



Buffalo Sabres

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Sabres GM Jason Botterill opens up on effort, Eichel, chats with Pegula

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

November 30, 2017

The losses are painful enough. What irritates Buffalo Sabres fans even more is hearing that players lack pride and effort.

They've heard it game after game.

"Where some of the frustration comes from, even our own players, I think there is a work ethic," Sabres General Manager Jason Botterill said Thursday. "I think they are working, but on a game-by-game basis it's one player working hard and not all of the players working hard at the same time. Or you see one line going well, and the other lines not going well. The penalty killing has improved this year, but then the power play's slipped.

"There has to be more of a consistency for us to be a consistent team."

They've been consistently bad, but that's not what Botterill was expecting as the new general manager. Buffalo is 6-15-4 as it starts back-to-back nights against Botterill's old team, the Pittsburgh Penguins.

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"I think we could have a long discussion on are we better than our record, worse than our record," Botterill said in KeyBank Center. "The bottom line is our record's our record. What we're looking for, we're looking for players to help us out of our situation here, players who want to improve and want to become a part of the solution here."

To find the right players, Botterill is evaluating Buffalo and Rochester. The teams are wildly different.

The last-place Sabres are 1-7-2 in the last 10 games and, generally speaking, in a miserable place. Players are much happier in Rochester as the Amerks have started 11-5-4, good for sixth overall in the 30-team American Hockey League.

It's tough to sell patience and the future to a fan base that has heard the sales pitch for too long, but there's not much choice as the Sabres continue to bottom out.

"We're very excited about the steps a team like Rochester has made," Botterill said. "Are we where we want to be? No, but at least especially at forward down in Rochester, I think there's a lot of internal competition down there for the call up.

"It's something we have to do more throughout our entire organization, have more internal competition for spots up here in Buffalo, more internal competition for our prospects and guys we want to sign, and guys ready for a call up from the American Hockey League up to the National Hockey League."

It was evident from his hiring in May that Botterill would be more cheerful and upbeat than his predecessor, Tim Murray. The GM had good things to say on several topics, none more so than organizational communication.

Botterill is impressed with how coach Phil Housley is critiquing the players after games and teaching them at practice. The GM likes how the Sabres' leaders are talking with each other and Housley. He likes the regular chats between the coaches in Buffalo and Rochester.

Botterill has also had plenty of talks with owner Terry Pegula.

"He's been very supportive with everything that's been going on," Botterill said. "From Day One when I took the job here, I had to make sure that we were on the same page of what we had to accomplish here and the steps we had to make.

"We've sat down in meetings to discuss where our team's at, not just the situation in Buffalo but our entire organization. Like any owner, like our fans, you want better on-ice success and a better on-ice record. What we've tried to explain to him is, 'Hey, these are the steps we want to take to improve that record.'

"This is a very difficult league. There's a ton of parity throughout the entire league, and I've loved the compete that our team has shown and the resilience to show that it can come back, but we can't be chasing games all the time. We have to have that desperation, that jump at the start of the game."

As the Sabres struggle, reviews have been mixed for star center Jack Eichel. People are looking at his demeanor and numbers, which include seven goals and 19 points in 25 games.

"There's mixed reviews I'm sure for Jack because of the offensive production," Botterill said. "But what I've absolutely loved from Jack is that competitive nature that he has and has shown. He's interacted with Phil, and he wants to improve as a player."

"He's more had more difficult matchups this year. Simple things such as the penalty kill, he's done a very nice job on that aspect. His speed is such an asset, and I think you've seen that in recent games. I think he's utilized it a little bit more. I think the only thing that's sort of missing now is success on the power play."

"I've seen it throughout the league. Star players have that success on the power play, then it carries over more to even strength. Hopefully, we can get our power play going here and not only give our team a spark there, but I think it will give our players on the power play – not only Jack but all of our players on the power play – more confidence with the puck at even strength."

Botterill has decisions coming on whether to trade scoring leader Evander Kane – he says he hasn't decided yet – and whether to allow Alex Nylander to represent Sweden at the world juniors in Buffalo from Dec. 26 to Jan. 5. That might happen. Botterill will continue to talk with the Amerks forward and Swedish hockey officials.

