



Buffalo Sabres

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Goal-less Ristolainen hopes Sabres find answers with new-look power play

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

November 27, 2017

After the Sabres finished practice Monday, Buffalo coaches Phil Housley and Davis Payne met with Rasmus Ristolainen at the blue line.

"I want more from myself, and I think they want more from myself, too, and for everyone," the defenseman said.

Not surprisingly, the conversation included the Sabres' struggling power play, which will have a new look Tuesday when Tampa Bay visits KeyBank Center.

Housley has again split up the top five of Ristolainen, Jack Eichel, Ryan O'Reilly, Kyle Okposo and Sam Reinhart. They lifted the Sabres to the top of the NHL power-play chart last year but have stumbled to 30th place this season.

Eichel and Reinhart practiced with Evander Kane and defensemen Nathan Beaulieu and Victor Antipin in HarborCenter. Ristolainen, O'Reilly and Okposo welcomed forwards Jason Pominville and Matt Moulson to their unit.

"We know we've got to be better," said O'Reilly, who saw potential in the coaches' changes. "It's something we're frustrated with and something they're frustrated with. Hopefully, give it another look and let's get going."

The Sabres are 0 for 15 on the power play in the last six games, which is part of the reason the team is on a 1-6-2 slide. Buffalo is 10 for 75 with the man-advantage this season (13.3 percent), including just 4 for 38 at home (10.5 percent).

The Sabres had a 24.5 percent success rate last season, including 27.6 percent in KeyBank Center.

"It's not that different," O'Reilly said of the power-play game plan. "What worked last year isn't working this year. It's the way the game goes. You have to reinvent yourself every year.

"Last year the way we started off, things worked for us because we were confident. We found a way to put it in. I think we're doing a lot of the same things. It's just we're not getting the result and scoring, and we're not as confident as were.

"Last year, it felt like we stepped on the ice and we were going to score. This year, we're overthinking or trying to do too much. It's just not there."

The Sabres looked crisper during practice and scored a few goals. It's certain they'll also look at tape of Tampa Bay. The Lightning penalty killers have allowed a power-play goal in three of their last four games, including a 3-for-5 showing by Pittsburgh on Saturday.

"It starts with speed," O'Reilly said. "That's what we've talked about. It's coming up with speed together. If we don't have anything, get it in deep and outwork them from there.

"It's not a complicated thing."

The Sabres have had problems across the power-play board. Sometimes they can't get the puck in the zone. Other times, they don't move quick enough to find open looks. Sometimes they get looks and miss the net.

Buffalo defensemen have yet to hit the net at all. With 24 games gone, the Sabres are still the only team without a goal from the blue line. The defensemen have combined for 202 shots, and none have gone in.

"I've been thinking about it personally for myself why I haven't scored," Ristolainen said. "Early in the year we maybe were struggling with our net-front presence, and I feel that now it's been there. We've got to keep shooting, and one day it will go in, for sure."

There's no better day than the present for the Sabres. They need the boost of confidence as they attempt to turn around their 6-14-4 start.

"I'd love to see our D score a goal," Housley said. "In this league, there's not only a first layer but you've got a second layer of guys, so you've got to do things quicker. I'd like to see our D continue to try and find that shot lane and deliver a puck a lot quicker so teams can't get into the shot lanes.

"Obviously, we want more production from our defense as a whole."

Sabres Notebook: Josefson out 4 to 6 weeks; Moulson could play; Bogosian close

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

November 27, 2017

Jacob Josefson's ankle is turning into his Achilles' heel.

Just three games after returning from an ankle injury, the Buffalo Sabres center tweaked the ankle again. Coach Phil Housley announced Monday that Josefson will miss the next four to six weeks.

"It's tough," Housley said in KeyBank Center. "It's difficult when you lose a guy like that. He sort of put everybody in the right seat. We'll have to deal with it and move forward."

Josefson was originally injured Oct. 15 and missed 15 games. He returned to the Sabres' lineup Wednesday against Minnesota. Centering for wingers Kyle Okposo and Jordan Nolan, Josefson had an assist against the Wild and scored Friday against Edmonton.

He played only one period Saturday in Montreal.

"That line in particular with Nolan and Okposo really had shown some good signs of contributing offensively with their overall play in the zone," Housley said. "A lot of good possession numbers for them."

The Sabres are down to the minimum of 12 forwards after losing Josefson and demoting Seth Griffith. The winger cleared waivers Monday and was sent to Rochester. Griffith had two goals and one assist in 18 games.

"He certainly had a really good opportunity," said Housley, who wanted more compete and better offensive decisions from Griffith. "He's really a gifted scorer, talented and very fast. A lot of the games when he had opportunities to really take a hard look and had open ice to make a play or shoot the puck, he was almost looking to pass.

"Obviously, when you're not doing well, you're going to make changes."

Housley said the Sabres would decide Tuesday whether to call up a forward for the game against Tampa Bay. Either way, it's possible Matt Moulson will return after being a healthy scratch in six straight.

Moulson practiced with center Kyle Criscuolo and left wing Zemgus Girgensons on Monday. Moulson also skated on a power-play unit with Ryan O'Reilly, Rasmus Ristolainen, Jason Pominville and Okposo.

Moulson led the Sabres with 13 power-play goals last season, but he has no points in 12 games this year. Housley deemed Moulson a game-time decision.

