



# **Buffalo Sabres**

## **Daily Press Clips**

*January 1, 2018*

## **Sabres' Pominville can see how Winter Classic has evolved**

Associated Press

By VIN A. CHERWOO

Jan. 1, 2018

NEW YORK (AP) — Jason Pominville can appreciate how much everything around the Winter Classic has changed over the years.

He was with the Sabres when they played in the first one 10 years ago in suburban Buffalo, in a 2-1 shootout loss to the Pittsburgh Penguins. Now, after four seasons in Minnesota, he's back for the Sabres' return to the NHL's New Year's Day game.

"Look at this, the buildup has been phenomenal," Pominville said Sunday as he addressed reporters after the Sabres practiced at Citi Field, home of baseball's New York Mets and the site of Monday's game against the New York Rangers in the 10th Winter Classic.

"The first one was a lot of unknown, no one really knew what the turnout was going to be. Obviously the way it went, the way the fans responded, the way it looked on TV, the way the game ended, I don't think you could've asked for a better scenario for the league."

The 35-year-old right wing also played in an outdoor game for the Wild in their win over Chicago in Minneapolis in February 2016.

"And now the whole buildup around it from press conferences in the summertime, TV shows, everything around it has really been pretty amazing for us to be a part of it again," he said.

It was 16 degrees when the Sabres hit the ice for practice at 10 am and the same when the Rangers went out 3 1/2 hours later. The forecast for Monday is sunny and about the same temperature for the start of the game.

"The ice was awesome," Rangers captain Ryan McDonagh said. "Obviously the cold temps are going to make a hard, fast ice. The only thing that's going to be a little tricky is the wind. We'll see how it goes tomorrow. It felt like you were definitely outside, playing some hockey outdoors the way you grew up on."

After their respective practices, each team had time for a family skate on the ice spread across the infield of the baseball diamond.

New York coach Alain Vigneault said the distraction was a welcome change from the routine of the regular season, and the players agreed.

"It's a great break," Rangers goalie Henrik Lundqvist said. "You play 82 games and everything is a certain way, the preparation the elements of the game, and then you do this. Guys are smiling, it's a different type of atmosphere in the room and the conditions. It feels almost like a new game."

Lundqvist, McDonagh and defenseman Marc Staal will each be playing in their fourth NHL outdoor game after having led the Rangers to wins in the previous three — at Philadelphia on Jan. 2, 2012, and at Yankee Stadium against the New Jersey Devils and New York Islanders in 2014. Buffalo's Benoit Pouliot will be appearing in his fifth game outside — including the two in January 2014 while playing for the Rangers.

Lundqvist acknowledged the previous experiences make it easier to go through this one.

"It helps a little bit," the veteran goalie said. "Just to know what to expect. For me, less distractions because you know what's going on today, what's going on tomorrow. And tomorrow when the game starts you just got to be focused on the right things."

For players, the atmosphere and experience trumps any potential issues with weather conditions.

"Most kids probably dream of playing this game and I was no different," Buffalo's 21-year-old star Jack Eichel said. "I was watching (Pominville) play in the first one. ... I haven't played in a game outside before so I don't know what to expect. I think beginning of the game will be a pretty simple one and just try and figure out what's working, what's not."

The Rangers began the day holding the first wild-card spot in the Eastern Conference — one point ahead of Islanders — and were two points behind third-place Columbus in the Metropolitan Division and six behind first-place Washington.

The last-place Sabres were 16 points behind the Islanders with just 10 wins in 38 games.

“Fun to just play in the Winter Classic and take your mind off the day-to-day routine of playing and just kind of breaks that, and puts a really special emphasis on one game and you can kind of forget everything else for a few days,” said Buffalo’s Kyle Okposo, who played for the Islanders in their outdoor game against the Rangers. “You have to enjoy the moment. These are the moments in your career you’re going to remember.”

To mark the 10th anniversary of their appearance in the initial game, the Sabres gave up a home game to be in this one since the Rangers are contractually obligated to play all their home games at Madison Square Garden for a tax exemption.

## **Sabres eager to prove they belong in Winter Classic spotlight**

Buffalo News

By John Vogl

December 31, 2017

NEW YORK – As a group of New York Rangers fans walked near Madison Square Garden, they saw an ad for Monday's Winter Classic. They were not impressed by the Buffalo Sabres as the opponent.

"Of all the Eastern Conference teams for them to play," one Rangers fan said. "I'd rather even see Carolina."

It was hard to blame them. Buffalo is 10-20-8, last in the Eastern Conference and 30th in the 31-team NHL.

But as the Sabres enter the marquee game of the regular season, they're eager to prove they belong on the big stage.

"It's a great place and great opportunity to bring our best game and show the type of team we are," left wing Evander Kane said Sunday after practice in Citi Field.

The Sabres had a blast skating outside in the baseball stadium. They posed for a team photo in their special uniforms. They held a regular practice, then welcomed friends and family to the ice for a leisurely skate.

As they changed out of their equipment, they relished the fact their seven-month wait was finally over.

"Since they announced it, all of us have been looking forward to it," center Ryan O'Reilly said. "It's a cool thing. You see these games happen every year. We finally get the opportunity, and it's pretty amazing. I'm glad we're a part of it."

Though there have been miserable times in Sabreland, the team enters the showcase game feeling good about itself. Buffalo rallied for an overtime victory Friday in New Jersey, upping its record to 4-3-4 in the last 11 games.

It has the group believing it deserves to be here, no matter what the naysayers think.

"Having this opportunity on the world stage can hopefully give our team a boost because we have been playing better as of late," coach Phil Housley said. "Our guys are going to be ready. They're playing pretty well. We've got a little confidence right now, so hopefully this game will give us a boost."

Being in the Big Apple has certainly boosted morale.

"You know everyone's watching," defenseman Zach Bogosian said. "It's been awesome to be part of the experience, and I'm looking forward to it. You watch it every year, and then to be part of it is pretty cool."

"You look at different experiences or different achievements that you've had in hockey, and this is right up there for me. It's been awesome to play in the NHL. I've been lucky enough to play for 10 years, and I haven't had a chance to play in an outdoor game. I'm really looking forward to it."

The Winter Classic has grown in almost unimaginable ways since it debuted in Buffalo in 2008. Sabres right wing Jason Pominville, who played in that 2-1 shootout loss to Pittsburgh, is as amazed as anyone.

"I mean, look at this," Pominville said while motioning to a packed media room. "The buildup has been phenomenal. The first one was a lot of unknowns. No one really knew what the turnout was going to be. Obviously, the way it went, the way the fans responded, the way it looked on TV, the way the game ended, I don't think you could have asked for a better scenario for the league."

"Now the whole buildup around it from press conferences in the summertime to TV shows, everything around it has been really amazing for us to be part of it again."

Players for both teams bundled up Sunday as a brisk wind blew through Citi Field, making it feel even colder than the 16-degree reading on the thermometer. The weather is expected to be similar when the puck drops at 1 p.m.

What will be different is having more than 41,000 people in the stands rather than a handful of workers. Even the empty stadium was imposing and impressive.