"I'm a big believer of the tournament," Botterill said. "I think it's a great tournament for young players to play against their peers and represent their country."

"The fact the tournament is right here in Buffalo versus him traveling halfway around the world makes it an easier possibility."

Murray allowed Nylander to represent Sweden at last year's world junior tournament. The winger had five goals and 12 points in seven games.

Nylander has played just six games in Rochester this season after suffering an injury during the Sabres Prospect Challenge in September. The 19-year-old has one goal and three points.

"We'll continue to look at where his game's at over the next little bit, continue to talk to him and our coaches down in Rochester," Botterill said. "We're just looking at hey, what's the best thing for his development path right now?"

Sabres GM Jason Botterill still weighing what to do with Kane

The Buffalo News

By John Vogl

November 30, 2017

Jason Botterill is very happy with Evander Kane. The Buffalo Sabres' general manager is also unsure whether he'll keep or trade the high-scoring winger.

On one hand, trading Kane seems like a bad idea since he is the only consistent scorer on the NHL's lowest-scoring team. On the other, Buffalo has multiple needs and could lose the pending unrestricted free agent during the offseason anyway.

Botterill has yet to decide which hand has more leverage.

"That's accurate," Botterill said Thursday. "You look statistically, Evander's done a great job for us. We're a team that's looking for more goals, and he's scored goals.

"We've been very happy from Day One with how Evander's come into training camp focused on our team and focusing on helping our team try to improve. Statistically, he's done a great job."

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Kane has 12 goals and 23 points in 25 games for Buffalo, putting him on pace for 39 goals and 75 points, both of which would be career highs under new coach Phil Housley.

"I think Phil deserves a lot of the credit with Evander," Botterill said. "He reached out to build a relationship early in the season, and Evander's come in here from Day One of training camp and has performed very well for us.

"We've been very happy with his play."

But as Anaheim and New Jersey showed Thursday, general managers are talking and ready to trade. The Ducks sent a package involving defenseman Sami Vatanen to New Jersey in exchange for forward Adam Henrique and others.

Botterill was watching.

"That's the balancing act you're always going to get, just like you saw with the trade today," the GM said. "I'm sure if you talk to both those teams, they're excited about the players they got, but it's also disappointment about the players you have to let go. That's always the things you're looking at, trying to find that mix."

Story topics: Evander Kane/ Jason Botterill

Linus Ullmark remains a happy guy, on and off the ice

The Buffalo News

By Amy Moritz

November 30, 2017

On Wednesday night, Linus Ullmark was in Utica. He made 31 saves for the Rochester Americans, but the team ended up on the short end of a 2-1 overtime loss to the Comets.

Thursday morning, Ullmark found himself in Buffalo, practicing with the Sabres in HaborCenter. The official word from the team was that starting goaltender Robin Lehner was given a "maintenance day" and the Sabres wanted two goalies at practice. So up came Ullmark to join Chad Johnson. Just for the day. Just for practice.

And as usual, the 24-year-old was all smiles and jokes, offering a side of life lessons with Linus for good measure.

"The show is what you dream of so every opportunity I get to show how I'm doing down there is great fun," Ullmark said after Thursday's practice.

What has Ullmark been showing in Rochester? He's 6-0-2 in his last eight appearances.

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A year after leading the AHL in saves, games and minutes played, he has picked up where he left off. He won a career-best five straight from Nov. 1 to Nov. 17. He currently leads the AHL in saves (444) and is tied third in wins with nine while his .919 save percentage ranks 14th

But Ullmark insists the personal success is the result of a team effort.

"I wouldn't say what's working well for me, I would say how it works for the team," Ullmark said. "You know personal success comes when the team is having success. So if the team's doing good, I'm doing good."

And the team is doing pretty good. The Amerks entered Thursday tied for third in the Eastern Conference with 26 points (11 wins, five losses, three overtime losses and one shootout loss). And the winning has created a better environment for players to grow.

"I (stinks) if you lose every game, don't you agree?" Ullmark said. "That's just how it is. If you win, you don't really care about what's really going on with your game or something. It's easier to let it go whenever you hit a slump or something like that personally. It's when you start getting all those losses in a row that you start thinking about what I'm doing wrong. You might not be doing anything wrong it's just the puck is passed this way and goes into the net."