"For right now he was fitting well into the power-play unit," Housley said. "He's just a good distributor. When he's in the middle of the box or the 1-3-1, whatever you want to call it, he sees plays pretty well and he knows the next play. Put him at the net front, I think he has a knack of tipping pucks."

Goal-less Ristolainen hopes Sabres find answers with new-look power play

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It shouldn't be long before Zach Bogosian makes his season debut. There's a chance it could be Tuesday.

The defenseman, who has been dealing with a lower-body injury since the preseason, practiced fully in HarborCenter. He was paired with Josh Gorges.

"We'll see how he reacts after this practice he had," Housley said. "I really liked the way Zach was playing before he got injured in camp. I thought he was bringing a speed game, a powerful game, a physical game, willing to get up in the play and make things happen.

"We've been missing that."

The Sabres' other defense pairs were Marco Scandella with Ristolainen; Jake McCabe with Victor Antipin; and Nathan Beaulieu with Justin Falk. Matt Tennyson, who has missed 10 games with a foot injury, practiced without a partner.

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Cory Conacher just missed out on a return to Buffalo.

The Lightning sent the former Canisius College star to Syracuse of the American Hockey League on Sunday. Conacher made his season debut for Tampa Bay on Saturday and scored during a 5-2 loss in Pittsburgh, but the former Sabres forward didn't stick for Tuesday's matchup.

Although they've lost two straight, the Lightning lead the Eastern Conference with 34 points and a 16-5-2 record. Center Steven Stamkos leads the NHL with 26 assists and 36 points. Winger Nikita Kucherov was tied for second with 34 points, including 17 goals.

Sabres Prospects: Evan Rodrigues ready to make another good impression

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

November 27, 2017

Evan Rodrigues was on the cusp of making his first NHL roster out of training camp.

The 24-year-old was impressive for the Buffalo Sabres in the preseason, seamlessly fitting into the desired plan of the new coaching staff to utilize speed.

But then came the preseason game against Toronto, an untimely hit, and an injured hand.

That put Rodrigues on the sideline to start the season. He was in good company, joining Alexander Nylander and Zach Bogosian, but it wasn't what was planned. This was the longest injury of his career, sitting on the injured reserve list from Oct. 5 through Nov. 17.

"I missed a few weeks in college, but nothing this long," Rodrigues said. "It's part of the game. Obviously it's frustrating. I thought I had a really good camp. All my work in the offseason was transferring to the ice. I had confidence with the puck. My speed increased. I was creating chances. And then the injury happened. I know how much work I put in during the summer and I was confident in my ability to make the team."

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There was no time for sulking. Rodrigues did have the opportunity to lean on the other contingent of injured Sabres as he went through his rehabilitation process. With the injury to his hand, he was able to get back on the ice to skate quickly and keep up his conditioning.

That led to him getting into a groove with the Rochester Americans pretty quickly.

Rodrigues had a four-point night Nov. 24 with two goals and two assists in the Amerks' 10-3 win over the Binghamton Devils.

"At the end of the day, hockey is hockey. It's like riding a bike," Rodrigues said, who noted he is at 100 percent both in terms of the injury and in getting his game day groove back.

He found chemistry on a line with Sahir Gill (a former teammate at Boston University) and Steve Moses (a former Hockey East rival at the University of New Hampshire). And what he's found in Rochester is a team that is winning.

"Everyone is buying in. Everyone is working for mutual success and has a positive attitude coming to the rink," Rodrigues said. "Honestly, there's nothing like winning."

The Amerks entered the week fifth overall in the American Hockey league and just five points behind the Toronto Marlies for the top spot in the North Division.

Last week, Rochester claimed five out of a possible six points and has at least one point in 10 of its last 11 games.

Among the leaders is rookie C.J. Smith, who leads the team with 13 assists and 19 points. Smith, on a three-game point streak, ranks second among AHL rookies in assists and is tied for 11th in rookie points.

The Amerks are also getting something their parent club is not — offense from the blueline. Brendan Guhle has 12 points (five goals, seven assists) in his last 15 games. Three of those goals have come on the power play.

Meanwhile forward Justin Bailey has only played one game with the Amerks since being sent down on Nov. 13. He last played on Nov. 18 vs. Binghamton where he had no points, no shots and was a minus-1.

"He's still having problems with his lower-body injury," Sabres coach Phil Housley said on Monday.

WHL

Vojtech Budik (defense, Prince Albert Raiders): Last had a point on Nov. 3. For the season he has one goal and four assists in 24 games with a minus-five rating. He has 23 penalty minutes and 61 shots on goal.

Brandon Hagel (forward, Red Deer Rebels): Scored his seventh goal of the season in a 2-1 overtime loss to the Calgary Hitmen on Nov. 25. That goal broke a four-game scoring drought for Hagel. He ranks second on Red Deer in scoring with 22 points (seven goals, 15 assists) in 25 games.

OHL

Cliff Pu (forward, London Knights): On a 10-game point streak and a six-game goal scoring streak. In the last 10 games, Pu has nine goals and 14 assists. Seven of those games have been multi-point efforts. Through 24 games, he has 12 goals (including six on the power play and one shorthanded) with 21 assists.

Austin Osmanski (defense, Peterborough Petes): The East Aurora native has one goal and 10 assists through 26 games. He ranks a plus-two, has 32 penalty minutes and 45 shots on goal.

QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (forward, Shawinigan Cataractes): After posting 11 points (eight goals, three assists) in October, has been held to one goal in seven games in November. On the season he has nine goals and five assists.

NCAA

William Borgen (defense, St. Cloud State): The junior has one goal and seven assists on the season as the Huskies are 9-2-0 overall.

Christopher Brown (forward, Boston College): Has four goals and four assists in 15 games this season. Has two multi-point games as the Eagles are on an eight-game unbeaten streak to move to 8-5-2 overall.

Jacob Bryson (defense, Providence): The sophomore picked up his ninth assist of the season in a 3-0 win against Maine on Nov. 24. He has one goal and nine assists through 14 games for the Friars.

Ivan Chukarov (defense, UMass): Missed the first month of the season with an upper body injury. Picked up his first assist of the season in a 6-3 win over Quinnipiac on Nov. 25, his fifth game of the season.

Casey Fitzgerald (defense, Boston College): Has three goals and six assists on the season, including a four-game point streak from Nov. 4 to Nov. 17.

Connor Hurley (forward, Minnesota): After three seasons at Notre Dame, Hurley transferred to the University of Minnesota. He will sit out this season per NCAA transfer rules and have one year of college eligibility left for the 2018-19 season. In 98 career games for the Fighting Irish, Hurley had 48 points (14 goals, 34 assists).

Casey Mittelstadt (forward, Minnesota): The Sabres first-round pick in 2017 has four goals and nine assists in his first 15 games at the collegiate level. He is tied for fourth nationally in freshman scoring.

Brett Murray (forward, Penn State): The sophomore scored his first collegiate goal Nov. 18, an empty netter, in a 4-2 win at Arizona State. In 15 games he has five points.

Philip Nyberg (defense, UConn): Registered his first two goals of the season in back-to-back games. Notched his first of the year Nov. 21 in a 4-1 win at Vermont then his second Nov. 25 in a 2-1 win against RIT.

Judd Peterson (forward, St. Cloud State): The senior has a two-game point streak after the Huskies swept Colorado College, Nov. 17-18. Peterson picked up an assist in a 6-1 win then had a goal (short-handed, empty-netter) and an assist in a 5-1 win.

Linus Weissbach (forward, Wisconsin): A native of Sweden, the 19-year-old freshman is on a four-game point streak as the Badgers are 9-6-2. In that span, Weissbach has two goals and four assists. In his first 15 collegiate games he has five goals and seven assists.

Maxwell Willman (forward, Brown): The senior has one goal and four assists in eight games as Brown has started the season, 4-5-0.

Europe

Rasmus Asplund (forward, Farjestad BK): In 23 games in the SHL, he has four goals and nine assists.

Marcus Davidsson (forward, Djurgardens): Has one goal and seven assists in 19 games in the Swedish Hockey League. He has three goals and an assist in three games played with the Djurgadens Under-20 team in the SuperElit League.

Oskari Laaksonen (defense, Ilves): Has two goals and seven assists in 28 games in the Under-20 league (Jr. A SM-Liiga).

Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (goalie, LeKi): Has a 2.79 goals against average and a .914 save percentage for LeKi, a second-tier league in Finland.

Victor Olofsson (forward, Frolounda HC): Has 11 goals and six assists in the Swedish Hockey League.

Housley makes changes to the power play

Seth Griffith clears waivers and is sent to Rochester

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

NOVEMBER 27, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres power play has been in a season long slump and is 30th in the National Hockey League. Buffalo is running at 13.3-percent. Last season, they had the top ranked power play and were at 24.5-percent.

Phil Housley once again changed the units on Monday going with:

Unit 1: Kane - Eichel - Reinhart / Antipin - Beaulieu

Unit 2: Okposo - O'Reilly - Moulson / Ristolainen - Pominville

Last season, Matt Moulson had eleven goals and seven assists for 18 points on the power play. This season, he hasn't even been on the power play and has sat out 12 of the 24 games.

Moulson has made a career out of producing on the PP. "I've played on good power plays," Moulson said with a laugh. "I think just being around the net, anticipating when shots or chances are going to come around the net. And obviously get into the goalie's way and pick up some rebounds. I think that's where most of my success has been as well as little plays around the net."

Housley said much of Moulson's past success dealt with net-front presence, "I think he's a good distributor, he sees plays pretty well, he knows the next play, he has a knack of tipping pucks."

It seems like the power play is set-up differently under Housley, but Moulson disagrees, "I don't think it's much different, no."

Ryan O'Reilly added, "It's not, it's not that different. What worked for us last year, isn't working for us this year."

"You have to reinvent yourself every year. We're not consistent enough in games where we're getting good looks and then we just lose sight of what we should be doing and we dig ourselves into a bit of a hole."

Two of the biggest problems have been entries and missing the net on shots. O'Reilly said entries have to improve, "It starts with speed together, get it in deep and outwork them from there, so it's not a complicated thing, it's simple, plus I've been struggling in those power play faceoffs. The last few games I've been winning a lot and that gets us possession right away, so I have to do a better job with that."

Confidence is a big thing in hockey and right now, very few of the Sabres have it. Confidence is also a word you can use for the power play, "We're not getting the result and scoring so we're not as confident as we were last year," O'Reilly said.

"Last year we stepped on the ice and felt OK, we're going to score. This year, we're overthinking it, trying to do too much, it's just not there."