"I missed a drill or two or a rep or two just kind of looking around, kind of soaking it all in," Kane said. "It's definitely something that you're fortunate to be a part of, and it's an experience I'm trying to enjoy."

Few things are as fun for professional athletes as winning. The Sabres get a chance to show the Rangers, their fans and the hockey world that things are trending in the right direction.

"It gives us the opportunity to win another game and use this momentum to find ourselves a little more," O'Reilly said. "Obviously, the hype around the game is a real cool thing to be a part of. We're trying to climb back, find ourselves, and it starts with this game here."

## Mike Harrington: In Winter Classic spotlight, Eichel looks to stay hot out in the cold

The Buffalo News

By Mike Harrington

December 31, 2017

NEW YORK — For nearly a month, Jack Eichel has been a solid player. For the last 2 1/2 weeks, he's been a flat-out superstar.

Something has clicked in Eichel's game. There's clearly more introspection going on, more of the maturity in his 200-foot play that he demanded from teammates after the Sabres' clunker two days before Christmas in Carolina.

"I don't really think I changed too much," Eichel insisted Sunday in Citi Field. "Took a couple veggies out of my pregame meal and switched up some things."

Snark of a 21-year-old aside, Eichel has definitely added more meat to his resume for this season.

With 15 goals, 20 assists and 35 points, he's the team leader in all three categories and is suddenly on pace for a 32-goal, 76-point season. He had eight goals and eight assists in December, making the 16-point month the second-best of his career (next to 17 last March).

Entering Sunday, Eichel's eight goals in December were second in the NHL to the 11 of New York Islanders winger Anders Lee. Eichel's 16 points were tied for sixth. Since Dec. 15, Eichel has an NHL-high seven goals; nobody else has more than five. In those 17 days, Eichel also leads the league in even-strength goals (6) and ES points (10).

### Buffalo Sabres practice before Winter Classic

You can keep pressing out the numbers, too. Eichel has four goals and seven points in his last four games, seven goals and 11 points in the last six games. Here's another one: Eichel's 29 even-strength points are eighth in the NHL for the season and just five off the league lead of Tampa Bay's Nikita Kucherov.

The math serves as quite a backdrop for Eichel heading into Monday's Winter Classic. It's the biggest single-game stage he's been on during his three NHL seasons, the most media attention he's gotten since the June night the Sabres drafted him No. 2 overall in Sunrise, Fla., in 2015.

Eichel pines to be included on the list of NHL stars. He's gotten excluded from it largely because of his team's poor play the last three seasons. There's no better way to grab attention than to seize it in this game, when the eyes of the hockey world will all be trained for one afternoon on the baseball stadium in Queens.

"You can just see it," linemate Zengus Girgensons said. "When he's playing a certain way, he's unstoppable. You're on a line with him, it makes hockey fun. He's a fast skater and keeping up with him is definitely a thing. It makes me faster, gets me going more."

"You see the speed, how he can escape guys, how he can hold guys off," added Ryan O'Reilly. "It's a unique skill. To be able to stickhandle and shoot at that speed, I can't do it. He's a guy that can do it all at the same time ... When he's trusting himself, he's a dangerous player and he's been really playing well for us."

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### Jack Eichel's Production by Season

| Season  | GP | G  | A  | PTS | ES G | ES A | ES P |
|---------|----|----|----|-----|------|------|------|
| 2015-16 | 81 | 24 | 32 | 56  | 16   | 19   | 35   |
| 2016-17 | 61 | 24 | 33 | 57  | 14   | 19   | 33   |
| 2017-18 | 38 | 15 | 20 | 35  | 14   | 15   | 29   |

2017-18 (Pace) 82 32 43 76 30 32 63  
(ES = Even-strength)

NHL even-strength point leaders (excludes Sunday)

Nikita Kucherov, TBL 34  
John Tavares, NYI 34  
Connor McDavid, EDM 32  
Claude Giroux, PHL 31  
Brayden Schenn, STL 30  
Sean Couturier, PHL 30  
Jaden Schwartz, STL 30  
Jack Eichel, BUF 29

Source: Buffalo Sabres, Buffalo News research

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Eichel was floating on off shifts far too often earlier in the season. He had one 18-game stretch where he scored just three goals and was invisible some nights. The Sabres were shut out for three straight games for the first time in franchise history but have points in eight of their last 11 games since then.

No coincidence it's happened as Eichel has picked up his play.

"I thought earlier in the year there were times I was playing well and not getting rewarded and I thought the same for our team," Eichel said. "But we've been a more consistent team shift in and shift out and it shows. We've figured out what's made us successful and what we can do to put us in the best position to win. We're all buying in now."

"He's the driving force of this team. There's no question about that," said defenseman Zach Bogosian. "I've been very impressed with the way he's been playing the last few weeks."

WINTER CLASSIC: SABRES VS. RANGERS  
SABRES INTENT ON ENJOYING THEIR TIME ON WINTER CLASSIC STAGE

NHL Winter Classic: By the numbers  
USA Hockey will announce Olympic teams during Winter Classic  
The raves carry around the dressing room.

"In games like this and the World Cup and other big games he's played in, he seems to always shine," said Evan Rodrigues, Eichel's Boston University teammate. "It'll be fun to watch him play. He always seems to show up in these big stages and puts on his best performance."

"It gives everybody a sense of confidence and it's fun to watch right now," said Eichel linemate and roommate Sam Reinhart. "We're starting to see everything he's putting at the net seems to be going in for him. He's been playing really well and it's been showing both for him and the team. He's well aware it starts in the 'D' zone and he's been able to clean that up and then take care of things offensively."

There's no question Eichel is going to be the captain of this team, sooner rather than later. You're not going to make any judgments from snippets of a reality show but one thing the NBC cameras have been showing inside the Sabres' dressing room is how Eichel is prominently talking between periods.

Asking around Sunday, the word I got was that it's not creative editing.

"He's definitely one of the leaders in the locker room," Girgensons said. "He's absolutely talking more, taking more charge of it. It's good to see that from him."

"He has experience now after a few years," O'Reilly said. "He's gotten more vocal and is saying a lot of good things."

This game should be right up Eichel's alley. He spent lots of times on the pond in Massachusetts as a youngster, working on his game in the elements. Monday is a chance to show what all that work produced.

"It's pretty amazing how much better you can get just by being out on the ice with skates and a stick and a puck," he said.  
"You don't need a whole lot. I played a lot of pond hockey growing up. Whether it was me by myself or a big group of guys, it's always enjoyable and I have a lot of great memories doing it."



## **Sabres Notebook: Lehner is hot; Kane is witty; Johnson is popular**

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

December 31, 2017

NEW YORK – Robin Lehner put on one layer of clothes. Then another. And another. And another.

"It's definitely cold out there," the Buffalo Sabres goaltender said after practicing outdoors Sunday in Citi Field.

It was 16 degrees and sunny when the Sabres skated in the New York Mets' baseball stadium. That's one of the few things that has cooled Lehner, who has been hot heading into Monday's Winter Classic against the New York Rangers.