So what is it exactly that Ullmark is doing right? He considers this a vague question and offers a vague answer, although one that's offered with the bits of wit and wisdom that have become a hallmark of the goaltender.

"I've had this question a lot of times during this season. I thought that people might know the answer by now," Ullmark said. "I'm just going to say once again, it's personal level. It's about growing as person. You grow as an athlete. And you can't take any days off. You can't really take any days off as a person. You can't go out there and be a moron ... It doesn't work like that. Just be yourself. I'm a happy guy. I like being a happy guy so why shouldn't I be happy guy at all times? Same thing being on the ice. I'm a happy guy, so why not be happy on the ice."

Matt Tennyson looks ready for game action. But the Buffalo Sabres want the defenseman to get his timing back with some time down in Rochester.

Before he can play for the American Hockey League affiliate, he has to clear waivers.

And Sabres coach Phil Housley sure hopes he does.

"Well hopefully he does clear because I thought Matt brought a lot to the table," Housley said Thursday afternoon after the team practice in HarborCenter. "He had a really good, solid camp. He was really consistent with his play when he was in the lineup and then he got hurt and unfortunately we've got numbers coming back at us. On a personal note I'd like to see him get through, get back his timing, and get some games in."

Tennyson has been on the injured reserve since Nov. 7 missing 11 games with a foot injury. He was an everyday defenseman in the lineup, twice skating more than 20 minutes in a game.

The Sabres have an abundance of defensemen, nine total participating in Thursday's practice, as players start to return from injury. Zach Bogosian continues to inch forward to playing his first game of the season after suffering a lower body injury in the last game of the preseason.

Two Western New York natives have earned assignments to officiate at the 2018 Olympic Winter Games in PyeongChang, South Korea.

Dina Allen (North Tonawanda) will be a referee for the women's tournament while Fraser McIntyre (Amherst) will be a linesman in the men's tournament.

There were seven Americans selected for the 47 on-ice positions at the Olympics. The referees and linesmen come from 13 countries.

Fans will have a chance to skate on the outdoor rink at New Era Field. But it will cost you.

Organizers of the IIHF World Junior Hockey Championship announced two sessions of open skating for fans, from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Wednesday, Dec. 27, and from 11 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. on Thursday, Dec. 28.

The cost is \$100 and includes a 300 level ticket to the United States vs. Canada outdoor game scheduled for 3 p.m. Friday, Dec. 29, at New Era Field in Orchard Park.

Any fan who has already purchased a ticket and would like to also experience the skate can contact the Bills ticket office and they will make an accommodation.

Skaters will enter the stadium through Gate 1 and head toward section 122/123 for field and ice access. There will be a warming station in New Era Field's east end zone tunnel, and fans can purchase concessions at the Miller Lite Brew Pub. Participants must bring their own skates, and helmets are required for anyone under the age of 12.

The offer is first open to Bills season- ticket members, Sabres season ticket holders, and My One Buffalo members starting Thursday. Remaining slots are open to the general public beginning at 10 a.m. Dec. 1.

Botterill confirms he hasn't made a decision on Kane

WGR

Paul Hamilton

Nov. 30, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550)- It was reported by Pierre LeBrun on Tuesday that the Sabres hadn't decided on what they're going to do with Evander Kane.

Kane becomes an unrestricted free agent on July 1 and Sabres GM Jason Botterill said there's still more thinking to do, "Yes, that's accurate."

"It's a situation where you look statistically, Evander's done a great job for us. We're a team that's looking for more goals and he's scored goals. I think Phil deserves a lot of the credit with Evander where he reached out to build a relationship early in the season and from Day 1 in training camp, Evander has come in here and performed very well for us here.

This season Kane is on a pace for 39 goals and 75 points. Jack Eichel's pace is 23 goals and 62 points while Ryan O'Reilly is on a pace for 23 goals and 53 points.

Anaheim and New Jersey made a big trade today and Botterill has been on the phone too. He said his talks have gone well, "They've been very positive. I'm still trying to build a relationship with other general managers, but I think it's good for the game when trades like Duchene go down or trades like today."