Zach Bogosian will be a game-time decision for Tuesday. Housley said he wanted to see how Bogosian got through Monday's practice.

There is room on the roster because Jacob Josefson tweaked his ankle and is out 4-to-6 weeks. He will go to injured reserve.

Buffalo also has a roster spot because Seth Griffith has cleared waivers and been sent to Rochester. Housley said they'll decide on Tuesday if there will be a call-up from Rochester. It won't be Justin Bailey as he's out with a lower-body injury.

Monday's lines:

Kane - Eichel - Reinhart

Pouliot - O'Reilly - Okposo

Nolan - Larsson - Pominville

Girgensons - Crisuolo - Moulson

Scandella - Ristolainen

McCabe - Antipin

Falk - Beaulieu

Gorges – Bogosian

Sabres' Josh Gorges moving in and out of lineup

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Nov. 27, 2017

BUFFALO – The past two months have been difficult for Josh Gorges. The Sabres defenseman last sat out games 11 years ago, his second NHL season. The uncertainty that accompanies being a healthy scratch has taken its toll on the proud veteran.

“The adjustment is just trying to keep your mind right,” Gorges said Monday inside KeyBank Center. “Every day you don’t know if you’re in or out of the lineup, so that can play tricks on you mentally.”

Gorges’ status for Tuesday’s home tilt against the Tampa Bay Lightning is uncertain. On Monday, he practiced beside Zach Bogosian, who’s close to making his season debut and could play Tuesday.

That was the fourth defense tandem, meaning Gorges could be scratched against the Eastern Conference’s top team.

Gorges, 33, began the season as a healthy scratch, sitting out three games. After playing four straight contests – his presence during his debut Oct. 12 seemed to settle the team down – a lower-body injury sidelined him nine contests. He played six straight games before sitting out again Friday. He returned for Saturday’s 3-0 loss in Montreal.

Sabres coach Phil Housley wants to utilize a five-man attack, which clashes with Gorges’ stay-at-home style. So the 6-foot-1, 204-pound Gorges, the Sabres’ oldest defenseman, has often been the odd man out.

“He’s been great under the circumstances, (a) really good teammate, he approaches the game and practice the right way,” Housley said. “He’s a veteran.”

In a frank chat following Monday’s practice, Gorges acknowledged the obvious, that moving in and out of the lineup has sapped some of his confidence.

“That’s hardest thing when you get scratched, keep the confidence that you can go out there and still be a player, still be a guy that makes a difference, knowing that probably you have one of those nights where you make a mistake and that could be it for you,” he said.

When Gorges plays, he said he might hesitate or second-guess himself.

“You’re not beaming with confidence . . . you’re just trying to keep things simple, keep it where you’re limiting chances against and you’re playing hard and physical,” he said. “But even then, you’re not going to stay in the lineup if you’re playing simple.”

The undrafted Gorges, however, plays a no-frills style. He’s a defensive defenseman who has played 760 NHL games because he showcases tenacity few can match.

In 13 seasons, Gorges has hit the 20-point mark once. In 200 games with the Sabres, he has compiled three goals and 24 points.

“You go out there and do what you do, and that’s being . . . solid defensively, physical, good on the penalty kill, a good guy in the room,” said Gorges, who’s in the final season of his contract.

Still, Gorges knows all that is “not enough.”

“I have to add more to my game if I want to be in the lineup consistently,” he said. “I got to be offensive and get involved and produce points, otherwise it’ll continue to be the way it is.”

But is Gorges, who’s pointless this season, suddenly going to change his style and start producing points in his 13th year? Probably not.

Not surprisingly, Gorges’ ice time has gone down. After averaging more than 20 minutes an outing eight straight seasons, he dipped to 18 minutes, 27 seconds a year ago.

Through 11 appearances this season, he has averaged 15 minutes, 57 seconds.

There are, however, some benefits to skating a fewer minutes.

“To play 20, 25 minutes, it’s a lot and it’s hard,” Gorges said. “Sometimes when you get to 16, 17, 18 ... you have a little bit more jump, you have a little bit more energy, you don’t get gassed out as much come third period time.”

Sabres Jacob Josefson out 4 to 6 weeks; Seth Griffith sent to Amerks

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Nov. 27, 2017

BUFFALO – Sabres center Jacob Josefson is out four to six weeks after tweaking the ankle that recently sidelined him, coach Phil Housley said. Winger Seth Griffith, meanwhile, cleared waivers today and was assigned to the AHL.

So, does that mean a forward will be recalled from the Rochester Americans? Housley said that would be decided Tuesday.

For now, winger Matt Moulson, a healthy scratch the last six games, is slotted to return for Tuesday's home tilt against Tampa Bay. Moulson, 34, has zero points in 12 games this season.

Moulson, who practiced at left wing beside center Kyle Crisculo and Zemgus Girgensons today inside HarborCenter, has a spot on the power play.

Josefson looked impressive after returning from a 15-game absence Wednesday, pivoting the fourth line with Jordan Nolan and Kyle Okposo.

"It's tough, the way he came and the way he was skating, and that line in particular, with Nolan and Okposo, was really showing some good signs of contributing offensively," Housley said of Josefson's play over two games.

Josefson was injured in Saturday's 3-0 loss in Montreal. Griffith also played that night, his return after sitting out two contests as a healthy scratch.