He has a .935 save percentage in his last nine games, putting up a 4-2-3 record despite spotty goal support. His .928 save percentage in December ranked fifth among NHL goalies heading into New Year's Eve. He's stopped 234 of the last 246 shots at five-on-five, an impressive .951 save percentage. That includes three goals that were technically six-on-five since the opponent had its goalie pulled.

Lehner will look to keep rolling with the hockey world focused on the game.

"I'm going to try to enjoy this opportunity," Lehner said. "I'm going to enjoy the atmosphere out there and just have fun."

Lehner has been fiery off the ice, too. He's taken shots at the NHL's replay system. He's engaged in animated dressing-room conversations.

He knows he'll be even more pumped up once the teams skate out to a packed house of more than 41,000. He'll try to keep the adrenaline down, but ...

"It's probably going to be hard," Lehner said. "It's an experience that not many people get to experience. You've just got to enjoy it and have fun with it."

Lehner will get extra motivation when he looks at the other net. Swedish countryman Henrik Lundqvist will start for the Rangers, and he's 3-0 with a .933 save percentage and 2.00 goals-against average in three outdoor games.

"Hockey is a small world," Lundqvist said. "The first time I met Robin was at his house when I went to meet his dad and talk about goaltending. He was maybe 11, 12 years old and had just started playing. I did know he had big dreams, but you also understand it's a long road to make it.

"I'm really happy for him. He worked really hard to get where he is today."

The respect is mutual.

"He's the best Swedish goaltender that's ever played," Lehner said. "He's a good guy, and it's always fun playing against him."

The word "fun" repeatedly came up during Lehner's chat. He enjoyed the post-practice family skate that included his wife, sister and 3-year-old son. He liked the condition of the ice and rink, though the sun was a little tough. He even had fun putting all those clothes on.

"My skates were a little tight," he said. "I had double socks. That was the only problem I had."

If that's the only thing that goes wrong for Lehner during this event, the Sabres will be in good shape.

"Any team is lucky to be part of something like this," he said. "We've been playing better, but it's a good opportunity for us in front of a big stage. Hopefully, we'll go out and get a win and keep the momentum going."

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With the sun shining and reflecting off the ice, many Sabres opted to put on eye black. Evander Kane said it's more fashion than substance.

"It's all about style points," the left winger said with a smile. "It does absolutely nothing when it comes to sun. I'll probably spend a little bit of time in the bathroom later on tonight trying to figure out what looks best for me and bring that into tomorrow's game."

There will be legitimate tricks to handle the elements. While the sun may affect goalies, the stiff breeze blowing through the ballpark will have more of an impact.

"The pucks are real cold, which is making them bounce a little differently," center Ryan O'Reilly said. "The wind is blowing my stick around a bit, which is different."

"When the wind picks up, it gets a little dicey," added right wing Kyle Okposo. "If it's a cross wind, it kind of blows your stick a little bit, makes you miss a pass by that much. It's definitely a little bit of a factor, but same thing for both teams."

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Backup goaltender Chad Johnson was a popular guy on the ice. He knows why.

He had a camera on his mask and microphone under his gear for television purposes.

"Guys were talking to me a little more than they usually do," Johnson said. "They usually leave me alone, then I have a mike on and everyone's trying to talk to me."

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During the second intermission, USA Hockey will announce the men's, women's and sled hockey teams that will compete in the 2018 Olympics.

Former Sabres captain Brian Gionta is a lock for the men's team, while Western New York goaltenders David Leggio and Parker Gahagen are hopefuls. Buffalo native Adam Page should make the sled hockey team. The women's team could include Buffalo's Emily Pfalzer and other Beauts.

The men's team will not include NHL players since the league decided not to go to South Korea.

"Every kid dreams about trying to play in the Olympics. I'm the same way," Sabres center Jack Eichel said. "Obviously, when we found out we were not going to be able to play in the Olympics, it's tough.

"It's something that I've moved on from. I know some guys that hopefully get the opportunity to play for the United States. I'll be following it and rooting for them."

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The family skate involved kids, wives and one former Sabres coach. Ted Nolan joined his son on the ice.

"He was really flying around out there," forward Jordan Nolan said with a smile.

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Right wing Jason Pominville, the lone Buffalo alumnus from the 2008 Winter Classic, was asked to compare this Sabres team to the one that lost to the Penguins outside. He had trouble.

"I don't remember half the team, half the players," Pominville said.

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Defenseman Victor Antipin missed practice for the second straight with an illness, coach Phil Housley said.

## **The Sabres got to test out the ice at Citi Field**

The players really enjoyed practicing outside.

WGR550

PAUL HAMILTON

DECEMBER 31, 2017

Queens, NY (WGR 550) - The Sabres got their chance to take the Citi Field ice Sunday morning. Phil Housley held an hour skate followed by a family skate with the players and coaches.

It was a cold, windy morning for the skate, but there were many smiles and laughs as the players were having fun. Housley said, "You get out there and all of a sudden it hits you, you're playing the Winter Classic game and you're sort of awestruck, just with the depth perception of where the stands are, but once you get on the ice, it's just great being outdoors. It really brings you back to your childhood and memories that you created growing up."

Housley had to stop and think about the last time he played a game outside. He thought it was in high school back in Minnesota. The head coach used to love to be outdoors, by himself honing his craft, "I remember a lot about being outside. Where I grew up in South St. Paul, we had 10 outdoor rinks and that didn't include the ponds.

"I had my mom wake me up on the weekends early so I could get out there first to skate around. We had some really good ice surfaces and there's nothing like being out there by yourself skating around, imagining things, creating things until the rest of the guys came."

The thing I noticed the most standing outside at practice was the wind. It's supposed to be even windier at game-time and Housley said that will dictate the game plan, "Yes, all those elements will come into play, but we're going to put a good game plan together just using other coach's experiences here after being in this game."

Jack Eichel has to depend on his superior skill when he's on his game. With the elements coming into play, he knows he may have to adjust, "Elements will be in play, it's not like playing your usual arenas, it's going to be colder, sticks are going to be harder, your hands won't be as warm as they would be, so you just adapt as you go.

"I've never played a game outside before, so I don't know exactly what to expect, but the beginning of the game will be a simple one and just try to figure out what's working and what's not."

Jason Pominville is the one Sabres that played in the very first Winter Classic 10 years ago at Ralph Wilson Stadium. He said, "The first one was a lot of unknown, no one really knew what the turnout was going to be, but obviously the way it went, the way the fans responded, the way it looked on TV, the way the game ended, I don't think you could've asked for a better scenario for the league and now the whole buildup around it has really been pretty amazing for us."

Ryan O'Reilly has sat and watched all the outdoor games and he said he was always jealous because he wanted to play in one of those, "You see the hype around it, especially with the TV show too, yes I've always been envious, I've always been hoping that I'd finally get one and to have it happen and to do it in New York against the Rangers is a pretty special time."

One housekeeping note, Victor Antipin missed his second straight practice due to illness.

Join Brian Koziol on Monday for the pregame at noon when you'll hear my exclusive interview with NHL Commissioner Gary Bettman as well as Phil Housley and multiple players.