The season certainly hasn't gone the way everybody thought it would. The team is tied with Arizona for dead last in the NHL with 16 points and Botterill said, "I'm optimistic and have been very happy with our players, but especially our coaching staff. There's frustration with the record, but what I've really liked of our coaching staff is the next day it's what is the action plan? What do we have to do to get better?"

Botterill has had two months of evaluation and seen this team through 25 games which is 30 percent of the season. I wondered if this team is worse than he thought it was coming in. "We could have a long discussion here on are we better than our record, worse than our record? The bottom line is our record's our record and what we're looking for is players to help us out of this situation and players that want to improve and want to become a part of the solution here."

We hear a lot that there needs to be more effort or more pride on this team. Botterill hears this stuff too and said, "I think there is a work ethic, I think they are working, but on a game-by-game basis, it's one player working hard and not all the players working hard or you see one line going well and another line's not going well or the penalty killing's improved this year, but the power play's slipped, so there has to be more of a consistency for us to be a successful team."

"It has to be an internal drive from our leaders for us to be a consistent team."

It's looking like Zach Bogosian has a good chance to play on Friday. Botterill said, "I'm excited about seeing Bogosian back in the lineup. This is a little bit of what we hoped our defense would look like when we went over things in the summer."

Robin Lehner has played a lot of hockey lately so Housley gave him the day off the ice. The head coach said Lehner will be OK for Friday.

Thursday's Lines:

Kane Eichel Reinhart

Nolan O'Reilly Okposo

Pouliot Criscuolo Pominville

Girgensons Larsson Moulson

Scandella Ristolainen

McCabe Antipin

Beaulieu Bogosian (Falk)

Gorges Tennyson (Waiver after practice)

Sabres place Tennyson on waivers

WGR

Brayton Wilson

Nov. 30, 2017

With some healthy defensemen ready to return to the lineup, the Buffalo Sabres have placed Matt Tennyson on waivers. If he clears waivers, he will be eligible to be sent down to the Rochester Americans.

The 27-year old defenseman started the season with the Sabres and appeared in 14 games before suffering a lower-body injury. In those games, Tennyson was held pointless with a minus-8 rating and 24 shots on goal.

Tennyson would have been the ninth defenseman on the roster with Zach Bogosian nearing a return from a lower-body injury, and with Josh Gorges and Justin Falk as the likely extras.

The Sabres will know if Tennyson clears waivers by 12 p.m. on Friday. The Amerks are home to face the Hartford Wolf Pack on Friday night at KeyBank Center.

Ullmark is up from Rochester

WGR

Paul Hamilton

Nov. 30, 2017

Buffalo, NY (WGR 550) - The Buffalo Sabres have called up Linus Ullmark for Thursday's practice. Both Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson practiced on Wednesday, but Lehner was given a maintenance day. Lehner was present at practice though, but watching from behind the glass in behind the net.

Ullmark has played 15 games this season in Rochester going 9-3-0. His goal against is 2.86 and his save percentage is .919.

Ullmark only got one NHL game in last season after being an AHL All-Star..

Despite struggles, GM Jason Botterill confident Sabres on right path

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

November 30, 2017

BUFFALO – Barely one-quarter into Jason Botterill’s first season as general manager, the Sabres are a mess, tied for the NHL’s lowest point total with a measly 16.

A team expected to improve and showcase an exciting style under new coach Phil Housley has regressed and averaged a league-low 2.2 goals through its first 25 games. Slick center Jack Eichel, who signed an \$80 million contract extension in October, has struggled along with many of the team’s other top players.

Botterill has remained quiet over the last seven weeks, making no notable moves. In his first public chat with the media since training camp, Botterill on Thursday acknowledged many of the Sabres’ problems while going out of his way to note the positives and growth within the organization.

“I’m optimistic and I’m very happy with our players and especially our coaching staff,” said Botterill, whose Sabres host the Pittsburgh Penguins tonight inside KeyBank Center.

Botterill said the Sabres will “have a long discussion” on whether they’re better or worse than their awful 6-15-4 record.

