was a point of emphasis for the young pro, who wanted to learn how to let go of mistakes and move on to the next play. And the mental game has been just as important as his physical game as Bailey has made his case for staying in the Sabres lineup.

"I think for me, it's worrying about the present," Bailey said. "It's thinking about that game for the rest of the night but then making sure I don't take any negative thoughts into the next game. It's just trying to notice that if I make a mistake, I make sure the next time that a play comes up that's similar, I make the smart play. I don't want to let myself get distracted by a mistake."

Sabres Notebook: San Jose ends long road trip in Buffalo

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

October 27, 2017

The San Jose Sharks have been on a long road trip. A really long road trip.

It's a five-game, 11-day East Coast swing for the Sharks, ending Saturday afternoon in KeyBank Center when they play the Buffalo Sabres at 1 p.m.

San Jose is 2-2-0 on the road trip with wins at New Jersey (3-0) and the Rangers (4-1) and losses at the Islanders (5-3) and Boston (2-1).

The 2-1 loss to the Bruins came on Thursday. The lone goal for the Sharks came on the power play, a tally by Joe Thornton. San Jose had four power plays that game and produced the one goal on 10 shots. But it also included a shorthanded goal against and was overall a disappointing part of the Sharks' game.

Heading into Friday night's schedule of games, the Sharks had the 10th-best power play in the NHL (21.6 percent).

"I don't know what it is, just seems like it's out of rhythm," Sharks forward Logan Couture said about the power play to the media after the game in Boston. "When I'm on the ice, seems like guys aren't in the right spots. We're not really creating as much as we're used to creating."

Speaking of Couture, he has nine points in his last five games with three of those last five games being multi-point efforts. He was the NHL's Third Star of the Week on Oct. 22.

After an off day on Thursday, the Sabres were back at practice Friday in HarborCenter. The team had a few new line combinations:

Evander Kane-Jack Eichel-Jason Pominville
Benoit Pouliot-Ryan O'Reilly-Kyle Okposo
Sam Reinhart-Zemgus Girgensons-Justin Bailey
Matt Moulson-Johann Larsson-Jordan Nolan/Seth Griffith

The shake up continued when the team practiced the power play. Eichel was off the top unit, skating instead with the second group of Okposo, Kane, Victor Antipin and Marco Scandella.

The top unit was Pominville, O'Reilly, Reinhart, Rasmus Ristolainen and Matt Tennyson.

Defensive pairings at practice were:

Scandella-Ristolainen
Jake McCabe-Tennyson
Antipin-Zach Redmond
Justin Falk-Taylor Fedun

Speaking of Falk, it was the second practice for the defender who has not played yet this season because of an undisclosed injury.

"Falk's close," Sabres coach Phil Housley said Friday afternoon. "He had a really solid practice today. That's a day-to-day situation."

Fellow blueliner Zach Bogosian had an evaluation done on his lower body injury that has kept him sidelined since training camp.

"He's making some good progress," Housley said of Bogosian. "I'd still say it's a week-to-week at this point right now. He's still making strides forward. He continues to push himself and we're just going to have to focus on the daily evaluation with him."

Speaking of the defense, the Sabres are still looking for their first goal from a defender. While Housley said the team needs to find some offense from the blue line, he's noted progress.

"They're certainly making strides," Housley said of the D-corps. "We want to have them add to the offense. For me, it's still early just understanding the reads of a D-man getting involved in the offense. Sometimes we're getting in too early, sometimes we're getting in too late. As we move forward we're going to continue to work on that but obviously the defense is a big part of our attack."

The Sabres are partnering with Roswell Park to offer a free prostate cancer early detection event on Tuesday, Nov. 14 from 4-7 p.m. in the Lexus Club in KeyBank Center.

Participants can meet Sabres alumni, get a behind-the-scenes tour of KeyBank Center, and get free parking.

Eligible men – age 50-75 who have not been tested in the past year and men 40-49 who have never had a PSA test – have the opportunity to get tested for prostate cancer by Roswell Park physicians.