## Winter Classic offers Sabres' Jack Eichel national showcase

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Dec. 31, 2017

NEW YORK – Jack Eichel offered little explanation for his recent hot streak. The Buffalo Sabres center joked he took some vegetables out of his pregame meal.

Come on, Jack. Something clearly ignited you during the last month.

“I don’t really think I’ve changed too much,” Eichel said Sunday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon’s Winter Classic against the New York Rangers at Citi Field.

Eichel can insist nothing has changed, but about a month ago, after the Sabres hit rock bottom with their third straight shutout loss, the third-year star started a tear he brings into today’s game.

It’s no coincidence the Sabres are 4-3-4 with Eichel compiling a gaudy eight goals and 15 points in that stretch. For the Sabres, who have only 10 wins all season, that qualifies as a hot streak.

“I thought earlier in the year there were some times where I was playing well and not getting rewarded, and I thought the same for our team,” said Eichel, who had only seven goals and 20 points in his first 27 games. “I think that over the last few games or so we’ve been a more consistent team shift in and shift out and it’s shown.

“We’ve figured out what’s made us successful and what we can do to put ourselves in the best position to win. I think that we’re all buying in a little bit better now. I think we’re starting to come together and things have been better, but we still have a long way to go.”

Eichel, 21, has quickly morphed into the Sabres’ MVP. Right now, the second overall pick in 2015 might be playing the best hockey of his 180-game career.

The Winter Classic, of course, is the NHL’s marquee event regular-season event, a time non-hockey fans tune into a game broadcast nationally on NBC just for curiosity’s sake.

If Eichel delivers a memorable outing before millions of viewers, he could become a more recognizable name in some parts of the country.

Sure, the Sabres, who hosted the first Winter Classic in 2008, might be celebrating the game’s 10th anniversary. Still, the NHL probably wanted the team, which hasn’t made the playoffs since 2011, partly because of Eichel and some of the other youngsters.

“You’re starting to see when Jack’s our best player, we’re winning a lot of games,” said Sabres winger Jason Pominville, who played in the first Winter Classic. (Defenseman Rasmus Ristolainen) and those guys are guys who are relied upon to play in every situation, to be leaders on this team for a lot of years.

“It’s been fun to see those guys play because they’re good players now and I think the sky is the limit as far as what they can bring to this franchise.”

Sabres coach Phil Housley said Eichel took the three embarrassing losses, perhaps the lowest point in franchise’s history, to heart.

“They were tough,” said Housley, a rookie coach. “We learned from that how we have to prepare, what it’s going to take to win in this league. ... But at that point, Jack (really took) his play to another level. It was great to see, he’s a leader, he leads by example. You can see by his play on the ice.”

He added: “If you look at our games in the last two weeks, we’ve really played solid hockey, especially against really good competition, teams that are in playoff positions.”

Housley believes the unique game could boost the Sabres. He noticed how much they enjoyed their nearly 60-minute practice in chilly conditions – the wind made the temperature feel much colder than the mid-teens – at the home of the New York Mets.

“We get out there, it just sort of all of a sudden hits you that you’re playing in the Winter Classic game,” Housley said. “You’re sort of awestruck just with the depth perception of where the fans are.

“But once you get on the ice it’s just great being outdoors. It really brings you back to your childhood and the memories that you created growing up. I know everybody’s got their own examples, but guys were energetic today, you could see it out on the ice.”

## **Sabres notes: Winter Classic brings players back to childhood**

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Dec. 31, 2017

NEW YORK – Four years ago, Buffalo Sabres forward Evan Rodrigues was injured when Boston University participated in “Frozen Fenway,” an outdoor game at the historic ballpark.

At first, Rodrigues held out some hope he would return in time. Then the college junior realized he would miss the special tilt.

“At the time, (it was) heartbreaking, because you always want to play in something like this,” Rodrigues said Sunday after the Sabres prepared for this afternoon’s Winter Classic at Citi Field. “I think this tops it.”

To a man, the Sabres are excited – most couldn’t stop smiling Sunday – to play outdoors against the New York Rangers.

Some have been through this before. Winger Jason Pominville played in the first Winter Classic in Orchard Park 10 years ago. Heck, winger Benoit Pouliot is about to play in his fifth outdoor contest. Winger Jordan Nolan played in two outdoor games with the Los Angeles Kings, although both were in California.

Still, for others like Rodrigues, 24, playing a game outdoors never seemed real.

“It’s funny to say, but you don’t even really dream about something like this because you think it’s never going to really happen,” Rodrigues said. “There’s only one a year, Winter Classic at least. It didn’t really set in until I stepped out on the ice this morning.”

Skating outside at the home of the New York Mets took Rodrigues back to his childhood growing up outside Toronto.

“It brings you back to when you were a kid and actually playing outdoors, how you feel,” he said. “I can’t even explain the feeling, you honestly feel like a kid again. You’re just having fun, enjoying it, trying to take it all in.”

Sitting in the visiting clubhouse with much of his special throwback-style uniform still on following the Sabres’ nearly 60-minute practice, defenseman Zach Bogosian seemed ready for the game to start.

“You feel like a kid,” Bogosian said. “You feel like you’re back in your childhood. It’s a cool thing. You don’t lose that feeling when you play in the NHL, on a normal rink, but to do it outdoors, it just brings back that smell of being outside and the wind hitting your face. There’s really nothing like it. That’s at the core of who we are as hockey players. ...

“To have that as an adult, on a huge stage like this, it’s a cool experience.”

Bogosian, 27, skated on frozen rinks every chance he could as a child in Massena.

“Growing up in a different time, a small town, there wasn’t too much my parents had to worry about,” he said. “So you just kind of just left the house and played outdoors for as long as you could. A lot of my friends had backyard rinks and spotlights and all that kind of cool stuff so you could play at night. It was a lot of fun. It brings back a lot of good memories as a kid.”

To Bogosian, a former third overall pick who has played 547 NHL games, an outdoor game ranks among his most special achievements in hockey.

“This is right up there for me,” he said.

Sabres coach Phil Housley, who retired from his Hall of Fame playing career in 2003, never played in an outdoor NHL game. But growing up in Minnesota, he said South St. Paul had 10 outdoor rinks.

“Every day we’d be out there and your mom would have to try to get you back in the house,” he said. “This is just one of those situations where we’re really fortunate to be able to play in this game. We’re going to take advantage of it, let’s enjoy it.”

After the practice, the Sabres skated with their families, another special experience. Nolan said his family, including his father, former Sabres coach Ted Nolan, participated.

“He was out on the ice,” Jordan Nolan said. “He was flying around there.”

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The Sabres, of course, wore extra layers during Sunday’s practice. They sported winter hats early before putting on their helmets. Most also wore eye black, you would think, to the help reflect the sun.

Not for Sabres winger Evander Kane.

“It’s all about style points,” he said. “It does absolutely nothing when it comes to the sun. ... I’ll probably spend a little bit of time in the bathroom later on tonight trying to figure out what looks best for me and bring that into (today’s) game.”

The Sabres practiced with temperatures in the mid-teens, although the wind made it feel colder.