“Bottom line is our record’s our record,” he said. “We’re looking for players to help us out of this situation here, players who want to improve and want to become part of the solution here, and that’s where I like the communication with our coaching staff and the players.”

The Sabres’ best player, winger Evander Kane, has morphed into a top scoring threat, compiling 12 goals and 23 points. Kane, 26, will be a free agent following the season, igniting speculation Botterill will deal him before the trade deadline.

But Botterill said Kane’s future hasn’t been decided.

“We’re a team that’s looking for more goals, and he’s scored goals,” he said. “I think Phil deserves a lot of credit with Evander. It was one of those situations where he reached out to build that relationship early in the season, and Evander’s come in here and from Day One of training camp has performed very well for us.”

If the Sabres have won just 24 percent of their games with Kane scoring 22 percent of their goals, how bad could they become if they trade him?

Botterill praised Housley and his staff for their communication skills throughout a rough stretch. He said he hired Housley, in part, because he believed he could build relationships with his players.

“He’s done a very good job communicating with the players of what we’re trying to improve on and what we try to ask for,” Botterill said. “What I’ve really liked is he’s an emotional guy, he keeps guys accountable, and ... there’s frustration with the results on the ice, but then the next day, instead of just being disappointed about it, he’s like, ‘These are the things we have to do to improve.’”

Of course, the Sabres can improve their effort many nights. They’ve showcased little consistency, something Botterill knows.

“Where some of the frustration comes from even our own players is that I think there is a work ethic, I think they are working, but it’s a game-by-game basis,” Botterill said. “It’s one player working hard, not all the players working hard at the same time. You see one line going well, but the other line’s not going well.

“The penalty killing’s improved this year, but the power play has slipped. So there has to be more consistency for us to be a successful team.”

The Sabres often fall behind early before roaring back, a disturbing trend. While Botterill likes the “compete” and “resilience” they’ve shown late, he said they “can’t be chasing games all the time.”

“We have to have that desperation, that jump at the start of the games,” he said. “We’ve talked about our leadership group a lot, and the good thing is they keep communicating with each other, they keep communicating with Phil.

“Phil and our coaches can keep pushing things and stuff, but it’s that internal drive from our leaders that has to keep for us to become a more consistent team.”

One team under Botterill, the Rochester Americans, has performed consistently all season, starting 11-5-3-1. Botterill overhauled the Amerks during the summer, hiring a new coach, Chris Taylor, and GM for the AHL affiliate, Randy Sexton.

Botterill also signed a slew of players he had during his tenure with the Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins, the affiliate he ran as Pittsburgh’s associate GM.

“Chris Taylor and his staff have done an excellent job down there on getting guys to buy into the system, getting guys to buy into their games to get up to the National Hockey League,” Botterill said.

Still, the Amerks, who haven’t made the playoffs since 2014, are short on impact prospects the Sabres could summon.

Rookie Brendan Guhle, the Sabres’ top defense prospect, has been bypassed for recalls all season. The Sabres seem intent on leaving him in the AHL for a bit. Second-year forward Alexander Nylander has only played six games this season. The eighth overall pick in 2016 suffered a lower-body injury in training camp. While goalie Linus Ullmark seems ready to graduate, the Sabres have two NHL netminders, Robin Lehner and Chad Johnson, blocking his path.

There’s no quick fix for the Sabres.

With Zach Bogosian close to return, Sabres waive Matt Tennyson

Olean Times Herald

Bill Hoppe

Nov 30, 2017

BUFFALO – Nearly two months into the season, the Sabres could have their six regular defensemen play together for the first time tonight.

Zach Bogosian, out since suffering a lower-body injury in the preseason finale, could return in this weekend's home-and-home series against the Pittsburgh Penguins.

"I've had a couple good days of practice," Bogosian said after the Sabres prepared for tonight's tilt inside KeyBank Center. "I feel ready. We'll see what tomorrow brings."

With Bogosian and defensemen Matt Tennyson (ankle) back, the Sabres had nine healthy defensemen, so they waived Tennyson following Thursday's practice at HarborCenter.

Housley leaned on Tennyson regularly for 14 games as injuries ravaged the blue line, playing him 18 minutes, 16 seconds a contest.