Griffith's strong training camp earned him a roster spot. But the AHL star mustered only two goals and three points in 18 NHL appearances.

"He certainly had a really good opportunity," Housley said inside KeyBank Center. "I just thought a lot of his compete in his game, and also he's a really gifted scorer, talented and very fast. A lot of the games that he really had an opportunity to take a hard look and had open ice to make a play or shoot a puck, he was almost looking to pass.

"Obviously, when you're not doing well, you're going to make changes."

Griffith has 66 goals and 202 points in 203 career AHL games.

In other news, Housley said defenseman Zach Bogosian, who practiced again today, could make his season debut Tuesday.

"We'll see how he reacts after this practice," he said.

A lower-body injury has sidelined Bogosian since late in training camp.

Housley revamped his struggling power play today, spreading out players from the first unit. The Sabres' 30th-ranked power play is scoreless in 15 tries over the last five outings.

The units from forwards to defense:

– Evander Kane, Jack Eichel, Sam Reinhart, Victor Antipin and Nathan Beaulieu

– Moulson, Jason Pominville, Okposo, Ryan O'Reilly and Rasmus Ristolainen

"It's been a little bit stale lately, not to say that we haven't had chances on the power play, because we've had quality looks," Housley said.

RISTOLAINEN REMAINS AGGRESSIVE AFTER REJOINING SABRES DEFENSE

Spectrum News

By Ted Goldberg

November 27, 2017

BUFFALO, N.Y. - The Sabres' defense got a helping hand last week with the return of Rasmus Ristolainen. An upper-body injury cost him nine games, but Ristolainen looked just fine in his return. Ristolainen recorded two assists in a win against Edmonton and a pair of shots in a loss to Montreal.

"I get good passes, so I just try to find the net," he said. "It's hard to score if you don't get any shots to the net so I try to get as many shots as I can. If they don't get in, maybe we get a rebound or a tip."

Marco Scandella has been on the other side of Buffalo's top defensive pairing, and he sounded happy to have him back.

"We have good chemistry," he said. "We have to bring it every night, and it leads to our offense, too. We have one goal -- we have to be a big presence back there."

Despite missing nine games, Ristolainen still leads Sabres defensemen with seven assists. The Blue and Gold are still waiting for a defenseman to score a goal; through 24 games, the Sabres are the only NHL team that hasn't gotten a goal from a blueliner.

"Our D are trying to get pucks through," said head coach Phil Housley. "In this league, there's not just the first layer, but you also have a second layer of guys. You have to do things quicker. I'd like to see our D continue to work on trying to find that shot and delivering the puck a lot quicker."

"Earlier in the year, maybe we were struggling with our netfront presence," said Ristolainen. "I feel now that it's been there, we just have to keep shooting, and one day it'll go in for sure."

Scandella sees more offense coming from Sabres defensemen

Josefson out 4-6 weeks; Griffith clears waivers

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 27th, 2017

In his return from a 10-game absence against Edmonton on Friday night, Rasmus Ristolainen's stat line included just about everything one could ask for from a top-pair defenseman. He kept up with his league-leading pace at 27:32 of ice time, recorded two assists, blocked six shots and delivered five shots on goal.

The one feat that eluded him, and has eluded all of Buffalo's defensemen this season, is a goal of his own.

"I've been thinking about it personally for myself, why I haven't scored," Ristolainen said. "I've had a lot of shots, some chances ... I've got to keep working, keep shooting. Early in the year we maybe were struggling with our net-front presence, and I feel that now it's been there. We've got to keep shooting, and one day it will go in, for sure."

Sabres Now (11/27/17)

02:06 • November 27th, 2017

When Phil Housley was brought in to coach the Sabres, he came with the expectation that the team's defensemen would factor heavily into its offense. Housley was credited with aiding the development of players like Mattias Ekholm and Ryan Ellis as an assistant coach in Nashville, both of whom were key cogs in a defense corps that helped lead the Predators to the Stanley Cup Final last season.

In that sense, it might come as a surprise that the Sabres have yet to receive a goal from one of their defensemen now 24 games into their season. Ask Marco Scandella, however, and he'll tell you there are a set of factors that suggest those goals are coming.

"It's definitely coming," Scandella said. "We've been shooting the puck. We've just got to keep doing that. Forwards are going in front of the net too, blocking the goalie's vision, but we haven't gotten lucky yet. It's been a bad stretch for that but as soon as they start going in it's going to open the floodgates, in my opinion. We're going to be scoring a bunch."

Establishing a consistent net-front presence has taken time for the Sabres, and it's very much a two-way street. Forwards need to get to the hard areas around the net in order for shots from the point to have a chance, but shots also need to come through often enough to make it worth their while.

We've begun to see both of those things occur on a more regular basis. Against Montreal on Saturday, the Sabres had four defensemen tally at least four shot attempts: Ristolainen and Nathan Beaulieu generated five apiece, while Scandella and Jake McCabe both had four.

The next step, Housley said, is to improve the quickness with which those shots are taken. The Sabres had 30 of their 78 shot attempts blocked against the Canadiens.

"The thing is, our D are trying to get pucks through," Housley said. "In this league, there's not only the first layer but you've got a second layer of [shot blockers] so you've got to do things quicker. I'd like to see our D continue to work on trying to find that shot lane and deliver the puck a lot quicker so that teams can't get into the shot lane."