“Hopefully the wind will be at our back (for) three periods,” Housley joked.

Sabres winger Sam Reinhart said the wind made his stick feel heavier. The ice was “pretty good.” The sun, however, was tough at the start of practice.

“We got a little bit of cover later on,” Reinhart said.

At game time, temperatures will be in the low teens with no chance of precipitation and 15 mph winds, according to [weather.com](http://weather.com).

xxx

Based on Sunday’s practice, defenseman Josh Gorges and winger Scott Wilson will likely be healthy scratches today. Housley said defenseman Victor Antipin, who didn’t skate, is sick.

## Sabres' staying loose as Winter Classic approaches

WKBW

Matt Bove

Dec 31, 2017

QUEENS, N.Y. (WKBW) - Jack Eichel remembers watching the first Winter Classic featuring Jason Pominville and the Buffalo Sabres from his couch. On Sunday the two sat side by side, answering questions as teammates, as the tenth Winter Classic is upon us.

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt\_Bove

Not too much, he's fragile #Sabres #WinterClassic

1:52 PM - Dec 31, 2017

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Eichel, like so many of his teammates, remembers playing outside as a kid. But to play on this stage, at Citi Field, during the tenth anniversary, that's a dream come true.

"Most kids I probably think dream of playing in this game," Eichel told reporters. "I'm just so excited that I'm able to be a part of it and just to share this moment and this entire experience with my family and the people that have been close to me. It's pretty special, it's been a great weekend."

Pominville agreed, noting how big the game has become over the years. When it started in 2008 no one was sure if it would be successful or if there would ever be another outdoor game.

"The build-up has been phenomenal, the first one there was a lot of unknown," Pominville said. "Now, the whole build-up around it, from press conferences in the summertime, TV shows, everything around it has been pretty amazing for us to be a part of it again,"

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt\_Bove

Jack Eichel, ice in his veins #Sabres #WinterClassic

11:21 AM - Dec 31, 2017

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As the Sabres prepared for Monday's showcase they made sure to keep things light. In their first and only practice on the outdoor rink at Citi Field leading up to the game, there were plenty laughs as practice wrapped after just about 40 minutes. For the next hour players and coaches skated with their family and friends, a moment some players said will likely be one the highlights of the weekend.

"You know it's a special thing for the whole family, for all of our families," Robin Lehner said.

"Fortunately enough, my parents were able to come out and experience this with me along with some friends and other family," Evander Kane added. "Just to go out on the ice and skate with them, it's something my dad and I worked hard towards so for me it's great to be able to share that moment, especially with him."

Matthew Bové

✓

@Matt\_Bove



Asked a few of the guys if the eye black actually helps. Evander Kane had the best answer, by far #Sabres #WinterClassic @WKBW

12:15 PM - Dec 31, 2017

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## Sabres prepare for Winter Classic ahead of New Year's Day

WIVB

By Nick Filipowski

December 31, 2017

QUEENS, N.Y. (WIVB) – A common theme on the eve of the New Year and the 10th anniversary of the Winter Classic was players and coaches re-living their childhoods while skating outdoors on the rink at Citi Field.

“Bring it back to my childhood growing up in Minnesota, in South Saint Paul we had 10 outdoor rinks to choose from and every day your mom would come out and try to get you back in the house,” Head Coach Phil Housley said.

“I was lucky my dad loved the game as well and he’d get me out of school on Fridays when I was little and we’d go play pond hockey,” added Jack Eichel. “You make so many memories just by being out there. That’s where the game started and the roots of the great game we play are. It’s pretty amazing how much better you can get just by being on the ice with skates, a stick and a puck.”

While the game will be fun for both the Sabres and Rangers, the elements will play a factor on New Year’s Day, especially the glare from the sun off the ice.

“That was kind of weird. A couple times I had the puck I came up and couldn’t see,” Ryan O’Reilly said after practice.

“Hopefully the sun gets down, might have to delay it, but it’ll be difficult for sure.”

Nick Filipowski

@NEWS4\_NICK

Common theme for the #Sabres -- battling the elements and especially the glare off the ice for the #WinterClassic

@news4buffalo

3:19 PM - Dec 31, 2017

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“Adapt as you go. I don’t know what to expect,” Eichel added. “I think the beginning of the game will be a simple one and just try to figure out what’s working and what’s now.”

“I hope the wind is at our backs for three periods,” joked Housley. “I know that’s not going to be the game. We’re going to put a good game plan together. Just being in this game and what it’s all about — we’ll be ready to go.”

Nick Filipowski

@NEWS4\_NICK

Eichel: "It's not too cold."

Scandella: "Oh it's chilly."

Eichel: "It's refreshing." #Sabres take ice at Citi Field @news4buffalo

10:05 AM - Dec 31, 2017

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For the Sabres 2018 marks a fresh start for the club which has just 10 wins through December — their fewest since the 2002-2003 season. After a strong effort against the Islanders (an OT loss) and comeback win over the Devils on Friday, Buffalo is hoping the NHL’s marquee event serves as a springboard for a strong second half to the season.

“You know I think that the last few games we’ve been a more consistent team, shift in and shift out,” Eichel said of the Sabres. “We’ve figured out what’s made us successful and we’re putting ourselves in a position to win and I think we’re all buying in a little bit better now. We’re all starting to come together.”

Nick Filipowski

@NEWS4\_NICK

#Sabres are hoping the #WinterClassic is a big springboard for a strong 2nd half of the season @news4buffalo

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Since being shutout in three consecutive games at the end of November and into December, the Sabres have battled and earned points of eight of the final 12 games of their 2017 slate.

“Another opportunity to win another game and use this momentum to find ourselves even more,” O’Reilly added. “The hype around the game is cool to be a part of but we’re trying to claw our way back and it starts with this game here now.”

“Any team is lucky to be a part of something like this,” said Robin Lehner who will start in net opposite of Henrik Lunqvist. “I think we’ve been playing better. It’s a good opportunity for us on a big stage, get a win and keep the momentum going.”

[View image on Twitter](#)

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Nick Filipowski

@NEWS4\_NICK

#Sabres goalie Robin Lehner jokingly said he has 4 layers on under his pads @news4buffalo

9:55 AM - Dec 31, 2017

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Puckdrop for the Winter Classic is set for 1 p.m. on New Year’s Day.

## Sabres Return to Spotlight for the Winter Classic's 10th Anniversary

New York Times

By ALLAN KREDA

DEC. 31, 2017

The Buffalo Sabres hosted the Pittsburgh Penguins at Ralph Wilson Stadium in the first Winter Classic 10 years ago. Credit Mark Blinch/Reuters

On Jan. 1, 2008, the Buffalo Sabres hosted the first Winter Classic, an outdoor game experiment by the N.H.L. The “snow globe” game at Ralph Wilson Stadium, in which Pittsburgh’s Sidney Crosby scored the shootout winner, was a hit.

The Winter Classic claimed a spot on the New Year’s Day sports calendar, traditionally reserved for college football, and has consistently been the highest-rated game of the N.H.L. regular season.