Registration is available online or by calling Roswell Park Cancer Institute at 1-877-275-7724.

Sabres' Bogosian still not close to returning

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

OCTOBER 27, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - Zach Bogosian has not practice since training camp for the Sabres. Phil Housley has been very cryptic on what is ailing his defenseman. In the beginning he made it sound like it wasn't too serious, but we're almost into November and Bogosian still hasn't hit the ice.

Last week Housley made it sound like Bogosian's lower body injury had a setback and would be undergoing more evaluation. Now, Housley said, "It went really well, he's making some good progress, but I'd still say it's a week-to-week right now."

"He still makes strides forward, he continues to push himself." Bogosian is still not skating.

Justin Falk had his second practice with the team. He too hasn't played at all this season. Housley said, "Falk's close, he had a really solid practice today and we'll evaluate that tomorrow morning."

If Falk is ready to go, Buffalo will have to make a roster move.

On Friday, Housley juggled the power play units to the point where there's no first or second until. The units were:

Reinhart O'Reilly Pominville Ristolainen Tennyson

Kane Eichel Okposo Antipin Scandella

Friday's Lines:

Kane Eichel Pominville

Pouliot O'Reilly Okposo

Girgensons Reinhart Bailey

Nolan Larsson Griffith (Moulson)

Scandella Ristolainen

McCabe Tennyson

Antipin Redmond

Falk Fedun

The Sharks are in to play the Sabres on Saturday afternoon. Join Brian Koziol for the pregame at noon when he'll have Phil Housley, Evander Kane and Matt Tennyson.

Sabres still leaning heavily on Rasmus Ristolainen

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

Oct. 28, 2017

BUFFALO – Rasmus Ristolainen celebrated another birthday Friday, and if you thought the Sabres defenseman was a bit older than his 23 years, you’re probably not alone.

Having cracked the NHL at 18, Ristolainen is already in his fifth season. This afternoon’s tilt against the San Jose Sharks will be his 285th appearance with the Sabres.

It feels like the Finn has been around forever.

By his second season, Ristolainen was the Sabres’ best defenseman, and he has been playing mega minutes for three years, averaging more than 25 a contest.

At an age when some players are taking their first steps into the NHL, Ristolainen has already endured a lot, playing for four head coaches and three general managers.

All the while, the Sabres have struggled, finishing dead last in the league twice and never sniffing the playoffs.

“I’ve been here quite a bit,” Ristolainen said Friday inside KeyBank Center. “When I got here my first year, there’s not too many guys left. Yeah, Buffalo’s been good to me, feels like a second home, so I really enjoy my time here. I believe we’re going to get things turned around moving forward.”

Turning things around, of course, would mean making the postseason for the first time since 2011.

“One thing I want to experience is playoff hockey,” Ristolainen said. “That’s a big goal, and I think that’s when I would be at my best.”

Right now, even with 71 games left, the playoffs look unlikely for the 3-6-2 Sabres. Ristolainen’s so-so play – he has zero goals and four assists – has contributed to their weak start. The Sabres will likely go nowhere unless Ristolainen starts showcasing his old form.

To be fair, the defense has struggled across the board. Housley, a Hall of Fame defenseman, wants his blue line to be aggressive and move the puck.

Incredibly, the Sabres are the NHL’s only team without a goal from a defenseman.

“We want to have them add to the offense,” Housley said of his defense. “For me, it’s still early just understanding what the reads of a D-man (are) getting involved offensively. Sometimes we’re getting in too early, sometimes we’re getting in too late.”

Ristolainen is supposed to be the guy leading the attack.

“I can do that,” said Ristolainen, who has averaged eight goals and 43 points over the past two seasons. “I haven’t really done that yet. I’m not happy that offense is far apart from my game right now. I can do more.”

Housley can’t give Ristolainen much more ice time. Like his predecessor, Dan Bylsma, Housley said before the season he wanted to trim Ristolainen’s minutes.