If Tennyson clears, he could bolster the Rochester Americans' defense.

"Matt brought a lot to the table," Housley said. "He had a really good, solid camp, really consistent with his play when he was in the lineup. ... I'd like to see him get through and get back to his timing and get some games in."

In other news, the Sabres gave goalie Robin Lehner a maintenance day Thursday, so they recalled goalie Linus Ullmark from the AHL to practice.

Ullmark is 9-3-2 with a 2.86 goals-against average and a .919 save percentage in 15 games for the Amerks, who are 11-5-3-1.

"Personal success comes when the team's having success," Ullmark said. "So if the team's doing good, I'm doing good."

Bogosian inches closer to return following physical practice

Sabres.com

Jourdon LaBarber

Nov. 30, 2017

Jason Botterill admitted while speaking to the media on Thursday that the Buffalo Sabres defense corps, from a personnel standpoint, is just now beginning to appear the way he envisioned it while constructing the team in the offseason.

A slew of injuries has tested Buffalo's depth on the back end, having had 10 defensemen enter the lineup already this season. With Rasmus Ristolainen's upper-body injury behind him, the impending return of Zach Bogosian will have the group of six finally looking how many chalked it up in the preseason.

Bogosian participated in a full practice for the third time this week on Thursday and, if he responds well, could make his season debut when the Sabres host the Pittsburgh Penguins on Friday.

"I've had a couple good days of practice," Bogosian said. "I feel ready. We'll see what tomorrow brings but I'm sure I'll have a conversation with coach sometime either today or tomorrow morning and go from there."

"He really has [had a good week]," Sabres coach Phil Housley added. "Monday his practice was really good, yesterday and today were really good practices for him. There's a lot of battles involved in our practices so we'll reevaluate that tomorrow and see how he gets through today."

Sabres Now (11/30/17)

01:49 • November 30th, 2017

Bogosian practiced on a pair with Nathan Beaulieu throughout the week. Marco Scandella and Rasmus Ristolainen remained together as did Jake McCabe and Victor Antipin, presumably rounding out the top six. The Sabres still have eight defensemen on their roster after placing Matt Tennyson on waivers Thursday, with Josh Gorges and Justin Falk skating as an extra pair at practice.

What those defensemen have in common is their skating ability, and Bogosian in particular displayed a comfort level with the offensive responsibilities placed upon defensemen in Housley's system prior to sustaining his injury in the preseason.

"I think you look at the guys that will be playing, [there are] a lot of good skaters," Bogosian said. "I think our depth from the first pair all the way down to the third will be good. All six that are playing, I think, can play an offensive game and get up in the rush, try to be that second layer of offense."

"Once you're up there, hopefully it drags a guy to you where maybe the forwards can do something or get a different look."

Tennyson, too, had been practicing with the Sabres throughout the week after dealing with a foot injury. He was placed on waivers after practice on Thursday with the hopes that he'd be able to contribute in Rochester.

"Hopefully he does clear because I thought Matt brought a lot to the table," Housley said. "He had a really good, solid camp, really consistent with his play when he was in the lineup and then he got hurt and fortunately we've got numbers coming back at us. On a personal note, I'd like to see him get through and get back to his timing and get some games in."

Tennyson has averaged 18:16 and recorded 24 shots in 14 games with the Sabres.

Ullmark joins practice

With Robin Lehner sitting out for a maintenance day, the Sabres recalled Linus Ullmark from Rochester to fill the void at practice on Thursday. Housley said the team expects Lehner to be back on the ice on Friday.

Ullmark already enjoyed success at the AHL level last season, when he was selected to represent Rochester at the AHL All-Star Classic and tied for seventh in the league with 26 wins. The difference this season is that the Amerks are now finding

success as a team, too. Rochester sits in second place in the North Division at 11-5-3-1 this season, and Ullmark has posted a .919 save percentage.

Ullmark praised the leadership of coach Chris Taylor, captain Kevin Porter and alternate captain Nathan Paetsch as driving forces behind the team's turnaround, along with added organizational depth.