Since the opener in Orchard Park, N.Y., there have been outdoor games at distinctive ballparks like Wrigley Field in Chicago and Fenway Park in Boston and a frigid contest between the Detroit Red Wings and the Toronto Maple Leafs in Ann Arbor, Mich., that drew more than 105,000 fans. The N.H.L. has expanded its outdoor offerings to include multiple stadium games a year, like the one in Ottawa about two weeks ago to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the league’s first games.

The last 10 years have been less successful for the Sabres, who will return to the Winter Classic on Monday, playing the Rangers at Citi Field.

Buffalo has the Eastern Conference’s worst record, with only 10 wins in 38 games. That is by far the fewest wins of any team to participate in the Winter Classic.

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The season before the first Winter Classic, the Sabres had a league-best 53 wins, paced by the offensive prowess of Chris Drury and Daniel Briere, and they advanced to the conference finals for a second consecutive year. They have not won a playoff series since and have not reached the postseason since 2011.

Despite gaining high draft picks that yielded the heralded forwards Jack Eichel and Sam Reinhart, the Sabres are struggling even more under their first-year coach, Phil Housley. He is the team’s fifth coach in six seasons.

But when it came to planning the Winter Classic’s 10th anniversary, those troubles did not matter to the N.H.L. or NBC Sports.

Photo

Much has been expected of Jack Eichel, right, since he was taken second over all by the Sabres in the 2015 draft. Credit Kevin Hoffman/USA Today Sports, via Reuters

“The Sabres deserve this,” said Sam Flood, executive producer of NBC Sports. “They were the ones that took the risk. The Sabres were the club that stepped up and turned it into a must-see TV moment. I think it changed the way hockey was viewed.”

Jason Pominville, now an elder statesman with the Sabres at 35, recalled being awed participating in the first Winter Classic. He expressed confidence that the Sabres would bring a spirited effort to the national audience despite their dismal record.

“It’s easy to get motivated for these type of games,” said Pominville, a former Sabres captain. “You have to put aside the fact we’re not playing the way we would want to, and just go out there and enjoy it.”

The Sabres pinned their hopes on Eichel, who came out of the once-in-a-generation draft class in 2015 that included Connor McDavid, the league’s reigning most valuable player. Eichel has been among the team’s offensive leaders in his first three seasons, but he has not had the impact in the standings that McDavid has had in Edmonton.

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Pominville said he understood the microscope Eichel was under and hoped national attention could inspire his young teammate. Eichel, 21, recently signed a 10-year, \$80 million contract extension that begins next season.

“He deserves to be there on the big stage,” Pominville said of Eichel, who has 15 goals this season. “He’s a guy who handles it well. He’s an elite player.”

Eichel, who is from North Chelmsford, Mass., said he was excited by the prospect of his first outdoor game.

“I’ve never played outside before. I don’t really know what to expect,” he said. “I’m excited I’m able to be part of it, able to share this moment and entire experience with my family. For people that are close to me, it’s pretty special.”

Marc Stein

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Because of tax exemption rules in New York, the Sabres will be the home team against the Rangers at Citi Field, the Mets’ stadium. The Rangers, one of the league’s most popular teams, will be playing in their second Winter Classic and their fourth outdoor game over all.

The Rangers edged the Flyers, 3-2, at Citizens Bank Park in Philadelphia in the 2012 Winter Classic, and they played two games at Yankee Stadium in January 2014 as part of that season’s Stadium Series.

The forecast is among the coldest for any outdoor game played in the United States. The average temperature through 23 previous outdoor games is 35.5 degrees, but Monday’s forecast for New York is a temperature around 20 degrees.

It appears Buffalo’s weather will come with the Sabres, and that makes Jon Miller happy.

Miller, the president for programming at NBC Sports, recalled the amazement he felt driving to the stadium on the morning of Jan. 1, 2008, and seeing tailgating fans everywhere. It was a football party before a hockey game.

Continue reading the main story

“Seeing the parking lot packed with people grilling, throwing footballs and playing street hockey, it reminded me of the parking lot before an A.F.C. championship game in Buffalo,” Miller said. “It has proven to be a special event.”

For the veteran Rangers defenseman Marc Staal, the game is a treat amid the grind of the season.

“The atmosphere, there’s nothing like it,” he said. “It brings you back to being a kid and playing the game in its purest form. That’s always a lot of fun.”

Pominville, who also played in an outdoor game in Minnesota against Chicago in 2016, said that he was grateful for the chance to participate in another Winter Classic and that he had spoken to teammates about the importance of embracing the experience and sharing it with family.

“My kids — who are 8 and 6 — weren’t even born when I played my first one,” he said. “So this game for me will mean even more.”

He added: “Every year, even when I’m not playing, I enjoy watching it just being a fan. It’s a day to celebrate hockey.”

## **Sabres happy to be at Winter Classic, but focused on securing two points vs. Rangers**

Newsday

By Steve Zipay

December 31, 2017

Beyond the buildup, the weather, the special jerseys, the national stage and the larger crowds, Jason Pominville recalled one thing that can be overlooked in a Winter Classic: It's a regular-season matchup and points count.

Pominville, who played in the first Classic in January 2008, when the Sabres lost to the Penguins 2-1 in a shootout on Sidney Crosby's goal in snowy Buffalo, said Sunday: "I believe we missed the playoffs by one point, so it could've been that shootout that made the difference."

Time can diminish memories: That season, the Sabres finished four points out of the last playoff spot — the top eight finishers, including the three division winners, made the post-season then. But Pominville's underlying premise remains accurate. A couple points can make a difference in the final standings or provide a springboard to better times.

Both the Sabres and Rangers can use the points when the puck drops Monday: Coach Phil Housley's squad stumbled out of the gates, but found its footing in the last few weeks. The Rangers are in a wild-card spot in the East, but face fierce competition in the Metropolitan Division.

"It's a great opportunity for us," Housley said after practice at Citi Field. "Guys were energetic today; I think our team is moving in the right direction. We'd like to be in a better position at this point in the season... Each situation brings its own unique presentation as far as what we've got to do to win a hockey game. We've got a little bit of confidence right now, so hopefully this situation will give us a boost."

Some players just liked the location. "Just being around where I played is going to be fun," said former Islander Kyle Okposo.

To be sure, temperature, wind and sun glare present an unusual situation, especially for players who haven't played in an NHL outdoor game and need to adapt.

"The elements are in play," said Jack Eichel, 21, who grew up in North Chelmsford, Mass. playing pond hockey. "Sticks are going to be harder, hands aren't as warm as they would be. Obviously the beginning of the game will be pretty simple, and you just try to figure out what's working and what's not."

## **Rangers, Sabres prepared for cold, windy Winter Classic conditions**

NBC Sports

By Sean Leahy

Dec 31, 2017

NEW YORK – Jordan Nolan of the Buffalo Sabres wasn't sure how effective his eye black would be should it be sunny during Monday's Winter Classic against the New York Rangers at Citi Field. One thing he was sure about, though, was how cool he thought it looked.