But with four defenders injured, Housley has been leaning on Ristolainen more than ever. So far, Ristolainen has averaged an NHL-high 27 minutes, 29 seconds an outing, 43 seconds more than Washington’s John Carlson, who ranks second.

Ristolainen has skated more than 28 minutes in four of the last five games and under 24 minutes only once this season.

Housley said the injuries – Zach Bogosian, who has been sidelined with a lower-body ailment all season, likely would’ve played some big minutes – and some overtime games have upped Ristolainen’s ice time.

“We’ve had to lean on him a little bit too much,” Housley said.

Still, Ristolainen, who averaged 26:28 a game last season and 25:16 two years ago, likes the minutes.

“I’ve felt pretty good minute-wise, I haven’t been too tired there,” Ristolainen said.

He added: “Pretty much every team I’ve played, I play the big minutes. I think I’m in good enough shape I can handle those.”

Housley, a puck-mover throughout his 21 seasons, said Ristolainen’s ice time has contributed to his slow start.

“When you play that many minutes in the style that we want to play, it certainly is affecting him,” Housley said. “He’s got to continue to just make good puck decisions, get up ice as much as possible. I’d like to see him come with speed on the power play breakout a little bit more.

“But when you’re the guy going back there and getting it every time you don’t execute, I can feel for him, because he’s got to go back and get the puck again. I think Rasmus will be fine. He’s a tough competitor and a fierce competitor. He wants to win.”

Sabres' Justin Falk close to playing

Olean Times Herald

By Bill Hoppe

Oct. 27, 2017

BUFFALO – For the first week and a half of his injury, Sabres defenseman Justin Falk said he couldn't do anything.

“So that was the worst,” Falk, who has missed the first 11 games, said this afternoon inside KeyBank Center.

Then the Sabres went on a four-game western road trip. Falk, meanwhile, stayed at home nursing his injury.

“You wait around all day until 10 o'clock at night to watch a hockey game,” he said.

There was, however, a silver lining to missing so much time.

“Fortunately, my family got in about two days after,” Falk said. “I was able to reset. I was away from my (two) kids for a month. I was able to really kind of do some dad things that you don't normally get to do during the season.

“I was taking my daughter to preschool ... seeing some other aspects of daily life that after being away from them for a month, it was good to refresh like that. That helped pass the time.”

His time away rehabbing a lower-body injury is almost over. He practiced again this morning inside HarborCenter, his second session with his teammates this week.

Falk said he started feeling something during a Sept. 27 preseason game in Pittsburgh. Still, he played two nights later in the exhibition finale.

By early the next week, though, Falk knew he couldn't keep playing.

“The timing wasn't obviously great,” he said.

The 6-foot-5, 222-pound Falk, one of the Sabres' biggest surprises last season as he played 52 games, impressed new Sabres coach Phil Housley during training camp.

Housley, of course, wants his defensemen to rush the puck. Falk isn't often cast in that role.

“I thought that training camp went well for me, personally,” said Falk, who's day-to-day, according to Housley. “I was really trying to use my skating a bit more to my advantage and wanting to get involved in getting up ice and supporting the attack and all that. I think that's helping me have better instinct and assertiveness in the D-zone and my all-around game.”

In other news, Housley said defenseman Zach Bogosian (lower body) is still week-to-week and hasn't been skating.

“He's still making strides forward,” Housley said.

The Sabres host the San Jose Sharks on Saturday afternoon.

Sabres aim for 2nd home win vs. Sharks

Fox Sports

Oct 27, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. — After an extremely disappointing start to the new season, the Buffalo Sabres picked up their first home victory of the year on Tuesday against the Detroit Red Wings.

They'll go for home win No. 2 against the San Jose Sharks in a matinee (1 p.m.) on Saturday.

The win over the Red Wings was anything but pretty, but the Sabres (3-6-2) showed some much-needed grit and got the job done in the end. Benoit Pouliot scored the lone goal for Buffalo on a wrap-around and Robin Lehner did the rest with 32 saves for his sixth career shutout.

"This team's been through a lot," Sabres head coach Phil Housley said. "They've had some tough starts they've had to battle through, but they've now found a way to win a tight game, which is really important. I think that's really going to help their confidence being in that situation again."