Phil Housley (11/27/17)

06:20 • November 27th, 2017

With that being said, not all defensive goals come from the blue line. The Predators defensemen excelled in their ability to activate both on the rush and in the offensive zone, be it jumping up to take a shot or pinching along the boards to maintain possession.

Scandella said he was used to being asked to activate offensively during his time with the Minnesota Wild, but it's a relatively new ask for the rest of Buffalo's defensemen. We saw them work to create that habit during training camp, but an onslaught of injuries has delayed the process.

"It just has to feel natural, so it's taking a little bit of time," Scandella said. "We had a few guys out of the lineup and we were playing - I wouldn't say safe - but we weren't going to take that many risks out there just because we had a few guys out and we were trying to give the team the best chance to win.

"Now that we've got a couple guys back, we're building it in practice. We've just got to make it natural. It's not about how fast you go, it's about timing. That's hockey. Reads, reactions, but it's about inches. If you're too quick on the play, it's not going to happen. If you're too slow on the play, it's not going to happen. We just have to find a happy medium."

Ristolainen has already displayed a willingness to jump in on the rush in his last two games, and the anticipated return of Zach Bogosian should help in that regard as well. Bogosian's skating ability and shot mentality looked like a good fit in Housley's system in camp, but he has yet to play during the regular season due to a lower-body injury.

Bogosian has been skating with the team as of late, and Housley said he'll be a game-time decision for Buffalo's contest against the Tampa Bay Lightning on Tuesday.

"I really liked the way Zach was playing before he got injured in camp," Housley said. "I thought he was bringing a speed game and a powerful game, a physical game. He was willing to get up in the play and make things happen.

"We've been missing that."

Top-pair potential

Housley said Saturday that the Edmonton game may have been Ristolainen's best of the season, and Scandella agreed that it was an example of the multi-faceted game the pair is capable of bringing on a consistent basis.

The duo of Ristolainen and Scandella played a key role in holding Oilers superstar Connor McDavid scoreless with just three shot attempts, while also factoring into the offense and helping with a 3-for-3 night on the penalty kill.

"I feel like that's what he can do night in and night out," Scandella said. "Shutting down the best line on the other team, blocking shots, being heavy with our big bodies. We can both skate so we just have to bring it every night."

Josefson out 4-to-6 weeks

Housley announced that forward Jacob Josefson will miss four to six weeks with an ankle injury after not returning for the second period in Montreal on Saturday. Josefson had scored a goal and an assist in two contests since returning from a prior injury that forced him to miss 15 games.

"It's tough," Housley said. "The way he came back and the way he was skating and that line in particular with [Jordan] Nolan and [Kyle] Okposo was really showing some signs of contributing offensively. Just their overall play in the zone, a lot of good possession numbers for them. It's difficult when you lose a guy like that, who sort of put everyone in the right seat. We'll have to deal with it and move forward."

Griffith clears waivers

Forward Seth Griffith cleared waivers and has been reassigned to Rochester, the team announced Monday. Griffith scored two goals and an assist in 18 games with Buffalo. He scored 44 points (10+34) in 38 AHL games for Toronto last season.

"I think he certainly had a really good opportunity," Housley said. "He's really a gifted scorer, talented and very fast. A lot of the games when he had opportunities to really take a hard look and he had open ice to make a play or shoot the puck, he was almost looking to pass. Obviously when you're not doing well you're going to make changes."

With Josefson out and Griffith in Rochester, the Sabres are without an extra forward on their NHL roster. Housley did not rule out a recall prior to Tuesday's game against Tampa Bay, but Matt Moulson practiced both on the fourth line and on the power play on Monday.

Housley said Moulson will be a game-time decision against the Lightning.

Monday's practice

9 Evander Kane - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart
67 Benoit Pouliot - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo
17 Jordan Nolan - 22 Johan Larsson - 29 Jason Pominville
26 Zemgus Girgensons - 51 Kyle Criscuolo - 26 Matt Moulson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen
19 Jake McCabe - 93 Victor Antipin
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 41 Justin Falk
4 Josh Gorges - 47 Zach Bogosian / 5 Matt Tennyson

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

With Hockey Canada watching, Pu steps up his game for London

by Kris Baker

Sabres.com

November 27th, 2017

Participating countries are expected to name their selection camp rosters this week for the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship, and one Sabres prospect has stepped his play up of late in hopes of catching the attention of the decision-makers.

London Knights forward Cliff Pu (2016, third round) had another big week, beginning with a rebound put-back for a power-play tally in Tuesday's 4-1 loss at Sarnia.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Rebound kicked right to Cliff Pu, who knocks in his 10th of the year. Pu later uses wheels, gets stopped on penalty shot #Sabres

11:54 AM - Nov 23, 2017

Replies 2 2 Retweets 14 14 likes

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Pu stayed productive Friday, netting an empty-net goal and an assist as the Knights knocked off Owen Sound 5-3.

On Sunday, Pu launched a shot bar-down to give him goals in six consecutive games, and added a pair of helpers to help power a 5-1 win over Guelph.

26 Nov

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Apparently Cliff Pu just needed to get to November. Another goal and two assists today gives him points in all 10 Nov. games and goals in eight of them (9-14-23). Goals in six straight. #Sabres

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Pu places one perfectly for his 12th #Sabres pic.twitter.com/dy0pNJF0L

10:16 PM - Nov 26, 2017

1 1 Reply 6 6 Retweets 43 43 likes

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With Hockey Canada watching closely, Pu now has points in all 10 November games, including goals in eight of them.