Eye black. Lotion. Heated benches. Toques. Layers upon layers of clothing. These are some of the tools available to players when they take part in these outdoor games. The forecast for Queens, New York on New Year's Day calls for a high around 16 degrees with a windchill making it feel like 1 degree.

As the game goes along, the players will be able to adjust to the elements, but early on, things such as sun, snowflakes and wind, which are expected to be around 16 mph, could affect play.

"All those elements are going to come into play," said Sabres head coach Phil Housley. "Hopefully the wind will be at our back for three periods. I know that's not going to be the case but we're going to put a good game plan together just using other coaches' experience here, being in this game and what it's all about. We'll be ready to go."

Both teams got to experience the elements and adjust to their surroundings on Sunday during practice day at Citi Field. The cold was obvious, but wind was a noticeable factor, one that will play a role when puck drops on Monday afternoon.

"It's in play," said Sabres forward Kyle Okposo. "It depends which way you're going. If it's a crosswind it kind of blows your stick a little bit [and] makes you miss a pass by that much. [It's] definitely a little bit of a factor but it's the same thing for both teams."

The first Stadium Series game at Yankee Stadium in 2014 between the Rangers and New Jersey Devils was delayed due to a sun glare. Even with eye black, glare combined with the unique sightlines a hockey rink in the middle of a baseball stadium brings can provide plenty of tough moments for both goaltenders and skaters. Sabres goaltender Robin Lehner called the sun "a little challenging," while Ryan O'Reilly added that a few times he had difficulty seeing while carrying the puck up ice.

Outdoor games are never a typical hockey experience, which is why most teams try to keep their game plan simple: get the puck in deep, get it out quickly, capitalize on mistakes. "The goals that happen are usually bang-bang plays," said Sabres forward Kyle Okposo, who played in the 2014 Stadium Series at Yankee Stadium.

Between the Sabres and Rangers, 22 players have participated in at least one NHL outdoor game. There will be plenty of newbies experiencing the pomp and circumstance that Monday afternoon will bring and then you'll have someone like Benoit Pouliot, who will be suiting up to play outside for the fifth time in his career.

Another outdoor game vet is Rangers goaltender Henrik Lundqvist, who will be playing in his fourth. He's won all three that he's started and by this point he's pretty well-educated on how to handle whatever conditions Mother Nature throws at him.

"It's about layering up and understanding what you need to be wearing," Lundqvist said. "The ice was great, really fast. I really enjoyed practice. It got a little cold in the end during the family skate. Overall, it felt to be out there. A little windy, but we'll see [Monday]. I think it's going to be a great hockey game."

## Smiles, memories abound as Sabres take the ice for outdoor practice

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

December 31st, 2017

NEW YORK - It's been said so much, it's almost become cliché. When players have spoken throughout the buildup to the 2018 Bridgestone Winter Classic, they've almost always cited how playing in the event might take them back to their childhoods. Many of them learned the game on ponds or outdoor rinks.

Seeing the smiles on the players' faces as they took the ice for practice at Citi Field on Sunday, however, one might have thought they were kids. As they skated through their drills and then welcomed their families onto the ice, the statement felt less like a cliché and more like reality.

Zach Bogosian, who has yet to play an outdoor game in 10 NHL seasons, may have summed it up best.

"You feel like you're back in your childhood," he said. "You don't lose that feeling when you play in the NHL, on a normal rink, but to do it outdoors - it just brings back that smell of being outside and the wind hitting your face. There's really nothing like it.

"That's at the core of who we are as hockey players ... To have that as an adult, on a huge stage like this, it's a cool experience."

Jack Eichel skated with his father, Bob, following the practice and said it took him back to his youth in North Chelmsford, Massachusetts. Bob would pick up Jack from school on Fridays and take him to the pond, where they'd play until the lights went dark.

"You make so many memories just by being out there," Eichel said. "That's where the game started and where the roots of this great game we play are ... It's pretty amazing how much better you can get being on the ice with skates and a stick and a puck. You don't need a whole lot."

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Buffalo Sabres



@BuffaloSabres

Family time on the ice ❄️ #Sabres #WinterClassic

2:28 PM - Dec 31, 2017

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Evander Kane said that the environment not only brought back childhood memories, but perhaps even some child-like tendencies.

"I was kind of caught, I think I missed a drill or two there, a rep or two, just kind of looking around a little bit and kind of soaking it all in," Kane said. "It's definitely something that you're fortunate to be a part of."

This year's Winter Classic marks the 10th anniversary of the event, a tradition that began when the Sabres hosted the Pittsburgh Penguins on a snowy New Year's Day in Orchard Park back in 2008. Jason Pominville is the only current Sabre to have played in that game.

In fact, 17 of the 23 players on Buffalo's active roster entered the NHL in the time since that first Winter Classic was played, which begs the question: has this event become a game that players put on their career bucket list?

"One hundred percent," Bogosian said. "You look at different achievements or different experiences that you've had in hockey, this is right up there for me."

"Yeah, of course," Eichel said as he sat next to Pominville. "Most kids, I think, probably dream of playing in this game and I was no different. I was watching him play in the first one."



Of course, practice also served as a test run for the conditions that players might face come Monday. Many of the Sabres have played in outdoor games already in their career, including forward Kyle Okposo, who after Monday will have played at the homes of both the New York Yankees and the New York Mets.

"Sticks get really cold," Okposo said. "That's the battle, really. You have to keep the sticks warm and everything feels normal. But it wasn't too bad. There was a little bit of a glare, for sure, and then when the wind picks up it gets a little dicey. But it was pretty good."

With so many factors in play, Okposo said the key to the game will be to not try and do too much.

"You've just got to keep it simple," he said. "Try and get the pucks deep, get the pucks out, and not be too fancy out there."

The Sabres enter the game having earned three points in two games since returning from their holiday break, including an overtime win against New Jersey on Friday. The turnaround in their play, however, goes back further. While they have left points on the table, the Sabres have earned at least one point in eight of 11 games since winning in Colorado on Dec. 5.

"I think that over the last few games or so we've been a more consistent team shift in and shift out, and it's shown," Eichel said. "We've figured out what's made us successful and what we can do to put ourselves in the best position to win. I think that we're all buying in a little bit better now."

"I think we're starting to come together and things have been better, but we still have a long way to go."

It's been Eichel steering the wheel throughout the run. The forward has scored eight goals and eight assists in his last 12 games, and he's produced four multi-point outings (and three multi-goal outings) since scoring his first career hat trick on Dec. 15.

"Jack has really taken his play to another level," Housley said. "It was great to see. He's a leader, he leads by example. You can see by his play on the ice."

"He's the driving force of this team, there's no question about that," Bogosian said.

Eichel and the Sabres now have a chance to prove on a national stage that they're better than their record suggests. A win over the Rangers would be the perfect cap to what's already been a memorable stay in New York.

"I'm just so excited that I'm able to be a part of it, just to share this moment and this entire experience with my family and the people who have been close to me," Eichel said. "It's pretty special. It's been a great weekend."

So, does eye black actually help?

According to Kane, no. He was asked whether wearing eye black on the ice actually helped fight the sun, and he admitted it was purely aesthetic.