The Sabres may be getting some help on the back end in the near future, too. Buffalo's reshuffled defense endured a rocky start to the year but defenseman Justin Falk is nearing a return and has not been ruled out of Saturday's game against San Jose. Falk has yet to play this season after suffering an injury at the end of training camp.

"The timing wasn't great," Falk said, according to the team's website. "But you show what you can in training camp and then now more importantly you've got to make sure that you're back to the point that you can make a good impression again, whenever that time may be."

Fellow Sabres defenseman Zach Bogosian is still considered week-to-week for Buffalo.

Evander Kane, Jason Pominville and Jack Eichel are all tied for the Sabres' lead in points with 11. Lehner has a save percentage of .913 in seven games.

The Sharks (4-5-0) are coming off a close 2-1 loss to the Boston Bruins on Thursday night. Saturday will mark the end of a five-game road swing for the Sharks, who are 2-2 on the East Coast trip thus far.

"Our game's been in a good spot," defenseman Brent Burns said, according to the team's website. "We're in every game, we're playing well, we're getting back to what we do well and it's just tough when you lose like that."

Logan Couture leads the Sharks in points with 10 (seven goals, three assists). Joe Veteran Joe Thornton is second on the team with seven points (two goals, five assists) and scored San Jose's lone goal against the Bruins.

In that game, Thornton tied Jari Kurri for 20th in all-time NHL points with 1,398 points in his career.

"We were pushing and pushing, but we couldn't get one past him at the end," Thornton said, according to the team's website. "But the boys fought hard. I liked our game, but it didn't work out for us in the end."

Goaltender Martin Jones is off to a strong start to the season for the Sharks with a save percentage of .928 through seven games.

Falk practices again, approaching game readiness

Sabres.com

by Jourdon LaBarber

Oct. 27, 2017

While the Buffalo Sabres began their season earlier this month, Justin Falk was stuck waiting around to watch.

After sustaining an injury late in training camp, the first week and a half of his rehabilitation called for rest. So, rather than building on a camp in which he had impressed a new coaching staff, he found himself staying up late, waiting to watch the team's West Coast games from afar.

"The timing wasn't great," Falk said. "But you show what you can in training camp and then now, more importantly you've got to make sure that you're back to the point that you can make a good impression again, whenever that time may be."

That time may be coming soon. Sabres coach Phil Housley said Friday that Falk is nearing game status, and left the door open for his inclusion in the lineup against the San Jose Sharks on Saturday afternoon.

His return will bolster a defensive corps that's also missing Zach Bogosian, Nathan Beaulieu and Josh Gorges due to injuries. Taylor Fedun and Zach Redmond were recalled last week to help fill the void.

Video: Sabres Now (10/27/17)

Falk prides himself on being a steady, reliable presence in the defensive end. He became that for the Sabres last season, averaging 13:42 in a career-high 52 games. In camp this fall, he worked to assimilate his game to the offensive responsibilities that come as a part of Housley's system.

"I thought the training camp went well for me, personally," Falk said. "I'm trying to use my skating a bit more to my advantage. [Housley] is wanting D involved to get up ice, supporting the attack and all that and I think that's helping me have better instinct and assertiveness."

The key to making sure he's not sacrificing his physicality and defensive presence, Falk said, is control. Defensemen joining the rush have to pick their spots well, based not only on the opportunity presented but also on their energy level on a given shift.

"Mainly, I want to make sure that I can shut things down in our end as quick as possible so that our guys can get on offense, so that they can do what they do best," he said. "I feel like if I do that, stay physical, then it'll lead to good things the other way."

Here's more notes from practice at HaborCenter on Friday:

Bogosian remains week-to-week

Video: After Practice: HOUSLEY

Housley said that Bogosian has been reevaluated and continues to make strides in his rehabilitation from a lower-body injury, but added that he remains week-to-week. Bogosian is still limited to off ice activity.