In total this season, the speedster has produced 12 goals and 33 points in 24 Ontario Hockey League contests.

NCAA

Sophomore defenseman Philip Nyberg (2016, fifth round) scored a wrist-shot goal in back-to-back games last week as Connecticut earned a pair of victories, 4-1 over Vermont and 2-1 over RIT.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

UConn D Philip Nyberg wrists one off the post and in for his first goal of the season and second of his NCAA career #Sabres

8:42 AM - Nov 22, 2017

1 1 Reply 4 4 Retweets 20 20 likes

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After his season was derailed by a six-game absence due to lower-body injury sustained on opening night, Nyberg is finding his game of late to boost his production to three points (2+1) and a plus-4 rating in eight appearances.

Casey Mittelstadt (2017, first round) posted a combined one assist and six shots on goal over the weekend as Minnesota was swept on the road at Notre Dame with 1-0 and 5-2 losses.

In 15 games of his freshman season, Mittelstadt has connected for four goals, 13 points and 41 shots on goal.

Boston College defenseman Casey Fitzgerald (2016, third round) and forward Christopher Brown (2014, sixth round) were each held without a point Friday as the Eagles and Harvard finished in a 4-4 tie.

Fitzgerald has nine points (3+6) and a team-high 47 shots on goal in 14 games. Brown has appeared in 15 contests, securing four goals, eight points, and 35 shots on goal.

Maxwell Willman (2014, fifth round) picked up one assist and a game-high seven shots on goal Tuesday as Brown doubled Holy Cross 4-2.

Through eight games, Willman has one goal and four points while leading the Bears with 24 shots on goal.

Jacob Bryson (2017, fourth round) produced his team-leading ninth assist Friday as Providence rolled to a 3-0 win over Maine at the Friendship Four tournament in Belfast, Ireland. Bryson finished with a minus-3 rating in Saturday's 4-2 loss to Clarkson, returns home with 10 points (1+9) in 14 games.

Linus Weissbach (2017, seventh round) notched one assist Saturday as Wisconsin lost to Mercyhurst 3-2, and extended his point to four games Sunday with another helper as the Badgers earned a series split with a 4-2 doubling of the Lakers.

At the 15-game mark, Weissbach has amassed five goals, including two of the power play and one game-winner, and a total of 12 points.

After punching one shot on goal in Friday's 2-1 win over Quinnipiac, Ivan Chukarov (2015, seventh round) produced an assist Saturday for his first point of the year as Massachusetts completed the home-and-home sweep with a 6-3 triumph over the Bobcats.

Chukarov has appeared in five games since missing the first nine due to injury, compiling six shots on goal and a plus-1 rating in addition to the point earned in the Saturday win.

Third-year defenseman William Borgen (2015, fourth round) and senior forward Judd Peterson (2012, seventh round) had the weekend off as St. Cloud State prepares for next weekend's conference series at Omaha.

Borgen has one goal and eight points in 11 games, while Peterson has a short-handed marker and eight assists over the same span.

Brett Murray (2016, fourth round) recorded one assist over the weekend as Penn State throttled Michigan State 7-2 on Friday before playing to a 2-2 with the Spartans the next day.

Through 14 games, Murray has collected five points (1+4) and 33 shots on goal.

Europe

Victor Olofsson (2014, seventh round) batted home a rebound and scored the decisive goal in the shootout Tuesday to thrust Frolunda HC to a 3-2 victory over IF Malmo Redhawks.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Victor Olofsson pesky to help gain possession, knocks in the rebound for his ninth of the year. Later he throws a quick shoulder juke and goes backhand for the shootout winner. #Sabres

5:42 PM - Nov 21, 2017

2 2 Replies 5 5 Retweets 23 23 likes

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Olofsson notched an assist in Thursday's 5-1 win over Rogle BK, and got back into the goal column Saturday with a power-play marker for the game-winner in a 5-1 dismantling of Linkoping HC.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Pardon the broken record over here, but Victor Olofsson flexed his stick for another power-play goal today and I wanted to share it. #Sabres

1:01 PM - Nov 25, 2017

11 11 Replies 12 12 Retweets 61 61 likes

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Olofsson's productive week bumps him to 11 goals, which ties for third-most in the Swedish Hockey League, and 17 points in his first 20 games.

Rasmus Asplund (2016, second round) posted an assist Tuesday as Farjestad BK defeated Vaxjo Lakers HC 4-2, and then extended his point streak to four games with a tap-in goal in Thursday's 6-4 victory over Orebro HK.

Kris Baker

@SabresProspects

Tap-in goal today for Rasmus Asplund gives him a four-game point streak. #Sabres

5:54 PM - Nov 23, 2017

1 1 Reply 3 3 Retweets 29 29 likes

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Asplund's streak came to an end in Saturday's 2-1 loss to IF Malmo Redhawks, giving the second-line pivot 13 points (4+9) through 23 contests.

Marcus Davidsson (2017, second round) notched an assist in 10:33 of action Thursday to help Djurgarden IF to a 4-1 win over HV 71.

Davidsson, who produced one shot on goal in Saturday's 4-3 overtime victory over Rogle BK, has eight points (1+7) and a plus-6 rating in 19 games while stabilizing Djurgarden's third-line center position.