"It's all about style points. It does absolutely nothing when it comes to the sun," he said. "I'll probably spend a little bit of time in the bathroom later on tonight trying to figure out what looks best for me and bring that into tomorrow's game."

A tour of Citi Field

For those wondering what it might be like to walk from the dressing room out onto the field on Monday, we've got you covered. Dan Dunleavy and Brian Duff gave a virtual tour on Twitter following practice, which you can watch below:

Buffalo Sabres

✓

@BuffaloSabres

We're live at @CitiField to give you a little tour of the #WinterClassic setup!

[https://www.pscp.tv/w/bRfLMTU1Mzc5Mnwxa3ZKcGtSZ25ad0dFSMkY4CGGOMUnSRqJci8Oeg93inW1jxIrXLz\\_4IKxmJo=](https://www.pscp.tv/w/bRfLMTU1Mzc5Mnwxa3ZKcGtSZ25ad0dFSMkY4CGGOMUnSRqJci8Oeg93inW1jxIrXLz_4IKxmJo=) ...

12:58 PM - Dec 31, 2017

Buffalo Sabres @BuffaloSabres

We're live at @CitiField to give you a little tour of the #WinterClassic setup!

pscp.tv

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In the dressing room

Hear from O'Reilly, Okposo and Housley in the videos below.

Kyle Okposo (12/31/17)

02:33 • December 31st, 2017

Ryan O'Reilly (12/31/17)

02:53 • December 31st, 2017

Phil Housley (12/31/17)

04:53 • December 31st, 2017

Lines at practice

Victor Antipin was absent for the second straight practice due to an illness. Ryan O'Reilly, who had a maintenance day on Saturday, returned to the ice and centered a line with Kane and Jason Pominville.

Here's how the full lineup looked at practice:

28 Zemgus Girgensons - 15 Jack Eichel - 23 Sam Reinhart  
9 Evander Kane - 90 Ryan O'Reilly - 21 Kyle Okposo  
67 Benoit Pouliot - 71 Evan Rodrigues - 29 Jason Pominville  
22 Johan Larsson - 10 Jacob Josefson - 17 Jordan Nolan  
20 Scott Wilson

6 Marco Scandella - 55 Rasmus Ristolainen  
19 Jake McCabe - 47 Zach Bogosian  
4 Josh Gorges - 82 Nathan Beaulieu  
41 Justin Falk

40 Robin Lehner  
31 Chad Johnson

## **Budik records 2 assists for Czech Republic, Sweden keeps rolling**

Kris Baker's World Junior Championship Update for Dec. 30, 2017

by Kris Baker

SabresProspects.com

December 31st, 2017

Defenseman Vojtech Budik (2016, fifth round) recorded two assists while leading his club with 21:16 of work Saturday as the Czech Republic got past Belarus 6-5 in Group B action at the 2018 IIHF World Junior Championship.

Budik, who also recorded his first shot on goal of the tournament in the victory, was more active with his skating game against the Belarusians than he had been in the previous two contests, augmenting his safer defensive style by carrying the puck longer and employing a more attacking mentality.

After an opening period of clearing rebounds and making short passes out of the zone, it was a tale of two shifts for Budik to begin the middle frame.

On his first, a miscommunication behind the net with goaltender Josef Korenar led to Budik getting outworked and Belarus getting the puck in the back of the net to go up 2-0.

-For tickets and tournament information, please visit [BuffaloWorldJuniors.com](http://BuffaloWorldJuniors.com).-

Minutes later after the Czechs had already gotten a goal back, Budik carried the puck into the center of the Belarus zone and created chaos that resulted in a goal by defensive partner Libor Hajek (TAM). With a helper on the play, Budik earned his first point of the tournament.

With the teams trading goals in the third period, Budik picked up his second assist of the afternoon when he emerged from a scrum behind the Czech net, skated the puck all the way out of his end and hit Marek Zachar in stride to spring him down the left side for a pretty finish.

Elsewhere in Group B, Alexander Nylander (2016, first round) continued to be a creative force, picking up one assist and adding four shots on goal as Sweden remained undefeated with a 7-2 victory over Switzerland.

Nylander's offensive zone work was noticeable from the get-go as he took a pass in the lower left circle for a quality scoring chance before having the puck roll off his stick. On his second shift, he sent a heady cross-ice feed for another prime opportunity.

Nylander's assist came on his third shift of the day on a play that was nearly identical to the one that saw him earn his second helper in Tuesday's opener versus Belarus.

Set up on the left side of Sweden's power play, Nylander accepted pass from Elias Pettersson (VAN) and quickly zipped a perfect shot-pass to the doorstep right on the blade of a camped-out Lias Andersson (NYR) for the deflection goal.

The helper boosts Nylander to five points (1+4) through Sweden's first three group stage games. His 12 shots on goal are tied with Pettersson for the team lead.

Sweden's checking line centerman Marcus Davidsson (2017, second round) continued to make an impact despite limited minutes with his speedy two-way style that saw him buzz the Belarus net all game long and break up play with an intense backcheck.

Like Nylander, Davidsson was making things happen from his very first shift as he cut inside for a shot on goal.

On his next shift, Davidsson took a pass and again got inside position on the defender to draw a penalty on his way to being stopped on the backhand.

Later in the contest, Davidsson's hard-charging mindset saw him drive to the left post without the puck before getting stopped by the goaltender's outstretched blocker.

Davidsson did not record a point in the victory, but he did receive 20 shifts for a total of 12:24 of work, his most thus far in the tournament, and tied two others with a team-best five shots on goal.

Through three games of the Championship, Davidsson has one goal and seven recorded shots.

In Group A action, goaltender Ukko-Pekka Luukkonen (2017, second round) earned his third-straight start for Finland, stopping 24 of 26 shots to backstop a 5-2 victory over pesky Slovakia.

Luukkonen, whose size and ability to take away the low part of the net has forced shooters to aim for the high corners through three contests, guarded Finland's 1-0 lead perfectly through 34 minutes before the Slovaks capitalized on a neutral zone turnover and quickly transitioned to even the score.

Luukkonen read the play well, but just as he was coming out of the blue paint to cut the angle down, Martin Bodak released a shot from high between the circles that got underneath him just as he dropped to his knees.

Following the goal against, Luukkonen would continue to play a strong positional game that saw him get set and square to the shooter and work to see around screens until the 50th minute, when the Slovaks would again connect for an even-strength tally.

After a winning a faceoff in the Finland end, the Slovaks got the puck behind the net and worked it to the front to Samuel Bucek, who got underneath the defender to flip the puck over a lunging Luukkonen.

Luukkonen has gone 2-1 with a 2.36 goals-against average and a .892 save percentage, allowing seven goal on 65 shots.

#### Sunday's action

CZE (Budik) vs. SUI - Noon at KeyBank Center

USA (Casey Mittelstadt) vs. FIN (Luukkonen) - 4 p.m. at KeyBank Center

SVK vs. DEN - 6 p.m. at HarborCenter

SWE (Nylander and Davidsson) vs. RUS - 8 p.m. at KeyBank Center