"He's making some good progress," Housley said. "I'd still say it's a week-to-week at this point, but he's still made strides forward, he continues to push himself and we're just going to have to focus on the day-to-day evaluation with him."

At the net-front

One area of emphasis from Housley and the players who spoke following a 5-1 loss in Columbus on Wednesday was that the Sabres hadn't done a good enough job of taking away the vision from reigning Vezina Trophy winner Sergei Bobrovsky.

The one goal they did get in that game, from Seth Griffith, came as the result of just that. Johan Larsson forced a takeaway in the Columbus zone and then was able to screen Bobrovsky just as Griffith took his shot:

Video: BUF@CBJ: Griffith snipes wrister past Bobrovsky

Getting to the net-front takes a physical toll and requires a certain mentality, but Larsson said it's also a matter of timing on behalf of both the low forward and those who are taking the shots.

"You can always do a better job trying to get to the goalie's eyes," he said. "I think we're swinging by [the net] a little too much."

Housley explained further:

"Within our system, we always have a guy hanging around down low just in case we have to send it back around the net," he said. "He's going to be the closest guy to get to the net front. I thought Columbus did a very good job of boxing us out early which didn't allow us, but we've got to find a way to fight through that.

"We've addressed it. We're going to have to spin off of checks, but certainly we can't have a goaltender seeing as many pucks as they did last game."

Lines at practice

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 29 Jason Pominville
67 Benoit Pouliot - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
28 Zemgus Girgensons - 23 Sam Reinhart - 95 Justin Bailey
17 Jordan Nolan - 22 Johan Larsson - 25 Seth Griffith / 26 Matt Moulson

6 Marc Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
19 Jake McCabe - 5 Matt Tennyson
93 Victor Antipin - 38 Zach Redmond
41 Justin Falk - 27 Taylor Fedun

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

Power play:

Unit 1: Reinhart - O'Reilly - Pominville - Ristolainen - Tennyson
Unit 2: Kane - Eichel - Okposo - Antipin - Scandella

Sharpen Up: October 27, 2017

Sabres.com

by Chris Ryndak

October 27th, 2017

The Sabres return to practice this morning. They'll play the San Jose Sharks tomorrow afternoon at KeyBank Center. It's a 1 p.m. faceoff.

Get your tickets here while you still can or bring the kids and check out our Kids Day ticket offer.

Here's what you need to know.

The Sabres were off yesterday after back-to-back games against Detroit (a 1-0 win at home on Tuesday) and Columbus (a 5-1 loss at Nationwide Arena on Wednesday). That also wrapped up a busy stretch of four games in six days.

The Sharks will be wrapping up a five-game road trip when they come to town. They lost to the Bruins 2-1 in Boston on Thursday and are 2-2-0 so far on the trip.

As you may recall, San Jose beat Buffalo 3-2 earlier this month in California.

We'll check in later this morning on any practice updates that may reveal themselves. Jourdon will have the Ice Level Practice Report and Duffer will have Sabres Now.

Zemgus Girgensons returned to the lineup on Wednesday after missing the three previous games with a lower-body injury that was the result of a blocked shot on the penalty kill. He played 14:37 in Columbus on a line with center Sam Reinhart and right wing Kyle Okposo.

Also, Zach Redmond also made his Sabre debut on Wednesday. From the Lexus Postgame Report by Jourdon:

It was his first NHL game since Jan. 21, when he was a member of the Montreal Canadiens.

Redmond made a turnover on the breakout that could have proven costly in the first period, but responded well from that point on and ended the night tied for the team lead with five shots.

"Sometimes it's just one of those nights, but that was an emphasis I wanted to put on myself," he said. "That's what we had success with [in Boston], we were just putting shots on net and going to the net hard so that was kind of my game plan personally."

October's SabreKidz Club Newsletter is out. Read all about it!

Check out highlights from this year's Halloween Skate and design your own Sabres-themed Jack-O-Lantern in this month's SabreKidz Corner newsletter.

It's not too late to sign your child up for the SabreKidz Club. Two great membership levels are available.

Check here for more details.