LeKi goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, second round) made 24 saves Friday in a 6-1 win over Peliitat, and returned to the crease Saturday with 25 stops in a 3-0 loss to Jokipolat.

Luukkonen has appeared in 14 games for LeKi, posting an 8-6 record with a 2.79 goals-against average and a .914 save percentage.

Oskari Laaksonen (2017, third round) scored his second goal of the year Sunday as Ilves U20 snapped an eight-game losing streak with a 4-2 victory over HPK. Laaksonen, who skated for a season-high 30:28 in the contest, began the week without points in 2-1 and 3-2 losses to Assat and Karpat.

Laaksonen has logged major minutes as the top defenseman on the Ilves U20 roster, along the way posting two goals and nine points in 28 games.

OHL

Peterborough defenseman Austin Osmanski (2016, seventh round) notched one assist in the week's three games as the Petes defeated Hamilton and Sudbury before falling to Sault Ste. Marie on Saturday. Osmanski has one goal and a career-high 11 points through 26 games.

WHL

Red Deer winger Brandon Hagel (2016, sixth round) went without a point Friday in a 6-2 loss to Portland, but got back on track Saturday when he corralled a rebound off the end boards and scored in the final minute of regulation in the Rebels' 2-1 overtime loss to Calgary.

The goal, which ended a nine-game drought, boosts Hagel to 22 points (7+15) in 25 games.

Prince Albert defenseman Vojtech Budik (2016, fifth round) went without a point last week as the Raiders lost to Swift Current 3-2 on Friday and then defeated Moose Jaw the next night by the same score.

The stay-at-home Budik has gone pointless in nine consecutive games, leaving him with one goal and four assists in 24 contests.

QMJHL

Vasily Glotov (2016, seventh round) posted a combined five shots on goal last week as Shawinigan suffered a pair of defeats to Val'd'Or and Chicoutimi.

Glotov has cooled some of late, notching just one point, a goal, in his last eight contests. Through 23 games, the overage forward has nine goals and 14 points.

For more on all the youngsters in the Sabres pipeline, check out Kris Baker's website, SabresProspects.com. You can also follow him on Twitter (@SabresProspects) for in-game updates throughout the week on any Buffalo prospects that are in action.

Sharpen Up: November 27, 2017

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

November 27th, 2017

The Sabres have wrapped up a busy stretch and after a day off yesterday, they'll hit the ice for practice today, in anticipation of three games this week against some tough opponents.

The Atlantic Division-leading Tampa Bay Lightning come to KeyBank Center tomorrow night. They'll follow that up with a home-and-home set against the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday and Saturday.

Here's what you need to know.

About last game

Sabres blanked by Canadiens, 3-0

03:13 • November 25th, 2017

The Sabres were unable to string together back-to-back wins on Saturday in Montreal after defeating the Edmonton Oilers on home ice on Friday.

Buffalo was shut out 3-0 in Carey Price's return from a 10-game absence due to injury.

From the Lexus Postgame Report:

Phil Housley Postgame (11/25/17)

02:04 • November 26th, 2017

It took an overturned goal in the final minute, but the game between the Buffalo Sabres and Montreal Canadiens on Saturday night ended the same way it began: with chants of "Carey" raining down from the Bell Centre crowd.

The first such chant came when the Canadiens took the ice prior to puck drop, a "welcome back" from the Montreal fans to their Vezina Trophy winning goaltender. The final chant was in celebration of a shutout, after Carey Price stifled the Buffalo Sabres on a 36-shot night that resulted in a 3-0 loss.

Sabres coach Phil Housley said he saw almost everything he wanted to see from his team, with the exception of beating the goalie.

Sam Reinhart Postgame (11/25/17)

01:51 • November 26th, 2017

"He's the best goalie in the world," Sabres forward Sam Reinhart said. "There's always ways we can get to him. We can make things more difficult on him whether it's getting pucks quicker, our forwards getting to the net quicker, making it tough on him to see the puck.

"There's not too many times where you're going to beat him clean so there's definitely ways we can do better."

Robin Lehner Postgame (11/25/17)

02:42 • November 26th, 2017

Robin Lehner allowed three goals on 26 shots, all of which came on breaks for the Canadiens. Jeff Petry's power-play goal deflected in off the stick of Sabres defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen, Alex Galchenyuk scored off a rebound on a 2-on-1 rush and Paul Byron scored on a shorthanded breakaway.

The Sabres felt like they were still in the game up until Byron's goal, which made it 3-0 with 11:33 remaining in the third period. It was a turnover at the blue line that led to the Montreal defenseman going free for a breakaway, and he tucked a backhand shot between Lehner's pads.

"We totally had them in the third," Lehner said. "That was a bad break for us I think. It turned into a breakaway and I think I had him. I think I played him well. It went off my stick, I think I had my stick there five-hole too, but it managed to squeak in.

"It's unfortunate, but I think the guys had a hell of an effort today."

Evander Kane Postgame (11/25/17)

02:26 • November 26th, 2017

Coming up today

Stay tuned for full coverage from practice. Jacob Josefson played just 5:28 before leaving Saturday's game due to an injury. It was his third back after a 15-game absence due to a lower-body injury. We'll see if he's on the ice and what lineup changes could be in store for Tuesday.

We'll also have Kris Baker's weekly Sabres Prospects Report for you.