"It's a big change," Ullmark said. "This is my third year, and coming in this year it feels like we have a lot more confidence, we have a lot more depth. So if we have guys who earn their spot up here in Buffalo, it's not the whole world for us as a team because we've got players in the [ECHL] and we've got more players as a team who can back it up."

In typical fashion for a man who wears a minion mask, Ullmark was also sure to give an entertaining answer when asked about his personal growth from last season to now.

"It's a personal level," he said. "It's about growing as a person, you grow as an athlete. You can't take any days off. You can't really take any days off as a person. You can't go out there and be a moron or just being a complete numbnuts to people, it doesn't work like that. Be yourself.

"I'm happy guy, I like being a happy guy, so why shouldn't I be a happy guy at all times? And it's the same thing being on the ice. I'm a happy guy, so why not be happy on the ice?"

Thursday's practice

Ristolainen and Gorges returned to practice after having maintenance days on Wednesday, while Housley changed his forward lines for the second day in a row. Changes included a move for Sam Reinhart to the top line alongside Jack Eichel, with Kyle Criscuolo centering Benoit Pouliot and Jason Pominville.

"We're working on our game offensively, definitely, and just trying to find chemistry," Housley said. "Like I said yesterday, we're going to continue to change our lines - we changed them again today - until we feel comfortable with where we're at."

Here's how the full lineup appeared at practice:

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

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

31 Chad Johnson
35 Linus Ullmark

Botterill talks state of Sabres, success in Rochester

by Jourdon LaBarber

Sabres.com

November 30, 2017

Jason Botterill spoke briefly after practice at KeyBank Center on Thursday afternoon and addressed the current state of the organization both in Buffalo and Rochester, as well as his own experience now two months into his first season as general manager of the Sabres.

Here's some of what Botterill had to say in his chat with the media.

On the state of the organization

The records in Buffalo and Rochester tell two different stories so far this season, with the Sabres off to a 6-15-4 start and the Amerks sitting in second in the North Division at 11-5-3. What connects the two, Botterill said, has been the level of communication shown between coaches and players at both levels.

"The bottom line is our record's our record,' Botterill said. "We're looking for players to help us out of this situation here and players who want to improve and want to become a part of the solution. That's where I like the communication with our coaching staff and our players, trying to find results. Like I said before, there is a frustration level but there's communication on what we have to do to improve.

"... We're very excited about the steps a team like Rochester has made. Are we where we want to be? No. But at least, especially at forward down in Rochester, I think there's a lot of internal competition for the call ups. It's something that we have to do more throughout our entire organization, have more internal competition for spots up here in Buffalo, more internal competition for our prospects, guys we want to sign, and guys from a call-up [standpoint]."

On the atmosphere in Rochester

Players who have been recalled from Rochester to Buffalo this season, from Justin Bailey and Nicholas Baptiste to Casey Nelson and Linus Ullmark, have raved about the night-and-day culture change that's occurred in Rochester under coach Chris Taylor.

Botterill and Amerks general manager Randy Sexton both stressed the importance of creating a winning culture in Rochester before the season began, and so far the hiring of Taylor as coach as well as the influx of leadership in players like Kevin Porter and Nathan Paetsch has paid off.

"It's what we've tried to accomplish down there. We understand that players in the American Hockey League don't want to be in the American Hockey League, they want to be up in the National Hockey League. But what we've been able to do or what I think Chris Taylor and his staff have done an excellent job of down there is getting guys to buy into the system, getting guys to buy into working on their games to get up to the National Hockey League," Botterill said.

"We've tried to give them, myself and [coach Phil Housley] whenever they have been sent down, whether it's in training camp or regular season, specific things for them to work on in order to get back up to the National Hockey League. I think the players down there have specific things they need to work on to get back up."

On Evander Kane

Kane has been Buffalo's most productive player this season with team-leading totals in both goals (12) and points (23), but his impending status as an unrestricted free agent this season has made him the subject of trade rumors.

A recent report from TSN's Pierre LeBrun stated that the Sabres had not yet made a decision on whether or not to trade Kane, which Botterill confirmed on Thursday.

"That's accurate," he said. "It's been a situation where you look specifically, Evander's done a great job for us. We're a team that's looking for more goals and he's scored goals. I think Phil deserves a lot of the credit with Evander. It was one of the situations where he reached out to develop a relationship early in the season and Evander's come in here and from day one of training camp has performed very well for us."

On what he's learned about Phil Housley

Botterill said that Housley's ability to communicate with players is part of what made him an attractive coaching candidate during the offseason, and so far the general manager has been impressed with the coach's personal skills.

"One of the reasons we tried to bring him in here was that I thought he could build relationships with players," Botterill said. "It's an ongoing thing, but he's done a very good job of communicating with the players what we're trying to improve on and trying to ask for."

"What I've really liked to see is he's an emotional guy, he keeps guys accountable ... There's frustrations with the results on the ice, but the next day instead of just being disappointed about it's, "These are things we need to do to improve so the results do get better moving forward here."

On trade talks

We've seen two blockbuster trades made in the NHL since the start of November, first with the three-way deal between Colorado, Nashville and Ottawa that landed Matt Duchene with the Senators and then again on Thursday when Anaheim traded Sami Vatanen to New Jersey for Adam Henrique, Joseph Blandisi and a third-round pick.

Botterill said he has been engaging with fellow general managers in discussions about potential trades while trying to establish himself as a first-year GM.

"I'm trying to build relationships with other general managers now, but it's a scenario where I think it's good for the game when trades like Duchene's goes down or trades like today," he said. "I think it's a trade that helps out both teams and it's a scenario where our conversations have been positive for sure."

Sharpen Up: November 30, 2017

by Chris Ryndak

Sabres.com

Nov. 30, 2017

Buffalo hit the ice for practice yesterday and they'll do so again today as they prep for a back-to-back slate against the Pittsburgh Penguins this weekend. They'll play the Penguins tomorrow night on home ice.

Here's what you need to know.

Sabres Now (11/29/17)

01:17 • November 29th, 2017

At practice yesterday, coach Phil Housley changed up some of his line combinations. With Rasmus Ristolainen and Josh Gorges out for maintenance days, here's how the team skated yesterday:

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

6 Marco Scandella - 41 Justin Falk
19 Jake McCabe - 93 Victor Antipin
82 Nathan Beaulieu - 47 Zach Bogosian
5 Matt Tennyson

40 Robin Lehner
31 Chad Johnson

One notable switch is Jordan Nolan skating with Ryan O'Reilly and Kyle Okposo. Why? Well let's hear from coach Phil Housley from yesterday's Ice Level Practice Report...

Phil Housley (11/29/17)

03:33 • November 29th, 2017

"I like the way he attacks the game," he said. "He's using his speed, he's getting the opportunity, he's controlling the puck down low in the offensive zone, he's willing to go to the net. He brings a physical element to the game as well."

Nolan has two goals and two assists so far this season.

"I think we need more guys stepping up and bringing that physical presence, talking in the room and on the bench," Nolan said. "I think it's going to spread. I think the more of that we have, the more guys will kind of get on board. Just keep doing what we're doing. Obviously we need to be a little bit more physical at the start of games and have a little more emotion, but we've just got to find a way for it to come."

Okposo found some chemistry with Nolan last week when they were on a line together with the now-injured Jacob Josefson. In two full games prior to Josefson's ankle injury, the trio combined for three goals and the Sabres generated 55.88 percent of the shot attempts taken while they were on the ice.

"I think he's played extremely well the last five or six games," Okposo said. "He deserves the opportunity that he's getting. I enjoyed playing with him when it was me, him and Joey. He's going to work hard and he's going to go the net, he's going to go win battles in the corners. I feel like we need some more of that."

We'll have full practice coverage for you today, including any news like this that may come up:

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Buffalo Sabres

✓

@BuffaloSabres

We've recalled goaltender Linus Ullmark from @AmerksHockey (AHL) for practice today.

9:23 AM - Nov 30, 2017

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Bow-A-Rama a go-go

Sabres Bowl A Rama.Transit Lanes.November 29, 2017Photo by Bill Wippert

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Thanks to everyone who attended yesterday's Bowl-A-Rama event. Proceeds benefit the Buffalo Sabres Foundation.